Theorizing Potential Downstream Cultural Consequences of LGBT+ Activism

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Abstract

To what extent does local LGBT+ activism have impacts beyond its immediate surroundings? We offer a theoretical framework emphasizing how a combination of local movement visibility and LGBT+ cultural receptivity can account for disseminating influences of LGBT+ activism. We illustrate our framework in part through an analysis of the potential diffusion of LGBT+ support in Bosnia in the aftermath of the country's first-ever Pride. Our model explains why the 2019 Sarajevo Pride increased LGBT+ support locally but had no immediate effects on attitudes in greater Bosnia. It also explains why LGBT+ support has since expanded beyond the capital to Bosnia's surrounding regions in a follow-up 2021 study. Even when local LGBT+ visibility is low or nonexistent, underlying cultural receptivity can be conducive to the gradual diffusion of LGBT+ support. Moreover, the challenging circumstances of the pandemic did not undermine the expansion of LGBT+ tolerance across Bosnia. Our findings illustrate the persistent power as well as limitations of LGBT+ activism to usher in downstream cultural change.

Keywords: social movements, LGBT+ activism, Bosnia, public opinion, collective action

Introduction

The disparity in public support for LGBT+ people is a near-universal reality across countries. In the twenty-first century, we have seen major transformations in attitudes around LGBT+ rights (Kollman 2016, Velasco 2018). Yet, while some regions within a country will move forward to embrace new norms in favor of LGBT+ inclusivity, sometimes with rapidity, others will lag behind or move in a different direction altogether (Hadler and Symons 2018; Roberts 2019). Why is this

so, and when can we expect LGBT+ activism to produce widespread cultural change within a society?

Questions regarding the impact of social movements on broader cultural transformation are a source of continued debate among scholars (Earl 2004). The effects of movements are generally understood to reach across time and place, involving cycles of contention and spillover or diffusion effects. Yet, the relationships between activism and broader cultural outcomes—like changes in public opinion—remain difficult to establish empirically (Amenta and Polletta 2019; Van Dyke and Taylor 2018). Our research informs and updates this discussion by theorizing different outcomes of LGBT+ activism and its cultural receptivity within mainstream society. We then evaluate whether such activism could diffuse and lead to growing acceptance and accommodation of LGBT+ people, a hitherto marginalized group around the world.

Could LGBT+ activism have downstream effects outside of the public spaces where these events often occur? In most countries, LGBT+ movement activity is dispersed sporadically—often occurring in one or a small number of urban centers—but its impact on broader attitudes remains unclear, as the cultural transformation that has occurred via public acceptance of LGBT+ people varies from region to region. In this study, we begin by theorizing the relationship between LGBT+ movements' visibility and attitudinal change within a given country. We argue that the degree of cultural receptivity toward movements—which can vary considerably within countries—facilitates connections between a movement's visibility and the diffusion of the norms it champions. We offer a typology of cultural outcomes that focuses on dynamics of local movement *visibility* and cultural *receptivity* that either inhibit or encourage LGBT+ support. Specifically, we argue that culturally open environments encourage the dissemination of LGBT+ support, while culturally closed environments are more conducive to cultural backlash against LGBT+ activism.[1] At the individual level, cultural receptivity is reflected in mindsets that are favorable to cross-cultural openness over insularity, and less adherent to ethnocentric/nationalist and religious worldviews. At the community level, we argue that ethnically and religiously diverse environments are more favorable to cultural receptivity than more socially homogeneous settings.

We then evaluate our theory in light of recent LGBT+ activism in the case of Bosnia, a society with limited public support for LGBT+ rights and recognition (Irvine and Irvine 2017; Swimelar 2020). Using a series of original surveys and interviews with organizers, we utilize the Bosnian case for understanding varied downstream cultural outcomes of LGBT+ activism. Our work builds upon Ayoub et al. (2021) in Bosnia, which found that the 2019 Sarajevo Pride (formally known as *Bosnia and Herzegovina Pride*) increased LGBT+ support locally but did not generate any diffusion effects beyond the local environment of Sarajevo. However, in a follow-up study in 2021, we find strong evidence that LGBT+ support has increased beyond the Bosnian capital over time, in regions where LGBT+ communities are often most marginalized from mainstream culture. Our theory can explain not only why LGBT+ activism initially failed to bolster LGBT+ support outside Sarajevo, but also why LGBT+ support gradually improved over time in the follow-up study.

Next, we consider whether cultural diffusion could have been affected by a substantial exogenous shock in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed major restrictions on movement activism and LGBT+ visibility. The pandemic poses a critical test for diffusion effects of pre-pandemic LGBT+ activism and the degree to which it reverberated in the period of isolation that followed. Early COVID-related research has found that the pandemic heightened in-group cohesion and nationalism, factors that typically raise perceptions of threat toward LGBT+ people (Bartoš et al. 2021; Rettie and Daniels 2021)—with some research showing the pandemic to be negatively correlated with LGBT+ support (Golec de Zavala et al. 2021). In contrast, we find that the negative effects of the pandemic on LGBT+ communities may be more nuanced (see also, Gold 2022). Remarkably, in Bosnia, our 2021 study revealed how knowing someone who died from COVID-19 is positively associated with LGBT+ support. We attribute this effect to possible "post-traumatic growth" or "compassion borne of suffering" that extends to other marginalized,

victimized communities, including LGBT+ people (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014; Lim and DeSteno 2016; Matos et al. 2021).

Finally, we discuss the implications of our theory and findings for both Bosnia and beyond. On the one hand, the growth and resilience of LGBT+ support during the pandemic speak to the potentially transformative legacies of the early visible LGBT+ activism on Bosnian society. At the same time, we caution that cultural opposition rooted in ethnonationalism and religious traditionalism still explains why transformation has not occurred more rapidly across Bosnia and why activism can often fail to achieve its desired effects or even generate backlash. We conclude with a discussion of why our framework has important extensions beyond Bosnia to other societies where LGBT+ rights are culturally and politically contested.

Theorizing Cultural Diffusion: Visibility and Receptivity

Social movement scholars underscore how localized activism can diffuse beyond its initial confines and how collective action is often interconnected across both time and place (McAdam and Rucht 1993). These dynamics are central to Tarrow's (2011) understanding of cycles of protest, where innovative "master frames" like the strategy of non-violence diffuse from early to later stages of the cycle. What is less understood, however, are the broader cultural consequences of social movements, which Earl (2004, p. 508) describes as "notoriously hard to define," in part due to the challenge of conceptualizing culture itself. One social–psychological approach to culture which we consider involves a change in the attitudes, beliefs, and values that individuals hold, which could occur quite rapidly when new movements are framed in familiar interpretative packages that resonate with existing cultural values (d'Anjou 1996; d'Anjou and Van Male 1998; Rochon 1998).

