

# Serbia Inequality Report

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## Executive Summary

### *Data*

Three datasets on wealth and status distribution in Serbia were analyzed: Serbian state data on monthly income by occupation for 2018, and International Labor Organization (ILO) data on income by occupation for the years 2016 and 2014.

### *Results*

Serbia's population is highly risk acceptant. Occupations that earn higher incomes are more to take risks due to the high reward of maintaining or increasing their socioeconomic status within Serbian society (Imas, 2016). The risk acceptance of the wealthier and poorer classes is exacerbated by political pressure from major international powers, internal economic issues, and social cleavages that refuse to allow old prejudices and conflicts to die. These long-lasting cleavages have the potential to incur violent outbursts and see a devolution back into a state of civil war (UNPD, 2018; CRS report, 2018).

### *Significance for Risk Taking and Stability*

Serbia has the potential to control the flow of displaced refugees into Europe. Furthermore, it has strong cultural and geopolitical connections to Russia. For these reasons, the United States, Western Europe, China, and Russia all take special interest in Serbian stability. The great powers attempt to influence Serbia using humanitarian aid, infrastructure investments, and more covert means through media and propaganda (CRS report, 2018; Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019; Nalaeva, 2016). Low economic achievement and a precarious relationship with the self-proclaimed independent state of Kosovo has only aggravated ethnic and societal tensions in recent years, causing a rising fear that Serbian society may devolve back into the violence it experienced in the 1990s (CRS, 2018). This scenario would place Serbian civilians in a position where they must take extreme risks amid sinking Serbian stability, and the data analyzed in this study indicate that they may very well be in a risk acceptant decision frame.

### *Implications for US Interests*

The United States has an increased interest in Serbia, which has grown from a socialist state and perpetrator of genocide to a democratic government and potential EU member state (CRS, 2018). However, ethnic tensions still lie under the surface of Serbian society and contribute to social discrimination and an ongoing socioeconomic crisis (UNPD, 2018). The United States' main interests are in supporting its allies in the EU and NATO as they seek to counter Russian influence by creating a stable and politically democratic Balkan region (CRS, 2018). To meet this goal, the United States has given millions of dollars in financial and humanitarian aid to Serbia. Serbia's risk acceptant population poses a risk to the US' interests should economically frustrated ethnic Serbs turn their frustrations toward minorities and destabilize the country.

### *Implications for China's Interests*

China has fewer immediate interests in Serbia than Russia and Western European countries. Instead its interests lie in potential future economic and political aspirations for China, both in the Balkans and beyond into central Europe (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019). Several Chinese infrastructure projects, which include the high-speed railway from Belgrade to Budapest and two separate construction projects on Serbia's corridor 11 highway, rely upon future Serbian social stability (Dimitrijević, 2017). Serbia has been incredibly receptive of China's infrastructure projects going as far as to suggest China open a joint infrastructure office with Budapest. Since its business sector has been receptive of economic overtures from Beijing, Serbia's risk acceptant population gives the leadership in China an opportunity if it is able to break ground on its Belt and Road initiative, providing more economic opportunities for the Serbian population.

### *Implications for Russia's Interests*

Russian interests in Serbia are based upon its ethnic and cultural ties to Slavic nations that follow Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Russia considers itself a protector of Serbia and other Balkan States due to these cultural connections (CRS, 2018). Russia views the EU and NATO's interaction within Serbia as a direct affront to its sovereign rights, and its ability to interact economically and politically within Eastern Europe. While Russia's interests in Serbia remain mostly political, it has used economic and media tools (such as Serbia's reliance on Russian energy, and Russia's posturing as a pan-Slavic Orthodox Christian defender), to counteract the United States' and Western Europe's interaction in the country (Bugajski, 2018). Serbia's risk acceptant population is both a risk and an opportunity for Russia. This is due to its population's ability to sway the direction of Serbia's government that could either align itself with the EU and NATO or Russia in the future based off of perceived potential gains.

