

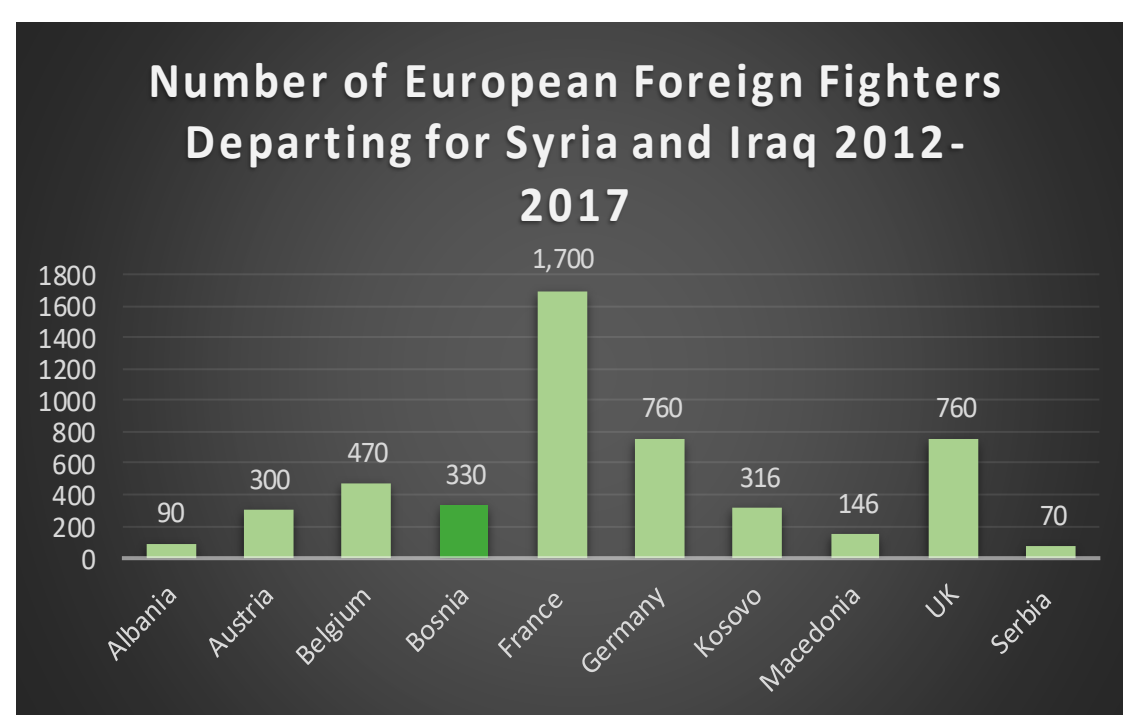
BOSNIA'S ISLAMIST FIGHTERS

Understanding Community-Level Risk in Bosnia | 2013

BACKGROUND

Bosnia and Herzegovina is still struggling with the aftermath of the war which occurred in the early 1990s. Economic disenfranchisement, ethno-nationalist

cleavages, and a weak democracy challenge the country in moving forward. In addition, Bosnia has seen a rise in the recruitment and radicalization of the Bosnian Muslim population to join jihadist terrorist organizations such as Islamic State (IS), al-Nusra (al Qaeda's Syrian branch), and al Qaeda as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. This escalation in radicalized members of the Bosnian population was at its peak between the years 2012 and 2016. In more recent years, Bosnia has seen the return of many of these foreign fighters as well as continued growth in the jihadi networks in Bosnia and the Balkans writ large. Understanding the socio-economic conditions may provide possible insight into where are Bosnians Muslims most vulnerable to adopting violent ideologies and where those ideologies may be likely to proliferate.



*Numbers may have changed since 2017. Sources: VOX-Pol and The Soufan Group

METHODOLOGY

This analysis utilizes census data conducted by Bosnia and Herzegovina's official agency for statistics in order to answer the question:

Where are the areas which are most vulnerable to Islamist radicalization in Bosnia?

This question will be answered by looking at four indicators by percentage of the population who are: Muslim, Bosniak (an ethnic group in Bosnia which is distinct from Bosnian, the nationality), hold a primary education or less, and/or are unemployed in order to better understand Bosnia's demographic landscape and socio-economic conditions at a localized level. I represent these barometers spatially, and then evaluate each municipality in an aggregated map using Natural Breaks (Jenks) for levels of vulnerability (1 being low vulnerability and 5 being high vulnerability). I excluded the rest of the census data from this study because I wanted to avoid cluttering the resulting data with irrelevant or misleading information. Primary education or less was selected as a more inclusive and accurate measure for calculating vulnerability since some degree of literacy enables potential terrorists to seek mentorship in online chatrooms and to follow the social media accounts of radical recruiters.