In societies where depictions of LGBT+ people are novel and majorities typically harbor anti-LGBT+ views, we consider four potential cultural outcomes following early-stage LGBT+ activism. These cultural outcomes, we argue, result from a combination of movement success at achieving both *visibility* and *receptivity* within existing cultural frames. By visibility, we refer to the salience of new ideas in the public discourse and the ability of people to interact with them. By receptivity, we are interested in the degree to which communities are likely to embrace or feel threatened by the cultural diffusion of LGBT+ activism and support. In other words, in contexts where suspicion of out-groups is high (particularly those with high degrees of in-group-centered nationalism and religiosity, insularity, and within socially homogeneous settings), we expect cultural receptivity to be low. Of course, ethnic and/or religious nationalistic understandings of belonging—with their more fixed, exclusive, and rigidly defined identity constructs—are easily challenged by the fluidity of new norms around gender and sexuality.

We illustrate how visibility and receptivity considerations can impact cultural outcomes using a four-part typology displayed in Figure 1 below. To do so, we draw on several studies dealing with LGBT+ norm visibility and cultural receptivity which inform our expectations (Ayoub 2016, 43; Schotel and Mügge 2021). First, when cultural receptivity is strong, but movement visibility is impeded by structural barriers, we predict gradual, incremental cultural accommodation (*Type 1-Gradual*). In many cases, this outcome is the result of state authorities who are persuaded or compelled by broader international norms to expand LGBT+ rights. Strong cultural receptivity to the mainstream reduces the likelihood of a major reactionary backlash, but limited movement visibility slows the pace of accommodation locally. A second outcome involves the movement achieving high visibility and experiencing strong cultural receptivity, at which point rapid cultural accommodation takes place, as the movement's goals become accepted by formal actors and institutions (*Type II-Rapid*). Here, movements send strong and clear signals directly to local audiences (governments and publics), both helping them interpret the issue and placing demands on them surrounding cultural accommodation (Gillion 2013; Lohmann 1993). Next, when both movement visibility and cultural receptivity are low, we anticipate no clear success at accommodating cultural change through LGBT+ activism (*Type III-Silent*). The movement and

	Movement visibility (low)	Movement visibility (high)
Cultural Receptivity (strong)	*Type 1: Gradual Accommodation* (following international trends)	*Type II: Rapid Accommodation* (low resistance)
Cultural Receptivity (weak)	*Type III: Silent or Null Accommodation* (no broad cultural change, preemptive resistance possible)	*Type IV: Backlash* (resistance + countermobilization)

Figure 1. Potential cultural outcomes of LGBT+ activism.

its goals, weakly tied to mainstream cultural norms, remain at the fringes of society, but a lack of visibility also disincentivizes countermobilization or backlash by elites seeking reactionary entrepreneurial gains. To be sure, invisible movements can lead to improved outcomes "below the surface" (like building underground support networks), but if people are unable to vocalize support publicly, we generally see null findings in terms of broader societal changes.[2] Finally, we predict that high visibility coupled with weak cultural receptivity offers the most-likely case for widespread countermobilization and backlash (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010; Swimelar 2017; Ayoub 2014), a potential worst-case scenario for LGBT+ activists (at least initially) in which the movement's actions may hinder cultural accommodation and social acceptance (*Type IV-Backlash*). Elites may also utilize the backlash for entrepreneurial gain, and formal institutions are harnessed to reinforce countervailing norms and further repression of LGBT+ groups.

We should note here that not all processes will likely fit into these four "ideal types," and elites may also preempt movement action by drawing on globally circulating frames of political homophobia (Weiss and Bosia 2013)—e.g., generating a visibility of their own, which transforms a *Type III-Silent* environment to a *Type IV-Backlash* environment. Nor are these movement outcomes static. For example, an initial backlash has been shown to galvanize LGBT+ activists and in some cases generate downstream gains for the movement, as is possible in the *Type IV-Backlash* context (O'Dwyer 2018; Ayoub 2016). In other words, we should think of the typology in a dynamic sense, where movement among quadrants can occur as conditions change over time. More importantly, we suggest that various processes can take place within the framework of a single state, for example, between urban areas and rural sub-state regions. While there is often a tendency to characterize whole countries heuristically as "LGBT+ friendly" or "anti-LGBT+", we emphasize the universal sub-state variation in contemporary world politics (i.e., in-country variation in public opinion toward LGBT+ is the norm everywhere). Furthermore, a process in one region (e.g., rapid accommodation in a capital city) may have downstream effects in other parts of the country. Our study considers the understudied phenomenon of how cultural norms diffuse across potentially highly variable within-country contexts of LGBT+ support and opposition.

In summary, we offer generalizable assumptions regarding the impact of movement visibility and cultural receptivity on the pace of LGBT+ cultural accommodation. First, high-visibility LGBT+ activism should increase LGBT+ support over time (visibility assumption). Second, strong LGBT+ cultural receptivity should increase LGBT+ support over time (receptivity assumption). Validation of both visibility and receptivity assumptions would be consistent with *Rapid* cultural transformation. Movement visibility in the absence of cultural receptivity results in *Backlash* outcomes, commonly generating an LGBT+ backlash with declining support for at least the immediate term following visible activism. The converse, low movement visibility and strong cultural receptivity, generates *Gradual* accommodation, typically following the broader international trends exemplary of the state's regional communities (Kollman 2016), while the absence of both visibility and receptivity leads to *Silent* or *Null* accommodation, but at least no discernable backlash.[3]

Finally, how fixed or flexible are these cultural accommodation types to outside influence? How likely are cultural norms to diffuse, for example, from a *Rapid* Accommodation environment (high visibility, strong receptivity) to a neighboring *Gradual*, *Silent*, or *Backlash*

environment, where either visibility, receptivity, or both are lacking? Could cultural norms in a world of *Rapid* accommodation accelerate support or fuel the erosion of support when encountered in contexts of *Backlash*? We argue that exposure to the optimal conditions for cultural change activism in *Rapid* environments could increase the pace of cultural transformation elsewhere but could also be met with resistance. This leads to our third assumption (diffusion assumption) that the likelihood of diffusion of LGBT+ support is greatest in *Gradual* environments and weakest in *Backlash* settings.