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## Introduction

This is a summary report on inequality in Serbia compiled as part of the Aggrieved Populations project conducted in support of the 2019 Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Future of Great Power Competition and Conflict project conducted for the JS-J39.

This report provides background on why the country was chosen, relevant historical background, literature review concerning inequality in the country, synopses of empirical data sources and analyses, and a concluding section that summarizes the findings. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of inequality and grievance in the country, but to place the empirical analyses conducted on this country in their social and political context and to highlight interesting cases of inequality pertinent to risk acceptance and great power competition. The analyses focus on the measurement of population risk sensitivity as a function of measured inequality using the Arrow-Pratt measure of risk aversion, whose positive values indicate risk aversion and negative values indicate risk acceptance. Studies have shown that risk acceptance is associated with social unrest, terrorism, and other forms of social disruption (Kuznar 2007; 2019). The full explanation of the underlying method and theory is presented in the summary report, *Inequality, Risk Sensitivity and Grievance in Context: Summary of Aggrieved Populations Country Reports*, submitted as part of this SMA project. This report is intended to be supporting material to that report and presumes familiarity with it.

In order to create an inclusive and more representative set of countries, an effort was made to analyze countries from each major region of the world (Africa, Central Asia, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America, South Asia).

## Why Serbia?

Serbia was chosen for three reasons: 1) It is an Eastern European country, 2) it has been a US adversary, and 3) it is a key Russian ally in Europe.

## Great Power Interests in Serbia

Serbia's positioning in the Western Balkans allows Belgrade significant geopolitical influence in the region (CRS, 2018). Its push to become part of the EU, following in the footsteps of several of its other Balkan neighbors, and close cultural and historic ties with Russia make it more politically important, rather than economically crucial, to the United States, China, and Russia. The EU considers not just Serbia, but the entirety of the Balkans as a highly strategic region due to the recent use of it as a causeway for migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Southern Asia that are flowing into Europe.

Serbia's relations with the United States have frayed since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992 (CRS, 2018). However, since the ending of Serbia's ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo during 1999, political relations with the West have been steadily improving. The US and its NATO allies view Serbia as a crucial player in the Balkan's overall Stability. Serbia's close historical ties to Russia and its acceptance of Russian interaction have been cause for alarm in Western Europe and the United States. If Serbia were able to gain EU membership, for which it became a candidate for in 2014, it would signal an important geopolitical victory for the US and its allies. The potential extradition of war criminals (i.e., from the Balkan's civil war) residing in Serbia is a major obstacle to EU-Serbian relations (Nalaeva,

2016). The US, EU, and NATO all have provided relief funding since the end of the genocide in Kosovo, making them not only spectators but also stakeholders in the stabilization process (CRS report, 2018).

Russia views its ties and influence with Serbia as an issue of sovereignty. It views its role in the Balkans as protector of the Slavic people that share a common religion, ancestry and history (CRS, 2018). Russia has used its media and Serbia's reliance on Russian energy as tools for leverage when interacting with Serbia politically. Like the US and its European Allies Serbian relations with Russia have been improving. Russia has acted as Serbia's close political ally against the US and Western Europe's recognition of Kosovo as an independent state. If Serbia were to become part of the EU and lessen ties with Russia, it would result in a large political defeat and direct threat to Russia's self-perceived sovereignty over former Yugoslav States (Nalaeva, 2016). This would be favorable for Serbia, as it would place Serbia with the EU in competition with Russia, firmly place it on a side that can lend extensive aid in its reconstruction.

China has undertaken several large infrastructure projects that run through the Balkans and relies heavily on Serbia's cooperation (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019). However, China's largest project in the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway has yet to begin construction. Le Corre and Vuksanovic have listed Serbia as China's greatest ally in the region as it has been receptive of China's potential infrastructure projects and has yet to become an EU member state even though it is an official candidate for EU membership. If it were to become an EU country, it would greatly harm China's economic interests in Serbia and the greater Balkan region.

