Data Article

Balkan Peace Index decision EXpert model and data

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This paper details the data collection process, dataset, and reuse potential of the Balkan Peace Index, a model designed to evaluate the levels of peacefulness in the Western Balkans. Data was gathered in phases: initially, a team of local experts conducted on-ground data collection, interviews, and focus groups, as well as using external international databases describing different notions of peace. This data was then processed and classified on a predefined scale by another team of experts using the Decision EXpert model. The BPI model incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data, reflecting the local context. The comprehensive dataset is stored in the Mendeley Data repository and offers significant reuse potential for further research, policy-making, and sensitivity analysis. This open-access resource aims to provide actionable insights for improving peace levels and preventing potential deterioration in the region.

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Specifications Table

Subject	Social Sciences – Political Science
Specific subject area	Peace and Conflict Studies; International Relations.
Type of data	Processed Tabular data
Data collection	Data was collected in two phases. Firstly, a team of local experts collected primary and secondary data from the countries of the Western Balkans by using desk research, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and external international databases. The data was processed and assigned a class on a predefined scale. Secondly, a separate team of experts created a peace classification model and classified Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) on the peace continuum scale using the Decision EXpert model.
Data source location	Data is collected from various primary and secondary sources (public statistical offices, official data, media, and international databases) in the countries of the Western Balkans. Namely, from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Data is stored at the Public information-communication institution Academic Network of the Republic of Serbia – AMRES and the University of Belgrade.
Data accessibility	Repository name: Mendeley Data Data identification number: 10.17632/fhc566gp7w.1 Direct URL to data: https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/fhc566gp7w/1
Related research article	[1] Local Turn in Knowledge Production About Post-Conflict Societies: The Case of the Balkan Peace Index. Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding. doi:10.1080/17502977.2024.2370691.

1. Value of the Data

- The Balkan Peace Index (BPI) places a concentrated focus on a single region (Western Balkans) where local researchers possess in-depth knowledge of the domain, are proficient in the local language, and can actively engage with the resident population. This is not a trait of global peace indexes (such as Global Peace Index) where domain experts assign values to a range of countries without knowing the context in them.
- The BPI incorporates local data unlike global indexes (for example Conflict Barometer) which mostly use quantitative data and English-based sources.
- Also, the methodology of the BPI represents a convergence of internationally recognised indexing methods and participatory approaches derived from on-the-ground field research.
- The BPI can also serve as vital tools for policymaking, aimed at guiding decisions to foster peace and stability. These systems enable governments and international organizations to identify regions at risk of conflict or where peace remains fragile and can leverage this information to determine where to deploy peacekeepers or how to allocate and redistribute aid effectively.
- The developed system allows for systematic sensitivity analysis, providing valuable insights into how adjustments to specific attributes influence the overall classification along the peace/violence continuum.

2. Background

The primary motivation behind compiling the Balkan Peace Index (BPI) dataset was to develop a comprehensive metric for assessing levels of peacefulness within the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). The BPI was created to address the need for a region-specific peace classification model that integrates both specialized expertise and local insights. This approach is grounded in the 'local turn' in International Relations [2,3], which emphasizes involving local researchers in generating knowledge about post-conflict settings. The BPI methodology combines decision support systems and ethnographic methods, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. This
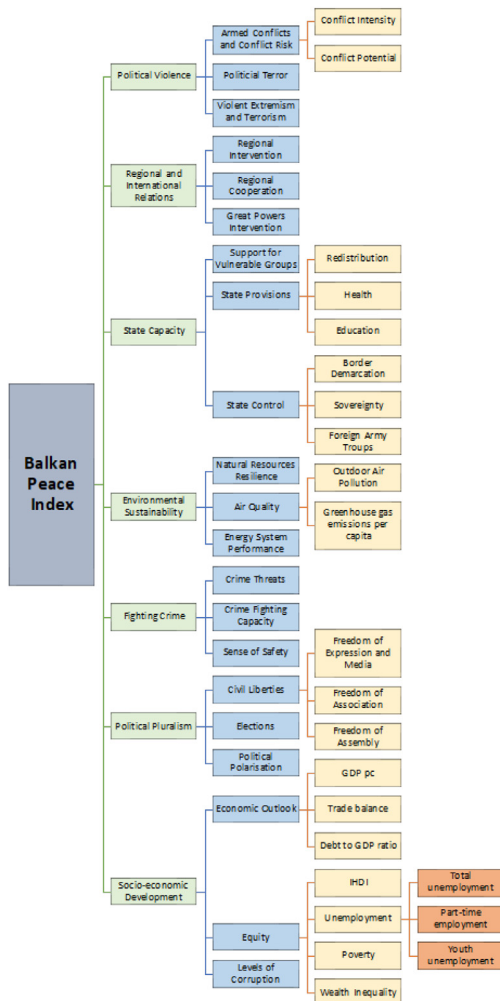
Fig. 1. BPI Indicators.