Theoretically, Sarah Soule (2004) identifies four features required for diffusion: a transmitter, an adopter, an innovation, and a channel that passes the innovation from transmitter to adopter. We look at diffusion within one country. For example, in a given country, the transmitter could be a visible movement performance in one location of the country, and the adopters could be publics outside the local space where the performance took place. The innovation is a new norm inclusive of LGBT+ rights that expands beyond the location of the original performance. Channels could ideally include free and open media (internet, television, radio, etc.) that carry information about the event to other parts of the country. However, when media channels are blocked or restricted, as they often are in repressive or conservative contexts, then channels likely involve LGBT+ activists and participants who travel to and from performance events back to their communities. The latter relational channel may explain why cultural effects of LGBT+ activism can be delayed, given that face-to-face channels involving queer people could occur more slowly and cautiously than open and free media channels, which may not exist. We do not exclude the possibility of other out-of-country transmitters and channels (like intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations or transnational advocacy networks), although our theoretical framework focuses, as much as possible, on within-country diffusion over a short time horizon. Such within-country effects are important especially when international organizations and transnational advocacy networks are limited or restricted in their within-country reach. Our aim is to further theory development by explaining more precisely where channels of diffusion are likely to work and where they will meet resistance.

The least encumbered channel of diffusion from one type of environment to another is found in the influence of a *Rapid* environment on a *Gradual* accommodation environment, where the cultural receptivity is already present, and all that is lacking is movement visibility. We anticipate that cultural accommodation of LGBT+ support in a *Gradual* environment is accelerated by the influence of newly visible movement activism coming from *Rapid* settings. In contrast, when people in *Silent* or *Backlash* environments are exposed to *Rapid* influence, we should anticipate either no diffusion of or backlash to norms governing LGBT+ support, at least initially. This is because the external visibility is easily characterized as "foreign imposition" in contexts with weak cultural receptivity (Velasco 2022), especially absent local movements to graft a norm to a locality (i.e., to help broker a norm's resonance by framing or repackaging it for a particular audience). In sum, what happens in *Rapid* environments may not necessarily translate well to locales absent local-level activists to do that grafting work (Acharya 2004). At best, exposure to *Rapid* conditions could lead to shifting from *Silent* to *Gradual* accommodation. At worst, exposure to *Rapid* influences could intensify *Backlash* responses.

So, what conditions increase LGBT+ accommodation in settings less favorable than *Rapid* environments? We focus on both visibility and receptivity criteria. We anticipate *Rapid* settings would typically comprise urban centers (Haeberle 1996), such as a capital city, from which visibility can diffuse elsewhere (Maxwell 2019). For activist visibility to be maximally effective, it must be seen and felt at the local level in those other less favorable settings. While distant activist environments could still produce some diffusion effects to other locations, more authentic visibility is typically generated by local-level activism that works to transmit the information in, potentially leading to cascading cultural transformations (Ramakrishnan 2005; Enguix 2009). In the LGBT+ politics literature, these actors are referred to as norm brokers because they do the critical work of grafting and framing contentious new norms to resonate with local audiences (Ayoub 2016).[4] In the absence of norm brokers, we suspect that a *Rapid*-context could still

influence cultural boundaries in positive directions elsewhere, but such a transformation is likely bound to a *Gradual* level of accommodation and to areas where cultural receptivity is sufficiently present.[5] We test the following hypothesis:

H1 (Cultural Receptivity): In areas where local movement visibility is low, strong cultural receptivity should gradually increase openness to outside LGBT+ activism and support over time.

Next, what types of cultural receptivity maximize openness to the diffusion of LGBT+ support? We focus on four salient factors: (1) ethnic and cultural heterogeneity versus homogeneity at the community level, (2) cross-cultural openness versus insularity, (3) ethnocentrism/nationalism, and (4) religiosity at the individual level.[6] In sociology, cultural openness is often equated with "the post-national" or cosmopolitanism (Fozdar and Woodward 2021). Similarly, in our analysis below, cultural openness is measured as having a more detached identification with one's national group (e.g., by also supporting and identifying with cosmopolitan values or supranational organizations). In terms of maximizing LGBT+ cultural accommodation, research has found positive support for how contact with out-groups, both direct and indirect, increases tolerance and reduces prejudice, including toward LGBT+ identity groups (Zhou et al. 2019; Kalla and Broockman 2020; Broockman and Kalla 2016). Indeed, Christ et al. (2014, p. 3996) report that "even individuals experiencing no direct, face-to-face intergroup contact can benefit from living in mixed settings where fellow in-group members do engage in such contact." The indirect mechanism focuses on how diversity in peer networks alters norms about acceptable behavior toward out-groups in ways that reduce prejudice, even in the absence of direct exposure (Gundelach 2014; Brown and Paterson 2016).[7] The remaining factors likely reinforce the effects of diversity on LGBT+ support. Specifically, people with higher baseline levels of cultural insularity, ethnocentrism, and religiosity may have less contact with out-group peer networks, thus limiting the impact of diversity on LGBT+ support (Dreier et al. 2020).

Finally, we note that receptivity to diffusion from *Rapid* environments need not be purely spatial in nature. Communities resistant to change can potentially co-exist with rapidly transforming communities, even with close spatial proximity to one another. Rather, we think of exposure in cultural terms. Locations with greater cultural diversity, openness as opposed to insularity, and social structures less rigidly defined by ethnocentric and religious norms are likelier to be influenced by downstream diffusion effects of proximate LGBT+ activism than those where cultural receptivity is less amenable to such change. Indeed, early LGBT+ politics research theorized such conditions of cultural receptivity for changes in lived experience (Badgett 2009; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel 1998), but further inquiry is needed to consider the role of diffusion and theorize the potential for change or lack thereof, as well as systematically test the propensity for change with original data collection across time. We now explain how these generalizable conditions map onto a specific context, using the case of diffusion of LGBT+ support in Bosnia.

Cultural Accommodation in the Bosnian Case

Bosnia is a methodologically important case for analysis due to the variation it provides in its ethnic and religious diversity, regionalism, urban cosmopolitanism and rural traditionalism, and unique war-related experiences. Its society is also among the most disapproving of homosexuality in Europe (Ayoub et al. 2021), making it a challenging case for the cultural accommodation of LGBT+ rights. In addition, we do not know how the global pandemic could have affected social attitudes in relation to LGBT+ rights. For example, early COVID-related studies in other European states have found that the pandemic inflated the in-group cohesion and nationalism that attributes threat to LGBT+ people and was correlated with the rejection of their rights (Golec de Zavala et al. 2021). In terms of visibility, Bosnia held its first Pride in 2019, garnering domestic and international media coverage with little apparent backlash around the event itself

(Gavrić and Čaušević 2021). In terms of cultural receptivity, the Pride took place in the cosmopolitan capital city of Sarajevo, which has an enduring history of social tolerance and acceptance (Massey et al. 1999). The Pride likely conformed with existing cultural receptivity in Sarajevo that connects LGBT+ rights to European cosmopolitan values (Swimelar 2020) and strong support for European Union integration (Page 2018). The event itself was also much more visible in the city (compared to its surroundings), providing opportunities for the local population to interact with it. Hence, the Sarajevo Pride took place in a local context that was relatively optimal (within Bosnia at least) for visibility and cultural accommodation, consistent with a *Type II-Rapid* accommodation setting. Within Sarajevo, high-visibility activism occurred in a relatively strong LGBT+ culturally receptive environment.