Cartographer: Wendy Robinson

Course: DHP P207 GIS for International Applications

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Projection: MGI 1901 Balkans 6, Transverse Mercator

Sources: GADM, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, VOX-Pol, The Soufan Group, Counter Extremism Project

RESULTS

The aggregate map indicates that 16 out of 137 municipalities are the most vulnerable in Bosnia (vulnerability level 5). The municipalities ranked level 4 and 5 cluster closed to district and country borders, and are also exclusively in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is largely Catholic Croat and Bosniak Muslim.

LIMITATIONS

Bosnia's Agency for Statistics census data from 2013 has the most thorough data compared to other sources. However, it is seven years old, and therefore not an updated option for understanding what Bosnia's demographics look like during the peak of foreign fighters leaving for the Middle East. It could be helpful to evaluate data from the beginning of this period (2012-2013), data from the peak period (2015-2016), and from today in order to better understand patterns of movement and changes in the communities.

One of the other issues which affected my methodology were the aggregate population numbers for each indicator. The population census was divided into female, male, and total population. However, adding female and male populations did not equal the total population included in the census. Consequently, the errors in the numbers will affect the outcome of my spatial results.

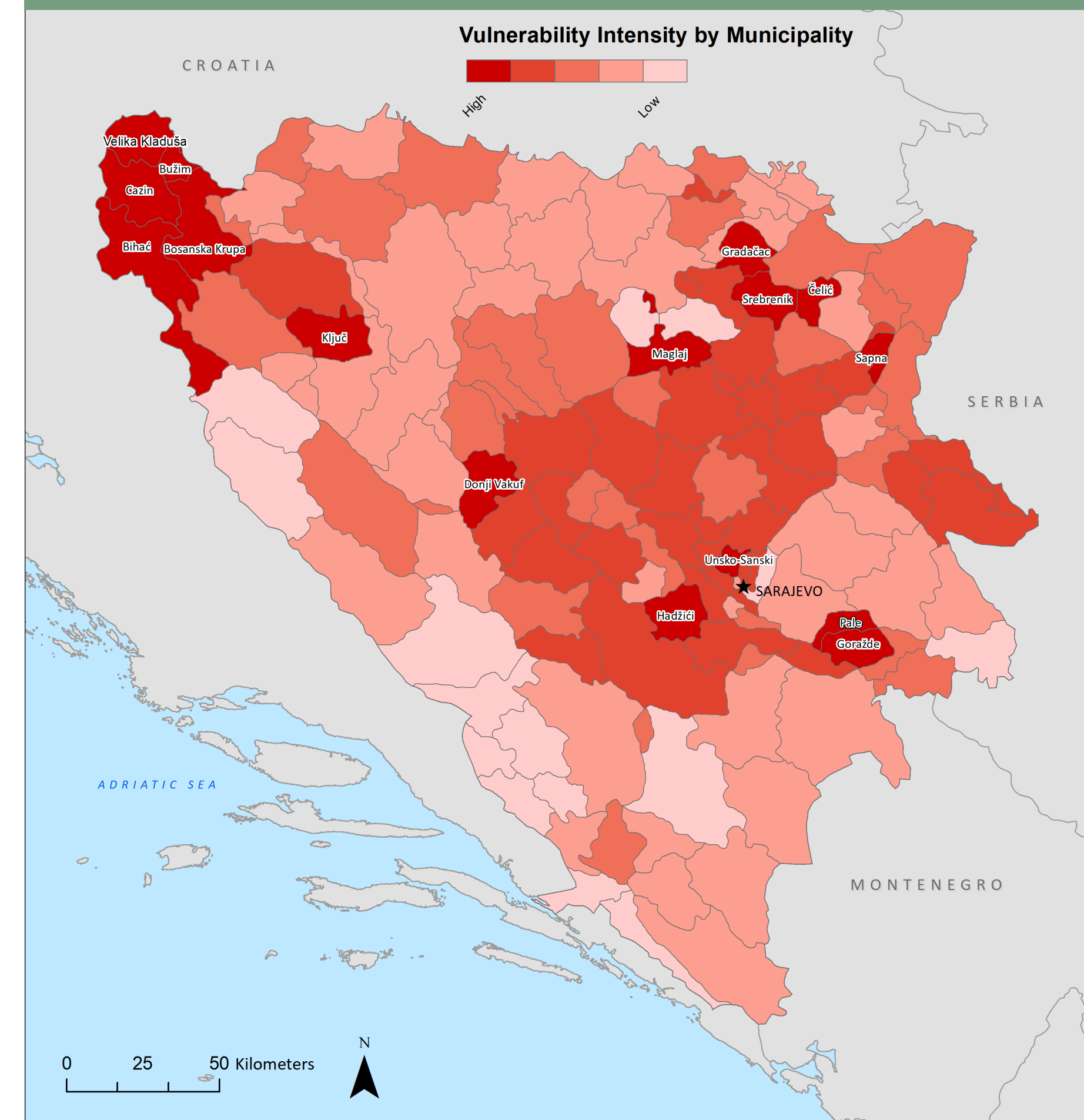
Additionally and most importantly, these indicators are general and do not include some of the other factors which are integral to understanding the Islamist terrorism and radicalization landscape in Bosnia, such as where radical Imams proselytize most successfully on a local level, and where radical Islamist education centers and mosques are connected to IS or al Qaeda in Bosnian communities. These other influences require further research and data.