dataset provides a nuanced and contextually informed understanding of peace within six countries of the region. By sharing the methodology, data, and results openly, the dataset aims to facilitate validation, integration into diverse research efforts, and serve as a valuable resource for decision and policy-makers. This data article complements the original research article by detailing the data collection process, the dataset structure, and its reuse potential, enhancing transparency and encouraging further research and application in peace studies.

3. Data Description

The Balkan Peace Index (BPI) comprises of seven domains—Political Violence, Regional and International Relations, State Capacity, Environmental Sustainability, Fighting Crime, Political Pluralism, and Socio-Economic Development—each with multiple indicators and sub-indicators, as detailed in Fig. 1. This approach ensures that the BPI model is tailored to the unique peace

dynamics of the Western Balkans [4]. Rather than ranking countries, the BPI positions them along a peace continuum with five categories: Violent Conflict, Contested Peace, Polarized Peace, Stable Peace, and Consolidated Peace, reflecting their overall peace quality. One country is associated with a single category, which helps to understand a country's position along the peace continuum [5].

Using a peace classification system can be vital as it can provide a deeper understanding of peace by positioning countries on a continuum rather than assigning them a rank or numerical score. Unlike rankings, which only indicate relative positions between two countries, classifications reveal the underlying dynamics of peace, distinguishing between aspects like the absence of violence (Negative peace) and the presence of justice and equality (Positive peace) [6]. This approach also helps policymakers identify specific areas needing attention and design targeted interventions. Additionally, classification systems are less prone to misinterpretation [7] and can be updated to reflect evolving insights, making them more practical and adaptable tools for fostering and sustaining peace.

Data for the BPI is drawn from secondary sources, such as local databases, CSOs, and media reports, and primary sources, including country-based surveys, focus groups, and expert interviews. Based on the data collected from these sources, researchers create values for each of indicators and sub-indicators. Newly created sub-indicators and indicators become data that is used to determine the values of each of the seven domains.

The dataset provided in Microsoft Excel documents includes comprehensive evaluations of the BPI for countries located in the Western Balkans for the years 2022 and 2023. As we previously stated, the Balkan Peace Index (BPI) provides an overall evaluation of peace in each country, reflecting their level of stability and peace. The table's rows classify domains, sub-domains, or indicators, while columns represent countries in the Western Balkans.

Please find below description of the domains and indicators. Each table describes a single domain, which consists of multiple indicators, each having its hierarchical numeration. For example, the first domain is political violence and its numeration is D1. This domain consists of three indicators numbered D1.1, D1.2, and D1.3. The intuition is the same for other indicators.

Each of the tables capture the key elements from each domain and indicator, providing an overview of their meanings, how they are measured, and the sources from which the data is gathered. The possible values for each indicator are predefined by domain experts and are ordered such that the first value represents the worst possible outcome, while the last value indicates the best possible one. Please note that each domain/indicator is a column in a dataset.

Measuring *Political Violence* (Table 1) is arguably the most critical for peace because it captures the intensity and frequency of violent acts that disrupt societal stability, including armed conflicts, state-led violence, and extremist actions like terrorism.

This measurement of *Regional and International Relations* (Table 2) is important because of mostly negative or strained relations, such as interventions, external pressures, or proxy conflicts, which can destabilize a country and lead to political violence or internal unrest. Conversely, strong and harmonious international relations provide a buffer against external threats, foster economic growth, and help states resolve conflicts diplomatically rather than through force.

State capacity (Table 3) is important for peace because it reflects how well a government can respond to crises, manage resources, and avoid breakdowns that lead to violence or unrest. For instance, weak state capacity often correlates with higher levels of political violence, crime, or social exclusion, which can fuel internal conflicts or even lead to state failure. By ensuring the government can provide welfare support, secure borders, and control its territory, the risk of conflict and instability is reduced, allowing peace to be sustained over time.