Beyond Sarajevo, however, Ayoub et al. (2021) found that the Pride's immediate cultural impact did not reverberate elsewhere. Bosnia, like many other countries (e.g., the United States), is a place with wide-ranging degrees of local-level LGBT+ support and opposition (Swimelar 2020). There are two possible explanations for this within our framework. One focuses on the reduced visibility of the Pride outside Sarajevo, including both restricted media coverage and contact with LGBT+ movement participants (Garretson 2018). The onset of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns likely further impeded the diffusion of Pride activism to other locations, diminishing the movement's mobility and visibility in subsequent years. Another explanation focuses on the LGBT+ movement's weaker cultural receptivity outside Sarajevo. LGBT+ activism could be obstructed by countervailing oppositional cultural framings in Bosnia's regions that tend to reinforce ethnic-nationalism, religiosity, and anti-EU sentiment, which is common across contemporary Europe (Ayoub and Page 2020). All of these factors amplify the fixed hetero- and cis-normative identities that attribute threat to LGBT+ people (who are often seen as fluid and "foreign") (Ayoub 2014). Hence, weak cultural receptivity and low visibility could explain why the 2019 Sarajevo Pride failed to boost support for LGBT+ rights beyond the capital city, but also failed to trigger widespread backlash, effects consistent with a *Type III-Silent* environment in terms of cultural accommodation of LGBT+ activism.

So far, we have considered the initial differences in outcomes between Sarajevo and its surroundings, but we are also interested in evaluating the influence of Sarajevo (our *Rapid* accommodation environment) on locations outside Sarajevo (arguably *Gradual*, *Silent*, and *Backlash*-prone environments). How might such diffusion work? Again, we draw on Soule's (2004) four features required for diffusion: a transmitter, an adopter, an innovation, and a channel that passes the innovation from transmitter to adopter. In this case, the transmitter is the visible movement performance of Pride in Sarajevo, the adopters are publics outside the capital city, and the innovation is a new norm inclusive of LGBT+ rights. According to our interviews (see research design section), the channels generated by the Pride consist of networks of activists, the media that carried information about the event to other parts of the country (which was limited and often negative), and LGBT+ people living outside the capital. The latter channel may explain the delayed cultural effect of that Pride, given that queer people themselves, who knew about the Sarajevo Pride (even in far-off places), were empowered to broach the topic in their communities in its aftermath. Other out-of-country transmitters and channels could also exist (like the EU and supportive transnational advocacy networks). Yet, we focus on the effects of the Sarajevo Pride, because it has been the most visible within-country LGBT+ activist performance in Bosnia's history. We see little evidence of activity by international organizations or transnational advocacy networks beyond the capital to Bosnia's regions that would suggest other more prevalent diffusion channels at work. While diffusion could potentially take place through "virtual visibility" arising from online LGBT+ activism or representation (Bennett and Segerberg 2016; Garretson 2018), the Sarajevo Pride is the only example of a visible *Bosnian* performance (as opposed to a virtual reality) that shows people outside of Sarajevo the possibilities of a more open, LGBT-inclusive version of their country.[8]

Consistent with H1, we anticipate that people and locations in Bosnia which are more similar to the cultural conditions of Sarajevo will have greater prospects for the diffusion of cultural norms

arising out of Sarajevo's high-visibility Pride activism and strong LGBT+ cultural receptivity (evidenced by ethnic heterogeneity, low ethnocentrism, religiosity, and strong EU support) compared to people and locations, which are more culturally removed from these influences.[9] Bosnia has a long history of interethnic tolerance that is often obscured by the conflicts of Yugoslav succession of the early 1990s, particularly in urban areas (Hodson et al. 1994; Massey et al. 1999). While the 1992–1995 war led to widespread population upheaval amid rising nationalism, some multi-ethnic communities have survived or resurfaced since the war's end and are generally associated with greater ethnic tolerance compared to ethnic enclaves (Kunovich and Hodson 2002). However, no one has considered the sway that ethnically diverse environments might have on tolerance toward other non-ethnically defined groups in Bosnia, including marginalized LGBT+ communities (see Dreier et al. 2020 for a related theory on religious diversity).[10]

Finally, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is an exogenous shock that presents many unknowns in terms of societal and cultural influence on activism. Early studies suggest that COVID-19 lockdowns and individual-level salience of COVID-19 correlate with intolerance toward LGBT+ people (Rettie and Daniels 2021; Golec de Zavala et al. 2021). The pandemic effectively froze in-person collective action across Europe as events were canceled and people went into lockdown. In Bosnia, the LGBT+ events that followed September 2019's first Pride were canceled or sparsely attended, and in-person gatherings ran counter to norms of acceptable behavior during the pandemic. That context did not change until the second-ever, in-person Pride was held on August 14, 2021. At the same time, many societies also adapted to the pandemic through greater reliance on technology to maintain social networks. It is unclear how the pandemic could have altered the momentum of Bosnia's LGBT+ movement or curtailed any diffusion effects of the 2019 Pride beyond Sarajevo. At best, by reducing movement visibility, the pandemic poses a hard test for cultural transmission and potential diffusion of Pride-related effects.

Research Design

To evaluate cultural accommodation in Bosnia, we replicate select elements of the Ayoub et al. (2021) study design, using a nationally representative survey in July 2021, and then compare responses on LGBT+ support from immediately before and after the 2019 Sarajevo Pride.[11] We restrict our analysis to respondents who reside in municipalities outside Sarajevo, where the Pride took place.[12] We examine four main indicators of LGBT+ rights support: support for LGBT+ rights in general, support for the Sarajevo Pride specifically, feelings of closeness to LGBT+ people, and willingness to allocate financial resources to LGBT+ causes. We argue that these items can be used to capture a latent variable of LGBT+ support, which we express with an index ranging from low to high LGBT+ support. We then utilize the following model to estimate changes in LGBT+ support over time.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (Time)_i + \beta_2 \left(Cultural\ Receptivity\right) + \beta_n X_i + e_i$$

where Y_i is the dependent variable (LGBT+ support) for a given individual (i). We measure cultural accommodation in two ways. First, *Time* is an ordinal variable for whether the survey was conducted before the 2019 Sarajevo Pride, immediately after the 2019 Pride, or 2 years following the 2019 Pride. We anticipate that the prevalence of *Silent* (Type III) conditions outside Sarajevo should result in limited LGBT+ support in the immediate aftermath of the Sarajevo Pride, but that the Pride could have also influenced cultural transformations outside Sarajevo, leading to gradual accommodation over time. To account for possible cultural receptivity effects, we utilize multiple (*Cultural Receptivity*) indicators to include community-level ethnic and religious heterogeneity and individual-level support for EU integration (a proxy for openness vs. insularity), religiosity, and ethnonationalism.