CONCLUSION

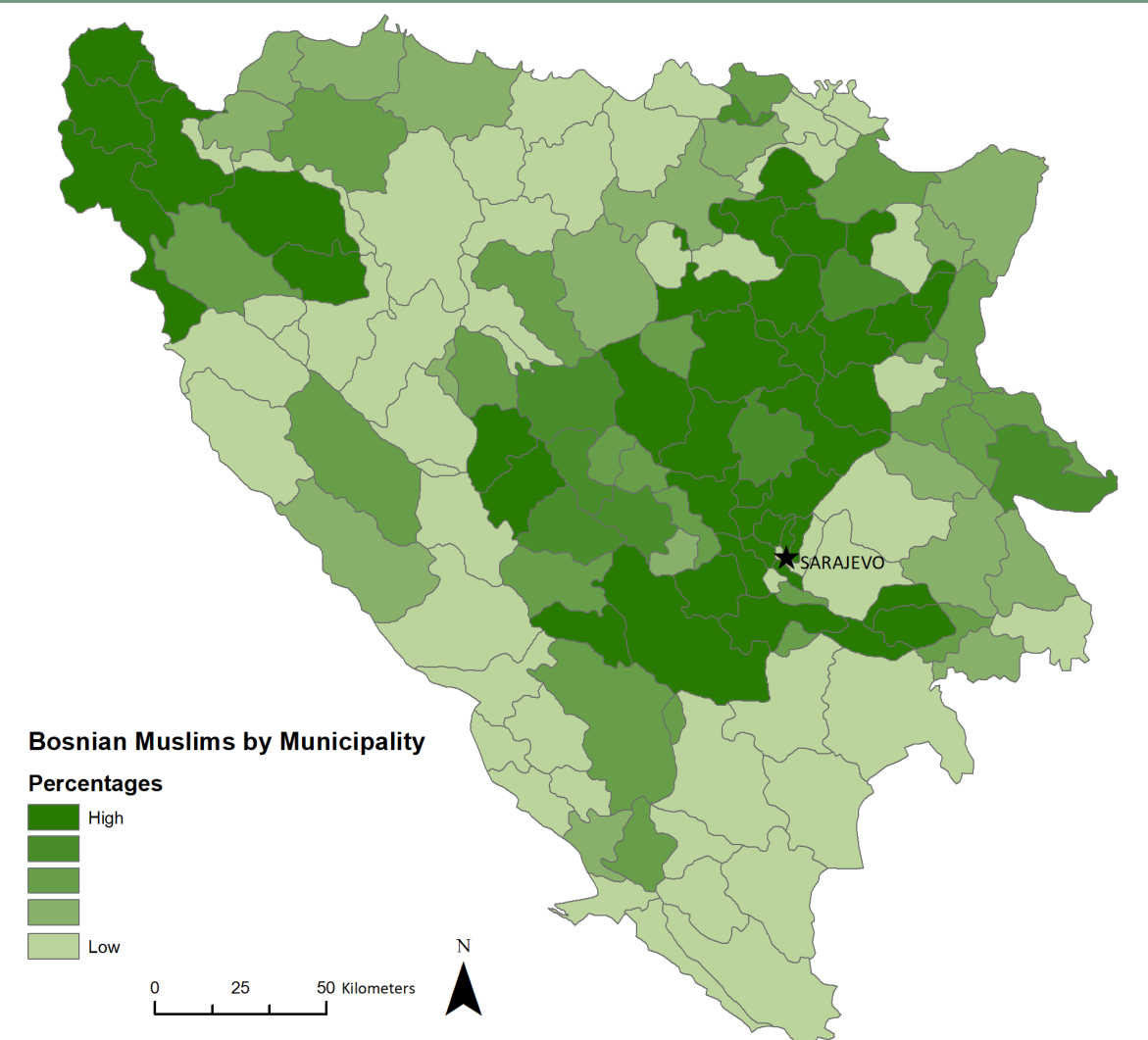
The composite map for vulnerability levels in Bosnia (levels 4 and 5 specifically) demonstrates clusters of vulnerable municipalities around borders —both those near country borders to Croatia and Serbia as well as entity borders near Republika Srpska and Brčko District where the population is majority Orthodox Serb—in other words, cutting along ethnic and religious lines. All municipalities are within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, from which it can be inferred that radicalized Bosnians in these areas are possibly prone to Islamist radicalization.