Measuring *Environmental Sustainability* (Table 4) within peace assessments is a relatively novel paradigm in peace studies because the health of ecosystems and availability of natural resources directly impact human survival, economic stability, and social well-being. By evaluating a country's ability to maintain its natural resources, air quality, and energy systems, we can better understand its capacity to support long-term peace and prosperity.

Table 1
Political Violence domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D1: Political Violence	Focuses on reducing political violence such as armed conflicts, violent crises, rebellions, protests, and extremism to ensure peace.	High, Medium, Low	Conflict Barometer, Global Peace Index, INFORM Risk Index, Fragile State Index, Government, focus groups, interviews with local experts, CSOs and local media reports
D1.1: Armed Conflicts and Conflict Risk	Measures the intensity of armed conflicts (internal, regional) and the risk of future conflicts. Includes analysis of political discourses and violent incidents.	High, Medium, Low	Conflict Barometer, Global Peace Index, INFORM Risk Index, Fragile State Index, Government, focus groups, interviews with local experts, CSOs and local media reports
D1.2: Political Terror	Assesses violent state actions such as torture, political killings, and suppression of opposition, unrelated to armed conflicts.	Terror, Insecure, Full or Limited Security	Conflict Barometer, Political Terror Scale, Global Peace Index, Fragile State Index, ACLED Global Disorder Map, Amnesty International Report, HRW, focus groups, interviews with local experts, and local media reports
D1.3: Violent Extremism and Terrorism	Measures radicalization and extremism leading to violence, including terrorism. Tracks incidents and their consequences (fatalities, injuries).	High, Medium, Low Intensity	Global Terrorism Index, Global Terrorism Database, Fragile State Index, Global Peace Index, Western Balkan Securimeter, ACLED Global Disorder Map, focus groups, interviews with local experts, and local media reports

Table 2
Regional and International Relations Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D2: Regional and International Relations	Focuses on the mutual relations of Western Balkans states and territories and their interactions with great powers. The peace is measured through regional intervention and cooperation levels.	Poor, Fair, Good, Harmonic	Local and international media reports, National official documents, European Commission Progress Reports, expert analyses, and local media reports.
D2.1: Regional Intervention	Measures the influence of regional actors on a state, divided into being subject to or conducting intervention.	Armed, Non-armed, None	Local and international media reports, National official documents, European Commission Progress Reports, expert analyses, and focus groups.
D2.2: Regional Cooperation	Assesses the level of cooperation of a country with regional actors, evaluated on whether the country is isolated or effectively cooperates.	Weak, Medium, Strong	Local and international media reports, National official documents, expert analyses, local media reports, and focus groups.
D2.3: Great Powers Intervention	Measures the influence of great powers on the functioning of Western Balkans countries, with possible armed or non-armed interventions.	Armed, Non-armed, None	Local and international media reports, National official documents, and expert analyses.

Table 3
State Capacity Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D3: State Capacity	Measures a state's material resources and organizational competencies that enable it to implement policies and achieve goals.	Low, Medium, High	ASPIRE, World Bank Data, Prague Process, UNICEF, UNDP, Roma Inclusion Index, Regional Cooperation Council, WB countries' statistical offices, interviews with local experts, survey and focus groups.
D3.1: Support for Vulnerable Groups	Assesses the state's capacity to provide welfare and prevent social exclusion of vulnerable groups (Roma, children, elderly).	Low, Medium, High	ASPIRE, World Bank Data, UNDP Regional Roma Surveys, Roma Inclusion Index, WB countries' statistical offices, interviews with local experts, survey and focus groups.
D3.2: State Provisions	Evaluates the state's ability to provide services and redistribute wealth through health and education capabilities.	Low, Medium, High	Gini Index, World Bank Data, EUROSTAT, UHC Service Coverage Index, WB countries' statistical offices, Regional Cooperation Council databases, survey and focus groups.
D3.3: State Control	Measures the state's capacity to enforce laws, control borders, and maintain sovereignty within its territory.	Low, Medium, High	Dayton Peace Agreement, Kumanovo Agreement, UN SC 1244, Ohrid Framework Agreement, WB Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Failed States Index, and focus groups.