## Literature Review on Inequality in Serbia

The belief that Serbia suffers from discrimination as a nation is a view held by the majority of Serbia's civilian population regardless of ethnic background (UNPD, 2018). According to the UNDP report, the group within Serbia that is facing the highest level of self-perceived discrimination are the poor, while the group that faces the most registered acts of discrimination is the Roma ethnic group. Income inequality is a strong driver for discrimination among Serbs (Krstić, 2016). Serbia's income inequality is one of the highest in Europe as it has a weak middle class. This weak middle class is a potential reflection of high unemployment (and citizens who are not currently seeking employment), which is also the highest in Europe, were nearly 50 percent of Serbs that are of working age are not part of the workforce (Krstić, 2016). The large number of citizens choosing not to partake in the work force can be a symptom of a large informal employment rate (compared to European nations), and is also a residual effect of the transition from Soviet-era industrial economy to a modern market economy (Krstić, 2016; ILO, 2019).

The unequal distribution of wealth has influenced the healing process from the civil wars in the 1990's (Popovic, 2017). Residual ethnic tensions rarely still cause outbursts of violence, but strong ethnic biases remain. Income and occupation inequality only aggravates the ethnocentrism that remains, as some groups view the economic shortcomings of others (or the overall weak economic conditions in Serbia), as a direct result of one or more group's ethnic propensity to underachieve. In Serbia these ethnic biases are strong, with members of the Roma ethnic group being targeted at a higher rate than others (UNPD, 2018). The UNDP report shows ethnic Serbs hold most of the power within the country, and more than 50% of them believe ethnic minorities are not capable of holding political office positions.

How citizens of a state react toward the institutions that collectively structure their day-to-day activities varies heavily on their economic and educational attainment (Amis, 2017). Citizens tend to blame institutions for the inequality they perceive or directly feel. A mixture of weak economic performance and

systemic ethnic repression within Serbia led Kosovo—which is primarily Albanian—to declare its independence (Bertelsmann, 2016). Many EU countries recognized Kosovo as an independent country in 2008, resulting in an on-going political crisis in Serbia.

## Country-Level Measures of Inequality in Serbia

Serbia will be initially assessed with a collection of country-level metrics. These metrics provide measures of the country’s inequality compared to other nations, inequality within the country, social conditions that may be consequences of that inequality, and the prognosis for stability in the future (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Despite Serbia's past ethnic tensions and bloody civil war in the 1990's, it enjoys a fairly healthy economic performance and a stable environment. Its national per capita GDP is modest, with citizens earning an average of \$5,901. Serbia’s Inequality adjusted Human Development Index is almost in the top third according to the United Nations. In contrast, Serbia has a moderately sized informal employment rate according to ILO, ranking within the top 74<sup>th</sup> percentile equaling slightly more than 22% of total employment. These factors make it difficult to label Serbia as either a stable or unstable country. The Fragile States Index, Terrorism Index, and the probability of Mass Killings all fall in the middle of the countries measured.

Table 1. Serbia: Basic Statistics on Inequality

Measure	Value	Rank	Source
Inequality Compared to Other Nations			
Per Capita GDP 2018	\$5901	88 of 187	WB
Country Measures of Inequality			
Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI)	0.667	57 of 151	UN
Gini Coefficient	--	--	WB
Informal Employment as % of Total Employment	22.1%	83 of 112	ILO
Measures of State Instability			
Fragile States Index	68.1	108 of 175	FFP
Terrorism Index	0.229	114 of 160	IEP
Probability of Mass Killing	0.004	103 of 161	EWP
Risk Sensitivity			
Average Arrow-Pratt Measure	--	--	This Study
<p>*EWP – Early Warning Project, FFP – Fund for Peace, IEP – Institute for Economics and Peace, ILO – International Labor Organization, UN – United Nations, WB – World Bank</p> <p>-The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) is a UN measure of well-being and is a scale based on per capita GDP, life expectancy and education levels of the population.</p> <p>- The Fragile States Index is based on twelve conflict risk that include security apparatus, factionalized elites, group grievance, economy, economic inequality, human flight and brain drain, public services, state legitimacy, human rights and rule of law, demographic pressure, refugees and IDPs, and external interventions. The potential range of the index is zero (no fragility to 120 total fragility).</p> <p>- The Terrorism Index scores each country on a scale from 0 to 10; where 0 represents no impact from terrorism and 10 represents the highest measurable impact of terrorism.</p>			