In addition, we employ a vector of extended controls (X_i) for demographics and pandemic-related effects of having contracted COVID-19, knowing people who have died from COVID-19,

and having been vaccinated.[13] We also consider institutional effects by controlling for whether respondents reside in the Republika Srpska[14] and conflict-related effects using municipal-level conflict exposure data courtesy of Hadzic et al. (2020). The key variables of interest are *Time* and *Cultural Receptivity*, where a significant positive effect of *Time* would indicate that levels of LGBT+ support have risen outside Sarajevo with time, while a positive effect on *Cultural Receptivity* indicates that LGBT+ support increased more rapidly among those with more culturally open mindsets (greater EU support and less ethnonationalism/religiosity) and in more ethnically diverse environments. Although we cannot establish a firm causal effect between changes in LGBT+ support and effects of the 2019 Pride due to the observational nature of our data, limitations of social movement activism following the 2019 Pride resulting from COVID-19 lockdowns increase our confidence that advances in LGBT+ support could be attributed in part to diffusion effects from the pre-COVID period. COVID lockdowns across the European continent further restrict the impact of visible outside influences of LGBT+ support during the study's timespan. Any cultural transmission taking place during the COVID-19 lockdown period would most likely be through mechanisms other than face-to-face modes of highly visible local activism covered here. Our study underscores the need for further research into causal processes underlying diffusion effects of LGBT+ activism, some of which are beyond the scope of our design and analysis.

Sampling and Data Collection

We rely on publicly available data from the Ayoub et al. (2021) study for the immediate Pre/Post-Pride timepoints (July and November 2019), and we supplement that data with our new replication data from July 10 to 25, 2021. Both studies employ the same research firm (Ipsos d.o.o.) and sampling methods. All three surveys were conducted face to face and are nationally representative of the Bosnian public in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, and region.[15] Our follow-up study was conducted in July 2021, with a total of 930 respondents outside Sarajevo. Pooling our data with the Pre-Pride (*N* = 953) and Post-Pride (*N* = 943) samples from Ayoub et al. (2021) yielded a total of 2825 respondents across three time periods. In the conduct of our initial as well as follow-up studies, we strove to follow American political science association (APSA) guidelines for the ethical conduct of research with regard to power, harm and trauma, confidentiality, and consent, which were also essential to receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval (see online appendix for further details).

Results

We begin by examining four main components of LGBT+ support using items collected and reported upon by Ayoub et al. (2021) and replicated in our study 2 years later. The first involves support for LGBT+ rights in general, using an item in the European Social Survey: "Do you agree or disagree with the idea that gay people should be free to live their own life as they wish?" with responses ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 10 (Strongly agree). The second focuses on LGBT+ activism and the Sarajevo Pride, asking respondents: "Do you support Sarajevo having a gay pride march?" with "Strongly oppose, Somewhat oppose, Somewhat support, Strongly support" as response items.[16] The Sarajevo Pride item is important to assess support for visible LGBT+ activism in Bosnia, which has not occurred outside of Sarajevo at the time of our study. A third item measures closeness or distance to LGBT+ people, asking respondents: "How close do you feel to gay people?" with options ranging from 0 (Not close at all) to 10 (Extremely close). Finally, we consider resource allocation to organizations that oppose and support LGBT+ rights in Bosnia. We asked respondents: "Imagine you have to allocate 1000 KM [Bosnian Convertible Marks] between two organizations, one is working to support gay pride events, the other is working to rally protesters in opposition to these events. How much would you contribute to the following two organizations?"
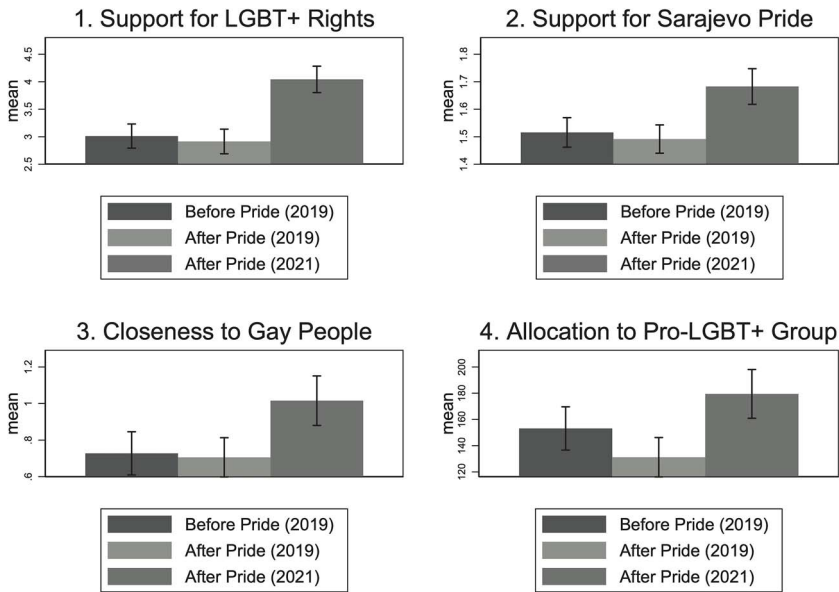
Figure 2. Changes in LGBT+ support over time outside Sarajevo.

Figure 2 reports mean responses to each item with 95% confidence intervals. We omit Sarajevo because LGBT+ support is stronger in Sarajevo across all item periods, and we focus here on diffusion of Pride effects.[17] In line with H1, Figure 2 indicates no significant change in LGBT+ support outside Sarajevo immediately following the 2019 Sarajevo Pride, consistent with a *Silent* accommodation environment where both local-level visibility and cultural receptivity are low. However, 2 years later, we find elevated LGBT+ support on all items, raising at least the possibility of diffusion effects of LGBT+ activism over time in ways that make the environment outside Sarajevo more culturally accommodative to LGBT+ rights (shifting the cultural foundations from *Silent* to *Gradual*).