Measuring *Fighting Crime* (Table 5) is vital for peace because high levels of crime, particularly violent and organized crime, can destabilize societies, undermine trust in government institutions, and fuel social unrest. Efficient crime prevention and control create a safe environment where citizens feel secure, and where conflicts are less likely to emerge or escalate. This measurement is of special importance because it evaluates not only the current crime levels but also the state's capacity to combat crime and ensure justice.

Political Pluralism (Table 6) reflects a society's ability to accommodate diverse political opinions, interests, and groups through democratic processes. When political pluralism is strong, it ensures that all segments of society can participate in governance, express their views freely, and feel represented in state decisions. Political pluralism is considered to be one of the main elements of democracy as it represents a stable and legitimate government. It is a positive concept of peace as it assesses the likelihood of maintaining peaceful, democratic governance and reducing the risk of conflict.

One of the main factors of peace within a country is *Socio-Economic Development* (Table 7). In peace measurement, socio-economic development evaluates a country's sustainable economic growth and equitable resource distribution, which are essential for long-term stability and peace. A stable economic environment with equitable opportunities helps prevent conflicts fuelled by inequality, while low levels of corruption ensure that resources are allocated efficiently, contributing to social trust and reducing the potential for civil unrest.

Authors strongly believe that peace classification systems, like the Balkan Peace Index, are important tools used for policy-making purposes with the main aim of guiding decisions about promoting peace and stability. Governments and international organizations can use these systems to find areas where conflicts might happen or where peace is fragile. For example, the United Nations and other global bodies could use this information to decide where to send peacekeepers, or how to (re)distribute aid.

In research, peace classification data could help scholars study the links between governance, development, and peace. Researchers often look at factors like political freedom, economic growth, or corruption and how they affect peace in different regions. For example, they

Table 4
Environmental Sustainability Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D4: Environmental Sustainability	Measures the ability of Western Balkan countries to sustain life support systems that enable human and ecosystem potential to flourish.	Low, Medium, High	Map of Life, UN SDG, Ecological Threat Report, Environmental Performance Index, European Commission Country Insights, CSOs and state audit reports, and media reports.
D4.1: Natural Resources Resilience	Assesses a country's capacity to ensure the resilience of natural resources, like species, water, and trees, against climate change effects.	Low, Medium, High	Map of Life, UN SDG, Ecological Threat Report, Environmental Performance Index, European Commission, CSOs reports, state audit reports, and media reports.
D4.2: Air Quality	Measures a country's ability to achieve recommended air quality levels and reduce air pollution's impact on health, with sub-indicators for outdoor pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.	Low, Medium, High	World Energy Trilemma, SDG 7.1.2, EU Energy Community reports, CSOs, and media reports.
D4.3: Energy System Performance	Evaluates a country's ability to meet energy demands responsibly and provide clean, sustainable energy.	Low, Medium, High	World Energy Trilemma, SDG 7.2.1, EU Energy Community reports, CSOs, and media reports.

may examine how high levels of corruption can lead to unrest, and then suggest ways to improve governance to support peace. This helps us better understand what conditions are necessary to keep societies peaceful. BPI specifically can be used for case-study analysis in education setups as it allows interactive environment[1] for students to inspect what components of peace is important in the Western Balkan setup and how an (statistical) intervention can result in improvement or deterioration of peace. A benefit of this approach is also in a unique sensitivity analysis (which is a property of DEX method used) that highlights factors that leads to immediate peace effects.

Also, we believe that humanitarian organizations and CSOs could use peace classifications to plan their work, especially in areas recovering from conflict (such as Western Balkan). Organizations like USAID or the World Bank could utilize this information to design programs that address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty or inequality, to help communities rebuild after violence.

4. Experimental Design, Materials and Methods

The most important distinction of the BPI compared to other peace indexes lies in its methodology, as it employs the DEcision eXpert (DEX) method—a qualitative multi-criteria decision analysis approach designed to facilitate decision-making and support, particularly in complex scenarios involving multiple and potentially conflicting attributes [7]. DEX is intentionally simple, relying on a hierarchical decomposition approach that enables researchers to construct a multi-attribute model by breaking down the decision problem into smaller, more manageable subproblems. In the context of classifying countries along a peace continuum based on peace and violence domains and indicators, this hierarchical decomposition effectively elucidates the components of peace and violence.