## Prognosis for Change to 2029

Serbia is at a crossroads in its state development. It is divided between the interests of the West and the East as it is receiving financial and humanitarian aid from the United States and NATO, and their political opponents, Russia and China (CRS, 2018; Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019). Serbia's relationship to Kosovo has also deteriorated as Kosovo has attempted to impose tariffs on Serbian goods and maintained its self-proclaimed independence (Jacobs, 2019). Serbia views both actions as a direct and illegal affront to its sovereignty and national security. Serbian prime minister, Ana Brnabic, refused to remove military action as a potential Serbian reaction to the continued deviance by Kosovo.

Weak economic environment, ethnic divides, and poor governance leaves Serbia's future in question. However, Serbia does have an avenue to join a more stable and organized union in the EU (CRS, 2018). While the contentious situation in Kosovo has been a major hurdle toward Serbia's induction into the EU, a negotiation process has been underway since 2014 (Jacobs, 2019). Concerns from current EU state members over the strength of Serbian democracy have increased, causing another obstacle for Serbia to overcome in order to become a member state. Similar to the stagnation Serbia is experiencing in its aspirations to join the EU, Serbia is facing threats to its infrastructure projects with China; China's inability to foresee returns on its investments along the BRI in Serbia, its largest project in Serbia (the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway), has yet to break ground (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019).

Serbia's already strong relationship with Russia has been improving. Russia is Serbia's closest political ally in the region and has taken Serbia's side in political confrontations over Kosovo (CRS, 2018). Serbia has been receptive of Russian humanitarian aid, access to energy, and media influences. This growing connection to Russia runs contrary to Serbia's desire to join the EU.

# Empirical Data on Inequality in Serbia

## Dataset 1: 2018 Serbia data on Monthly Income by Occupation

The monthly income data was collected from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>1</sup> The monthly income is broken down into larger groups and then into more granular subgroups that show the professions Serbians are employed in, the number of employees therein, and how much the average income is for each profession.