To explore further, we turn to regression models. Simplifying the analysis, we combine the four items into an index of LGBT+ support. Factor analysis shows that all four items align clearly on a single dimension (Factor 1 Eigenvalue = 2.18) indicative of an underlying latent variable of LGBT+ support. The combined factor analytic index is a normalized, continuous variable ranging from 0 = low to 1 = high LGBT+ support. Table 1 below provides results from ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation with standard errors clustered at the municipal level. In each model, the constant term captures LGBT+ support among respondents outside Sarajevo before the 2019 Pride. Model 1 reports the baseline effects of *Time* on LGBT+ support outside Sarajevo, which indicates that LGBT+ support outside Sarajevo did not change from before to immediately after the 2019 Pride but increased in the 2 years following the Pride, consistent with Figure 2. Model 2 reports the effects of *Cultural Receptivity* on LGBT+ support outside Sarajevo. Here, we find evidence consistent with the influence of cultural receptivity on LGBT+ support in Bosnia. LGBT+ support is greater among those who support EU integration (a proxy for cultural openness vs. insularity), using a dichotomous variable coded 1 for those who would vote in favor of Bosnia's EU integration and 0 if opposed. In contrast, ethnonationalism, measured by a dummy variable for having more favorable views of one's ethnic in-group over another, and religiosity, measured by asking respondents if they consider themselves 1 = not religious, 2 = somewhat religious, or 3 = very religious, indicate lower LGBT+ support. These findings are all in line with our expectations that religious nationalism hinders LGBT+ support (as opposed to more culturally open, cosmopolitan people supportive of EU integration).

Table 1. Change in LGBT+ support over time outside Sarajevo (OLS regression)

VARIABLES	(1) LGBT+ support	(2) LGBT+ support	(3) LGBT+ support
Time (shortly after 2019 Pride)	−0.0119	−0.0506*	−0.0417
	(0.0151)	(0.0253)	(0.0254)
Time (2 years after 2019 Pride)	0.0478**	−0.0143	−0.0190
	(0.0166)	(0.0278)	(0.0275)
Vote for EU integration		0.0305**	0.0339**
		(0.0116)	(0.0113)
Ethnonationalism		−0.0378**	−0.0372**
		(0.0124)	(0.0112)
Religiosity		−0.0236**	−0.0214**
		(0.00745)	(0.00745)
Ethnic diversity × pre-Pride		−0.0969	−0.0991
		(0.0577)	(0.0582)
Ethnic diversity × post-Pride 2019		0.183*	0.162
		(0.0815)	(0.0838)
Ethnic diversity × post-Pride 2021		0.252**	0.241**
		(0.0808)	(0.0807)
Contracted COVID-19			0.0228
			(0.0253)
Knew someone who died from COVID-19			0.159*
			(0.0637)
Vaccinated			−0.00555
			(0.0199)
Bosniak			−0.0329
			(0.0348)
Croat			0.00398
			(0.0394)
Serb			−0.0454
			(0.0376)
Men			−0.0408**
			(0.00934)
Age			−0.000604*
			(0.000283)
Education			0.0126**
			(0.00298)
Rural			−0.0184
			(0.0133)
Unemployed			−0.00437
			(0.0102)
Republika Srpska			0.0160
			(0.0172)
Constant	0.157**	0.230**	0.253**
	(0.0123)	(0.0292)	(0.0545)
Observations	2463	2403	2402
R-squared	0.017	0.045	0.094
adj r2	0.0157	0.0417	0.0861

Robust standard errors clustered by municipality in parentheses. $**p < 0.01$. $*p < 0.05$.

Model 2 also considers the broader community-level effects of ethnic diversity using an interaction term between ethnically diverse communities and time. The ethnic diversity measure is based on municipal-level data from the 2013 census of the percentage of people identifying as Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. In the Bosnian context, ethnic diversity or heterogeneity has long
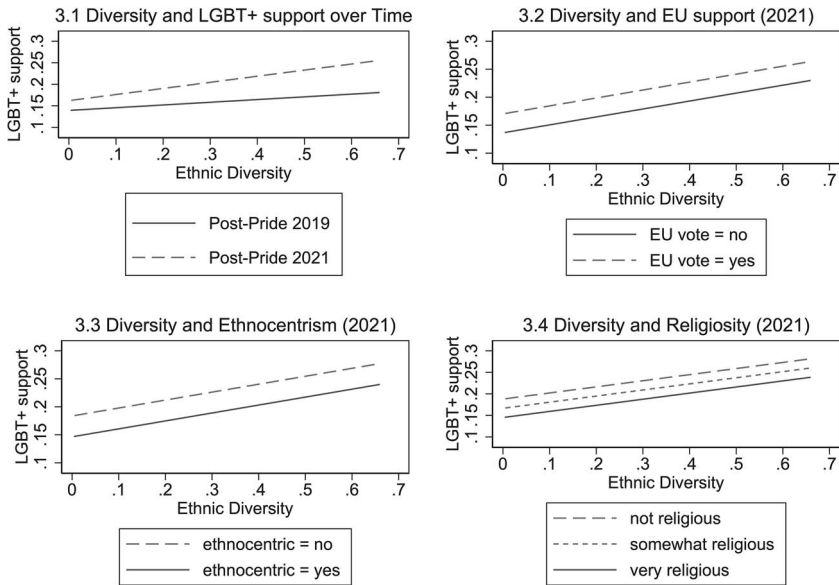
Figure 3. The impact of cultural receptivity on LGBT+ support (marginal effects).

been associated with less insularity, ethnonationalism, and religiosity (Massey et al. 1999). We calculate a Herfindahl index of ethnic fractionalization, which ranges from low to high probability that two randomly selected people from a given municipality are of different ethnicity.[18] Consistent with H1, Model 2 shows that when the ethnic diversity of a region is considered, LGBT+ support increased over time following the Pride outside Sarajevo, mainly in ethnically diverse regions. There is no comparable boost in LGBT+ support in more homogeneous communities now represented by the original *Time* variable.[19]

The marginal effects of cultural receptivity on LGBT+ support are estimated below in Figure 3. The first Figure 3.1 shows how LGBT+ support grows between 2019 and 2021 with increasing levels of diversity. Figures 3.2 to 3.4 indicate how cultural insularity (proxied by EU opposition), ethnocentrism, and religiosity reduce LGBT+ support at all levels of ethnic diversity in our 2021 sample, but ethnically diverse communities exhibit greater LGBT+ support. These results underscore the importance of both individual as well as community-level factors to account for cultural accommodation of LGBT+ support over time. At the individual level, cultural receptivity is consistently predictive of LGBT+ rights and support across Bosnia. However, we see greater evidence of attitudinal change in more diverse communities. In contrast, people in more insular, strongly religious, and ethnocentric enclaves are likely to have unchanged views or to keep their support silent, consistent with our theoretical framework.