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[1] The website is available at https://mind-bpi.streamlit.app/.

Table 5
Fighting Crime Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D5: Fighting Crime	Evaluates the state's ability to combat crime and ensure safety, essential for preventing conflict and promoting peace and development.	Poor, Moderate, Strong	Official national statistics, UNODC Crime Trends Survey, Organized Crime Index, IISS The Military Balance Database, SEESAC Database, focus groups, and interviews with local experts.
D5.1: Crime Scale	Assesses the current level and nature of crime threats, including violent crime, organized crime, and state crime, through qualitative analysis.	High, Medium, Low	Official national statistics, UNODC Crime Trends Survey, Organized Crime Index, IISS The Military Balance Database, SEESAC Database, focus groups, survey and interviews with local experts.
D5.2: Fighting Crime Capacity	Measures whether state resources and capacities are adequate to address crime effectively and act as a deterrent.	Poor, Moderate, Strong	Reports by state institutions, Official national statistics, European Commission reports, CSO reports, Organized Crime Index, specialized portals, and interviews with local experts.
D5.3: Feeling of Safety	Evaluates citizens' perceptions of safety and their trust in institutions responsible for fighting crime.	Low, Moderate, High	Official national statistics, CSO reports, focus groups, and survey.

Table 6
Political Pluralism Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D6: Political Pluralism	Assesses the extent to which diverse political attitudes coexist, compete, and are represented in state decisions, enabling democratic participation.	Bad, Problematic, Fairly Good, Good	Freedom House Freedom in the World, Nations in Transit, V-Dem Democracy Report, EUI Democracy Index, European Commission, CSO sustainability index, and local media reports.
D6.1: Civil Liberties	Measures respect for freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, which are preconditions for political participation and pluralism.	Low, Medium-Low, Medium-High, High	Freedom House, V-Dem Democracy Report, Reporters Without Borders, European Commission, Council of Europe, local media, and CSOs reports.
D6.2: Elections	Evaluates the electoral process and its ability to reflect the will of the citizens in forming democratic institutions and decision-making.	Not free, Partly free, Free, Free and Fair	Freedom House, Election Vulnerability Index, OSCE, European Commission, V-Dem Democracy Report, local authorities, local media and CSO reports, and interviews with local experts.
D6.3: Political Polarisation	Measures the degree of antagonism between political groups, which can erode democratic institutions and hinder cooperation and compromise.	High, Medium, Low	Fragile State Index, Positive Peace Index, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, V-Dem Democracy Report, European Commission, interviews with local experts, and local media reports.

Table 7

Socio-Economic Development Domain.

Domain/Indicator Name	Explanation	Possible Values	Sources
D7: Socio-Economic Development	Evaluates long-term peace prospects through opportunities for sustainable economic development and equitable distribution of resources.	Low, Medium, High	World Bank Open Data, IMF, WTO, Global Debt Database, Eurostat, UNICEF, United Nations University, National statistical offices, survey, and focus groups.
D7.1: Economic Outlook	Measures a country's economic performance based on GDP, trade balance, and debt-to-GDP ratio, assessing vulnerability and growth capacity.	Bad, Intermediate, Good	World Bank, WTO, IMF, National trade administrations, Global Debt Database, National statistical offices, and interviews with local experts.
D7.2: Equity	Assesses social and economic equity, including employment, poverty, and wealth distribution, to ensure fair opportunities for development.	Low, Medium, High	Eurostat, Luxembourg Income Study, World Bank IIDD, UNICEF, ICF Macro, UNU World Income Inequality Database, and Global Population Review.
D7.3: Levels of Corruption	Measures the impact of corruption on resource allocation and its effect on essential services and social stability.	High, Medium, Low	World Bank, V-Dem database, Transparency International, TRACE Bribery Risk Matrix, CPI, Global Corruption Index, Global Risk Profile, and survey.

In the context of the DEX method, several key concepts are central to its framework. **Attributes** represent measurable or inferred concepts, such as elements related to peace and violence in country classification. Each attribute is described using a qualitative **scale** of ordered categories, like 'poor' to 'good,' with quantitative attributes discretized by domain experts into these categories. Attributes are organized **hierarchically** to reflect their interrelationships, enabling structured analysis. **Decision rules**, a core feature, map lower-level attributes to higher-level ones, forming a comprehensive table that aggregates values to infer higher-level attributes that cannot be directly measured.