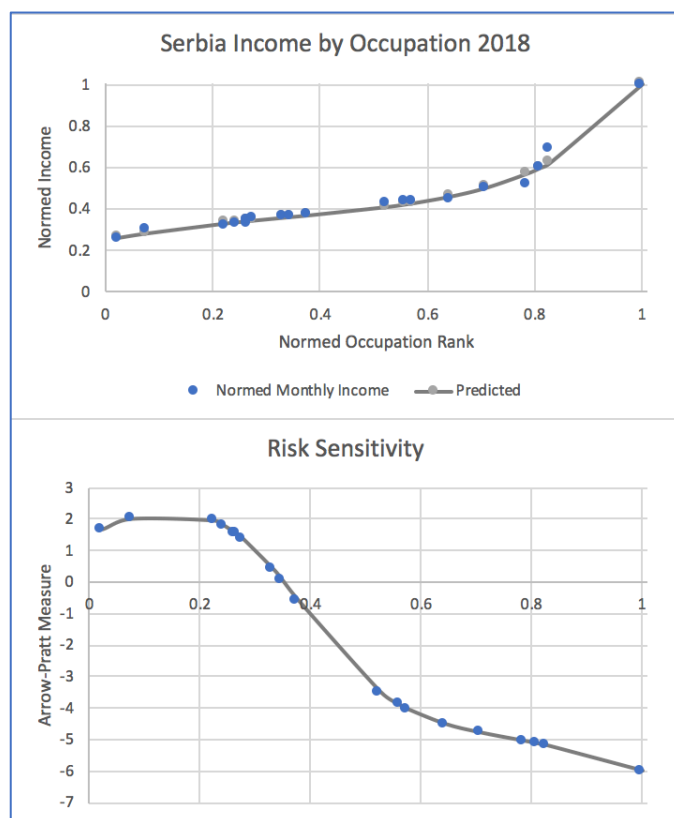


Figure 1: Distribution of Income, World Bank Quintiles Serbia 2018 and associated Risk Sensitivity.

### Summary Dataset 1: 2018 Serbia data on Monthly Income by Occupation

The most risk averse occupations are lower income occupations in Serbia. These occupations include retail, mining, and retail sales. This group's aversion to risk may be explained by the fear of further loss (Imas, 2014). The Arrow-Pratt measure shows on average a greater acceptance of risk in Serbian society with a score of -1.60. However, the more wealth an occupation accrues, the higher the propensity for risk taking occurs. This is likely due to the benefits achieved from maintaining social status (Imas, 2014). In Serbia, the occupations that make the highest incomes include manufacturing and financial services. This income bracket is more likely to take risks as they fear change within Serbian society that risks the wealth they have acquired. The lower income jobs are communication jobs, personal service jobs, and low-level manufacturing jobs. This group of low wage earners in Serbia also faces the highest level of discrimination (UNPD, 2018). While discrimination can cause risk taking behaviors, it is believed this income bracket of

<sup>1</sup> Data from: <http://www.stat.gov.rs/en-US/>



workers is the least risk acceptant, mostly because of fear of losing what little resources they possess (Imas, 2014).

*Dataset 2: 2016 ILO Serbia data on Monthly Income by Occupation*

The data taken from ILO is similar to the data taken from Serbia's Bureau of Statistics. It is broken down into industries, by how many employees work in those industries, and the average monthly earners for those workers. The ILO data was used for the second and third data sets, with the first data set being from 2016, and the third being from 2014. The two-year span allows the project a glimpse at potential changes in risk taking in Serbia over a short period of time.

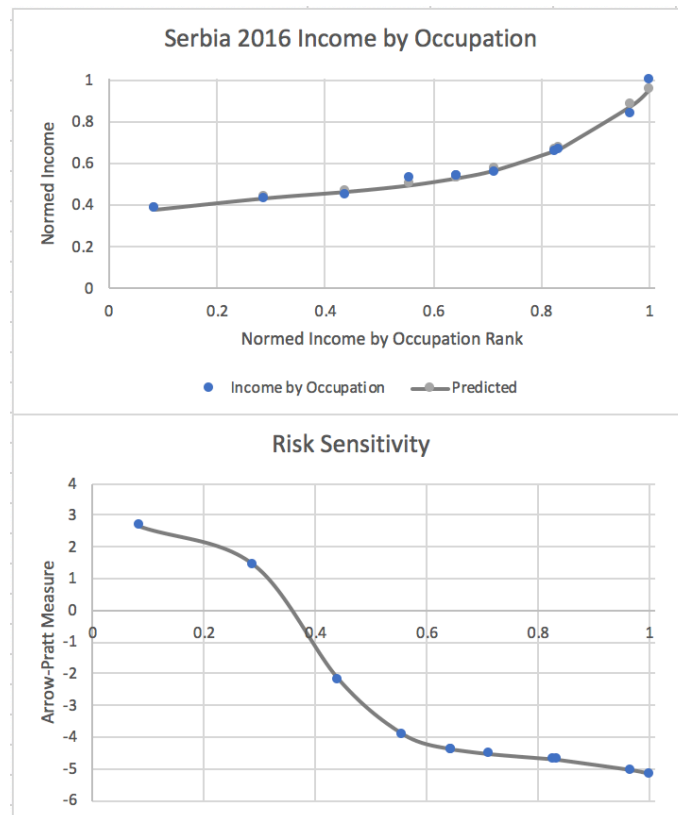


Figure 2: Distribution of Income, World Bank Quintiles Serbia 2016 and associated Risk Sensitivity.