Finally, table 1 Model 3 shows that *Cultural Diversity* effects are robust to extended controls.[20] Among those extended controls in Model 3, several are noteworthy. LGBT+ support is greater among women, younger, and more educated Bosnians. In addition, we find a strong positive effect of a dummy variable coded 1 for having known someone who died from COVID-19 on LGBT+ support. This may reflect "post-traumatic growth" or "compassion borne of suffering," where the experience of trauma or loss leads to increased empathy and prosocial behavior toward others, consistent with research on prosocial effects of victimization and trauma (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014; Lim and DeSteno 2016; Matos et al. 2021). Other controls for having contracted COVID-19 and vaccination are uncorrelated with LGBT+ support. Hence, we do not find evidence that the pandemic has negatively affected LGBT+ support, and COVID-19 victimization may have even bolstered compassion toward traditionally marginalized groups. It is rather remarkable that

downstream transmission occurred despite the pandemic, and we believe that speaks to the transformative potential of LGBT+ rights activism.[21]

Discussion and Conclusion

We opened this paper by pointing out the striking disparities that exist when it comes to the public support of LGBT+ people, not simply across countries around the world, but within them as well. Despite the sweeping revolution in public opinion change that LGBT+ movements have helped facilitate in many countries over the last three decades, their wins are never uniformly distributed among the people living in a state. In this study, we offer a plausible theoretical explanation for the complex but important question of why that is. At stake is the effectiveness of LGBT+ activism where it is needed most. In theorizing cultural outcomes, we have focused on the role of high-visibility activism coupled with strong LGBT+ cultural receptivity as most conducive to rapid cultural accommodation. The absence of one or both of those critical components at the local level leads to either more gradual change, no change at all, or generates strong backlash that could do more harm than good, at least in the immediate term.

We evaluate our theoretical framework using the case of LGBT+ activism in Bosnia, finding that LGBT+ support has increased following the 2019 Sarajevo Pride in areas beyond the Bosnian capital. In terms of our theoretical framework, Bosnia appears to be transitioning toward a gradual pathway for cultural accommodation of LGBT+ support into mainstream cultural values (*Gradual*) rather than the *Silent* or *Backlash* categories of cultural responses. While we cannot directly attribute causal effects of the Sarajevo Pride to boosting LGBT+ support across Bosnia's regions, the results should be seen as encouraging for LGBT+ activists on the ground. We also do not find any evidence of an anti-LGBT+ backlash two years on from the Pride. These findings support one branch of scholarship in LGBT+ politics, who see the propensity of backlash to be over-stated or to wane over time.

Most notably, this research largely supports the new school of thought that challenges the so-called "myth of mass opinion backlash" on LGBT+ rights in the United States (Bishin et al. 2021; see also Flores and Barclay 2016). However, the findings also buttress a more cautious pathway that has been articulated on backlash or resistance in contexts with high levels of homophobia among the general population, where hesitance commonly follows the injection of LGBT+ visibility into the domestic discourse but has diminishing returns over time (Ayoub 2014; O'Dwyer 2018). In this model, an LGBT+ movement (if it exists) can be galvanized by resistance and can challenge narratives of threat; in part, because people realize that society does not "fall apart" when LGBT+ people become included. Finally, our findings may also suggest that while the public visibility of early activism is limited by proximity, the diffusion of social cohesion within LGBT+ communities can be more far-reaching and lead to downstream progress. As one activist explained to Ayoub et al. (2021), "We received a lot of messages from LGBT+ people from smaller communities and towns, saying that Pride gave them hope to carry on. I think that empowerment is most important" (p. 17).

At the same time, our study cautions against inferences of a widespread "rapid" transformation of Bosnian culture to accommodating LGBT+ identity. At best, Bosnia remains a culturally bifurcated society. Like most countries in Europe, there are gaps between largely urban cosmopolitans, who view LGBT+ rights as culturally linked to European values, and ethnic and religious nationalists, who regard LGBT+ identity as contrary to traditional cultural norms and values. For all these reasons, a gradualist perspective on LGBT+ cultural mainstreaming seems most appropriate to the Bosnian case.

It is also noteworthy that LGBT+ support grew in a period of social isolation and collective action barriers wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. One possibility is that technology helped support and promote LGBT+ activism through online informal networks which substituted for more visible in-person contact and exposure, something we need to explore further in future research (Bennett and Segerberg 2016). Another potentiality is that people can be carriers of

diffusion, with more people moving out of the city (to the country) during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors merit further investigation.

We also find it compelling that COVID-19-related victimization through the loss of friends and loved ones resulted in a positive shift in support toward the LGBT+ community. This is inspiring given concerns that COVID-19 could increase stigma and intolerance of out-groups in ways that encumber LGBT+ rights (Golec de Zavala et al. 2021). Instead, we find evidence consistent with post-traumatic growth that trauma and suffering can increase empathetic attitudes and behavior, even toward out-groups (Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014). The growth and resilience of LGBT+ support during the pandemic speak to the potentially transformative legacies of early LGBT+ activism on Bosnian society. Further research should explore whether compassion borne of suffering is a generalizable pandemic-related phenomenon both for LGBT+ rights and other traditionally marginalized groups.[22]

Of course, there are potential limitations to what we can glean from surveys revolving around the Pride repertoire and its effects. While our research design has isolated key factors and held constant others, it is important to note that LGBT+ movement visibility is not contained spatially or temporally to a single repertoire, but is the result of sustained activism involving a range of actors (e.g., transnational advocacy networks) that support the movement over an extended period. Bosnian activists and their allies have worked tirelessly on a variety of tactical strategies, including ones relying less on visibility. It is nonetheless noteworthy how impactful Sarajevo Pride has been in terms of opinion change. Finally, while this study has focused on the case of Bosnia, it has implications for social movement theory more broadly. Social movement research is still predominantly oriented toward studying the effects of movement performances on policy, not cultural, outcomes (Van Dyke and Taylor 2018). Studies that have systematically dealt with cultural outcomes often observe only a snapshot in time, measuring opinion after the event itself and then concluding the analysis. Our research takes lag into account directly, by studying the downstream effects of movement visibility, in a difficult case setting, over various moments in time.