Understanding that these 16 municipalities are the most vulnerable in Bosnia based on four socio-economic variables in this analysis and are located along border areas speaks further to the differences between ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia. This study is focused on vulnerabilities, therefore, further research is required in order to examine from where terrorists actually originate, and what are the real motivations for Islamist radicalization.

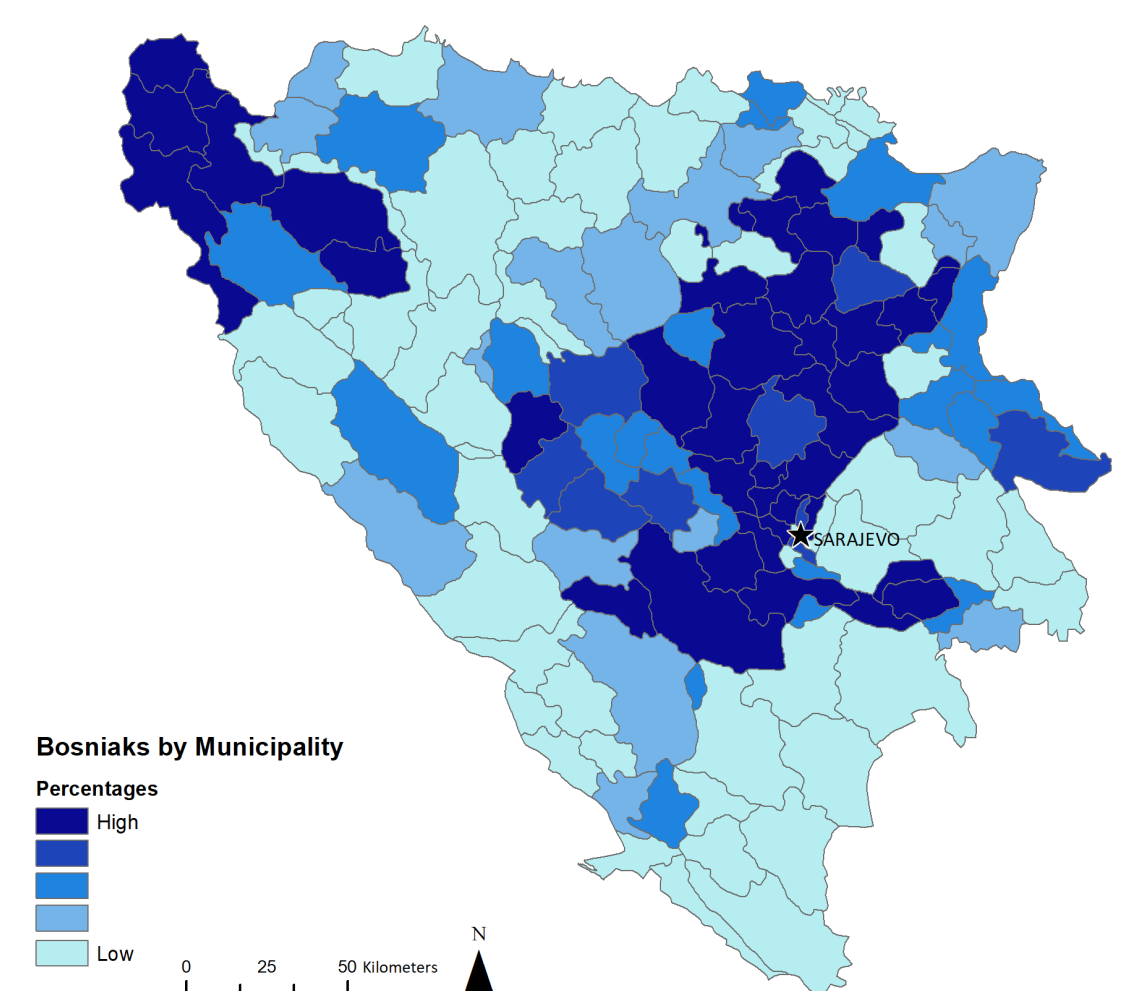
VULNERABILITY INTENSITY BY MUNICIPALITY



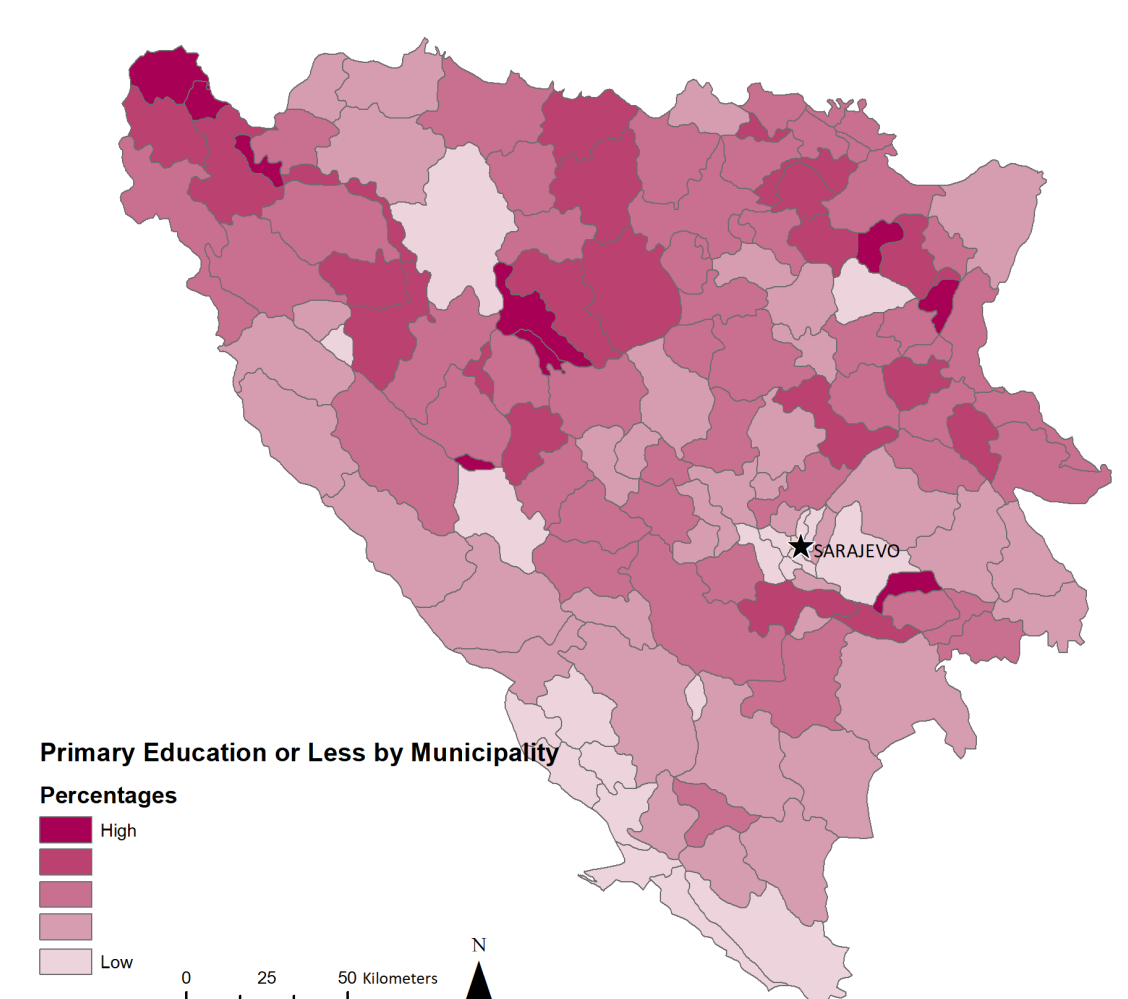
PERCENTAGE OF BOSNIAN MUSLIMS BY MUNICIPALITY



PERCENTAGE OF BOSNIAKS BY MUNICIPALITY



PERCENTAGE WITH PRIMARY EDUCATION OR LESS BY MUNICIPALITY



PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYMENT BY MUNICIPALITY