*Summary Dataset 3: 2016 ILO Serbia data on Monthly Income by Occupation*

Similar to the data taken from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the data taken from ILO relates the risk acceptance of the population to the monthly income of an occupation. This relationship is due to the fear of those within a society that do not possess vast amounts of resources of losing what they possess, while those who control a large amount of resources desire to maintain or increase their socioeconomic standing within society (Imas, 2014). For citizens in the lower income brackets, the reward for taking that risk must be substantial or extremely life changing. Serbia's lack of middle class compared to other European countries implies a low reward for risk taking behavior for the lower classes; there really is no higher class to which they can aspire. There would probably have to be broad changes in the distribution of wealth in Serbian society in order for the lower class to take substantial risks. Lower income

professions including service industries and low-level manual labor jobs and agriculture being more risk averse. Higher income jobs that include more professional careers such as managerial positions in manufacturing and the financial sector are more risk acceptant. Of the three data sets, the ILO's 2016 data shows the highest acceptance of risk within an average score of -3.20.

*Dataset 3: 2014 ILO Serbia data on Monthly Income by Occupation*

The third dataset is also taken from ILO and uses the same methodology and in collecting and representing the data.

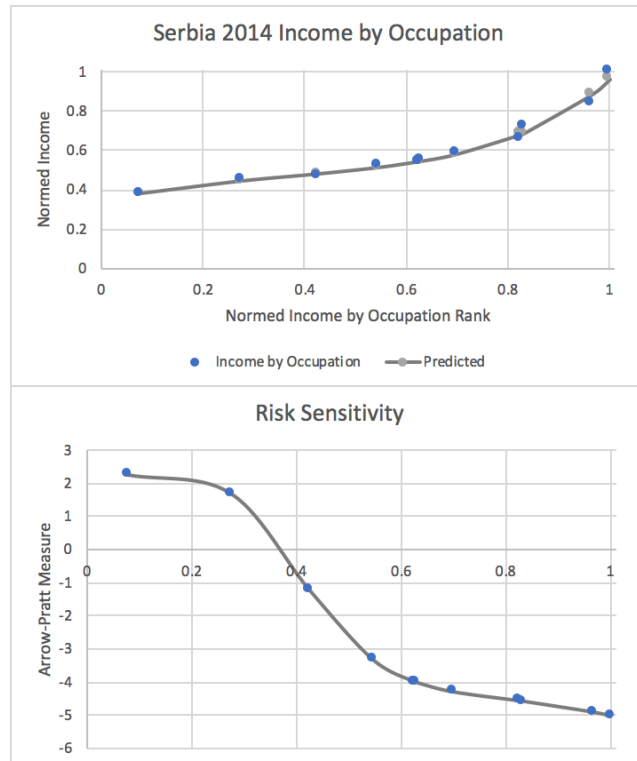


Figure 3: Distribution of Income, ILO 2014 Serbia Monthly Income by Occupation and associated Risk Sensitivity.

**Summary Dataset 3: 2014 ILO Serbia Monthly Income by Occupation**

The mean Arrow-Pratt measure based on ILO data from Serbia in 2014 is highly risk acceptant, -2.91, but not as risk acceptant as the data from 2016 indicate. Serbs are becoming increasingly risk acceptant. According to the data higher income occupations are more likely to take potentially risky actions in Serbia. This potentially could be because this group stands to lose more if they fall from their current socioeconomic status. High-risk acceptance remains with industries that are related to professional careers, including management and finance, while risk averse occupations are consistently lower income level service and manufacturing jobs including education and agriculture.