At present, LGBT+ support shows remarkable resiliency and growth, offering encouragement that early activist efforts to promote greater LGBT+ visibility and acceptance in socially conservative societies can result in transformative cultural legacies. While Bosnia may be a challenging case for successful LGBT+ activism given high rates of homo- and trans-phobic attitudes, coupled with a post-conflict history and a difficult pandemic experience that impeded mobility and cultural exchange—it does carry several lessons for other contexts. As noted above, the attitudinal variation we see across Bosnian regions is not uncommon in many states, so the cautiously optimistic findings (of gradual cultural accommodation in Bosnia) elucidate much about the potential of LGBT+ activism to affect local communities, as well as to reverberate beyond them. The study offers some hope, by showing that activism could have downstream effects in the places—those that silence and suppress LGBT+ voices—where it may be most vital. With the backdrop of both persistent domestic resistance and an increasingly coordinated global movement opposed to cultural transformations around so-called "gender ideology," this encouragement may be especially vital for LGBT+ activists who are continuing with their important work. Their activism may be affecting more than they realize, with the potential to put in motion subsequent cultural changes in outlying places.

Endnotes

1. Drawing on Altman (2004), Zhang et al. (2022) define cultural openness as having a global common consciousness. See our discussion in the theory section.
2. For example, Ashley Currier (2012) argues that contexts of low cultural receptivity—like her case of Namibia—can also influence LGBT+ movements to select strategies of invisibility, simply to survive.

3. We should note again that state authorities can sometimes preemptively construct LGBT+ people as a threat—e.g., for political gain during election campaigns—even before a movement makes such demands (Weiss and Bosia 2013). This complicates *Gradual* or *Silent* accommodation settings, given that state actors then generate visibility to which movement actors are often compelled to respond—shifting us into the *Backlash* quadrant in that scenario.

4. In the case of Bosnia, such norm brokers are largely absent outside of the capital city of Sarajevo.

5. While our hypothesis could also be tested cross-nationally at the country level, we are focusing here on the understudied role of diffusion among different cultural environments within-country (see Graham, Shipan, and Volden 2013 for an overview of different types of diffusion studies).

6. We do not focus extensively on the origins of those types of receptivity here but do demonstrate how their presence produces effective conditions for the gradual accommodation of LGBT+ people.

7. Also, in studies focused on LGBT+ populations, such indirect contact (sometimes also referred to as "parasocial" or "vicarious" contact) has been shown to lower prejudices and improve attitudes (Garretson, 2018; Lee & Mutz, 2019).

8. In this analysis, we do not consider diffusion effects via what we call "virtual visibility" through media and online communities. The parasocial/indirect visibility that the media offers has been well established in the LGBT+ politics literature (Garretson 2018). However, in the case of Bosnia, activists tell us that the Sarajevo Pride had limited media coverage nationwide, or coverage was negative. The influence of virtual communities on cultural diffusion, however, may provide a fruitful avenue for future research.

9. A study of public opinion finds that the European Union is equated with open, cosmopolitan values in contexts with high levels of homophobia like Bosnia (Page 2018).

10. One alternative argument would be that Serbs and Croats saw the Sarajevo Pride as a "Bosniak Pride" and so diffusion only took place within Bosniak ethnic channels to predominantly Bosniak-populated regions. Our interviews with activists, however, point to a multi-ethnic Pride event, also framed as such, which would increase the likelihood of diffusion across different ethnic channels throughout Bosnia. Furthermore, our data demonstrate that Pride transcended ethnic boundaries. If Sarajevo Pride were viewed only as a Bosniak event, then we should see stronger effects of LGBT+ support among Bosniaks than other ethnic groups. This is not the case.

11. A secondary component of our study involved interviewing six key organizers and activists of the original Pride for important contextual information, both about the event and about potential mechanisms through which its message interacted with the wider population.

12. Ayoub et al. (2021) utilized an online panel survey for Sarajevo, but this panel was no longer available in 2021. Instead, we focus on changes in support outside Sarajevo using nationally representative samples. We plan to revisit the Sarajevo study at a later date with a larger sample size in the context of future Pride events using a pre–post Pride design consistent with Ayoub et al. (2021).

13. We do not have a measure of high-visibility local LGBT+ activism outside Sarajevo because, to our knowledge, there have been no Pride-type events in Bosnia to date outside Sarajevo. We assume all locations outside Sarajevo constitute low-visibility environments.

14. Bosnia's federal system is composed of two main sub-state entities, the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and a Bosniak-Croat "Federation."

15. See online appendix for discussion of data collection protocols during COVID-19 which included masking and social distance.

16. We use the word "gay" (instead of "LGBT+") in the survey items due to the term's broader familiarity in the general populace.

17. Before the 2019 Pride, Ayoub et al. (2021) report that people in Sarajevo were more supportive of Pride than outside Sarajevo (20% vs. 3%, respectively). There was also less strong opposition

to the Pride inside Sarajevo than outside Sarajevo (40% vs. 65%, respectively). Following the 2019 Pride, strong opposition to the Pride dropped 10% and strong support rose 10% in Sarajevo, but outside Sarajevo, support/opposition remain largely unchanged. Only in 2021 did opposition and support begin to drop, consistent with a more gradual understanding of cultural accommodation. See the online appendix for further discussion.

18. The index ranges in theory from 0 = perfectly homogenous to 1 = perfectly heterogeneous. In Bosnia, the average index score is 0.27 ± 0.17, and ranges from 0.01 (Posusje municipality) to 0.66 (Brcko District). See our online appendix for robustness checks involving an alternative specification of ethnic diversity using sample heterogeneity by municipality over time.

19. In the online appendix, we show that items measuring cultural receptivity are sufficiently distinct from one another and do not create multicollinearity problems when combined in the same model.

20. In the online appendix, we also provide analysis of war-related casualities, ethnic voting, and refugee displacement, using municipal-level data from Hadzic et al. (2020), but none of these items independently predict LGBT+ support, and our regression models cluster standard errors at the municipal level.

21. In the online appendix, we show that having COVID-19 or having lost someone close to COVID-19 is also not correlated with cultural receptivity indicators. Instead, COVID-related variables are mainly correlated with one another. This could mean that COVID functions as a separate, independent post-traumatic growth pathway to explaining LGBT+ support that should be explored in greater detail for long-term effects in future research.

22. See online appendix for further discussion.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online, http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/.

Competing interests

The authors declare none.

Data Availability Statement

Replication files are available here: Phillip Ayoub; Douglas Page; Sam Whitt, 2023, "Replication Data for 'Theorizing Potential Downstream Cultural Consequences of LGBT+ Activism'", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TIQBMU, Harvard Dataverse.

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