## Findings on Inequality in Serbia

All three datasets examined in this study show similar findings relating to Serbian income inequality and the risk-taking potential for the different groups within Serbian Society. In all three models, occupations receiving higher incomes are more likely to take risks due to the high-risk, high-reward potential for retaining socioeconomic status within Serbia. Individuals with fewer resources and less income are less likely to take risks due to the potential of losing everything and only gaining slight improvement in social status. This is most likely due to a small middle class in Serbia and the already strong discrimination felt by those with lower socioeconomic status in Serbian civil society (UNPD, 2018).

### *Relevance to Instability and Social Cleavages*

Serbia has gone through extensive political transformations and ethnic conflict since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992 (CRS, 2018). The issues facing Serbia are not solely restricted to Serbia, as many of its neighboring Yugoslavian successor states face similar conflicts and political transformations (Dyrstad, 2017). Slow economic growth within Serbia has resulted in a sustained socioeconomic crisis with high rates of unemployment that also aids the grey and illicit economy, including human trafficking (Bolcic, 2016). This has weakened the state's legitimacy in many Serbs' minds.

Serbia is also riven with social and ethnic cleavages that have resulted in violence and ethnic cleansing in the past and continues to fuel discrimination. The wide income gap is a common source of discrimination within Serbia (UNPD, 2018). Current day ethnic discrimination is mostly aimed at the Roma ethnic group; however, ethnic Albanians and Croats living in Serbia have also reported high levels of discrimination. The ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo in the 1990s' lead Kosovo to self-declare as an independent state, which is still a source of conflict today (CRS, 2018),

### *Opportunities and Pitfalls for the US and Adversaries*

The United States, its Western European Allies, and Russia all have deep interests in Serbia (CRS, 2018). The US, NATO, and the EU see Serbia as a potential means to decrease Russia's grasp within the region, as well as to gain more control over the flow of migrants and refugees flowing into Europe, as Serbia's geographical positioning in the Balkans makes it a likely route for travel over land. Russia views itself as a protector of Serbia due to cultural and historical connections even though it was never formally part of the Soviet Union (Nalaeva, 2016). China sees a geopolitical and economic opportunity for involvement in Serbia, which it believes can be a gateway for its political aspirations and infrastructure projects that are part of its Belt and Road Initiative (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019).

The primary pitfall for all parties taking special interest in Serbia is the risk of large-scale divestment. The United States, EU and NATO have all continually given support in either financial or human aid since Serbia ended its genocide in Kosovo and began a gradual transition to its current democracy (CRS, 2018). Russia and China also have investments in Serbia that could fall apart if it were to either become an EU member state, or simply devolve back into civil strife. Russia has the most to lose as it has already extended financial aid and views Serbia as a protectorate by leaning upon its Slovakian and Orthodox Christian background (Nalaeva, 2016).

### *China*

China has less interest in Serbia than Russia, and views it as a gateway for both its political and economic aspirations within the Balkans (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019). China does not have the cultural connection Russia has to Serbia, nor the geopolitical significance that the EU and NATO have if they are able to fully bring Serbia into EU membership and the Western European democratic political system (CRS, 2018). However, China does face the threat of divestment on several crucial infrastructure projects that are supposed to run through Serbia and the Balkans, which are a piece of China's larger Belt Road initiative (Le Corre & Vuksanovic, 2019).

### *Russia*

Russia views the United States and Western Europe's attempt to influence Serbia into EU membership and into a fully functioning democratic state, as a direct confrontation to its sovereignty and its own political goals in the region (Nalaeva, 2016). Russia has been Serbia's closest political ally since the 1990s, as it refuses to acknowledge Kosovo as an independent state and has used its media influence extensively in attempting to paint itself in a favorable image within Serbia (CRS, 2018). Russia has also used its cultural and ethnic connections to the region as a Slavic and Christian Orthodox country to curry its favor within the country.

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