Once the attributes, hierarchy, and decision rules are established within the DEX method, the process of inferring the value of the goal attribute can commence. This process initiates from the lower levels of the hierarchy and ascends to the top through the application of decision rules. Specifically, when a new option is introduced, its bottom level (elementary) attributes need to be determined on a predefined scale. These elementary attributes are then aggregated into higher-level attributes using decision rules, continuing until the goal attribute is reached—in our case, the peace/violence continuum.

The overall process is illustrated in Fig. 2. The evaluation of alternatives involves collecting values for elementary attributes (represented as v_{11}, v_{12}, v_{13}, and v_{14} in Fig. 2]. These values are then systematically propagated upward to the root attribute, which, in our case, is the Balkan Peace Index.

The modeling approach employed addresses several challenges prevalent in data-driven methodologies, including issues of insufficiency, inappropriateness for decision support, and incompleteness. To ensure that the developed model meets the requirements for effective decision support, it is essential to adhere to the 5C requirements proposed by Bohanec [7], which are **Correctness** (the model solves the problem at hand), **Completeness** (the model will always be able to produce an outcome), **Consistency** (a better combination of input cannot lead to worse outcome, and vice versa), **Comprehensiveness** (information presented is sufficient for effective decision- and policy-making), and **Convenience** (the model is easy accessible and easy to use).
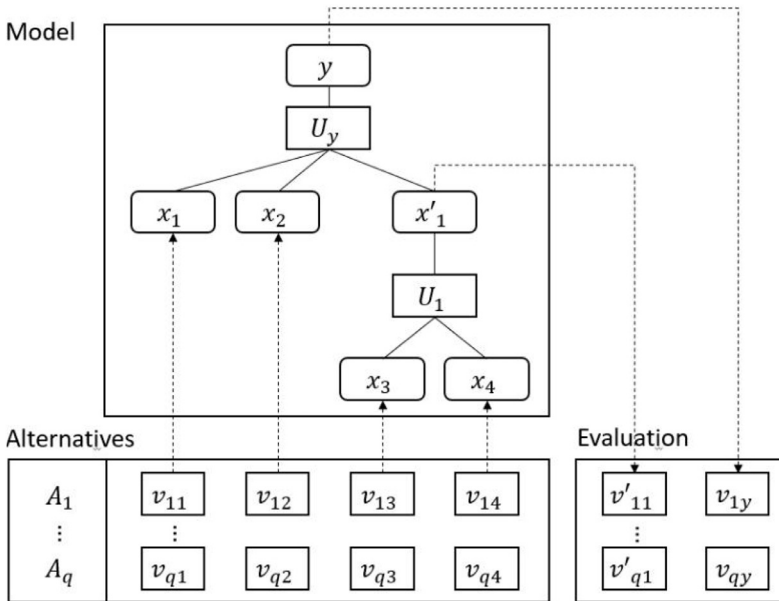
Fig. 2. General concept of DEX models [8].

We emphasize the possibility to trace the DEX model. In other words, one can understand and track how the classification was made. In addition, the DEX model offers a distinctive advantage over other peace classification methods in its capacity to conduct sensitivity analysis and explore the effects of changes. By systematically altering each elementary attribute by one value, both to a better and worse value if applicable, independently of other attributes, decision- and policy-makers can investigate the impact of these changes on the final classification. This form of sensitivity analysis provides valuable insights into how adjustments to specific attributes influence the overall classification along the peace/violence continuum. Such insights empower decision-makers to strategically focus their efforts on improving the classification or proactively preventing any deterioration.

Limitations

While the data presented offers valuable insights into the peace and governance status of the Western Balkans, it has several limitations. One significant limitation is the availability of only two years of data, specifically for 2022 and 2023. A dataset spanning a larger period would allow for a comprehensive analysis of trends and evaluation of policies over time, enabling observation of patterns and long-term impacts of interventions. This research is a step toward building such a dataset.

Another limitation is the lack of comparison with existing peace indexes. While our initial research indicates that the DEX classification procedure correlates well with numerical peace indexes, it does not provide a direct comparison. Existing peace indexes often use a weighted sum approach, simplifying relationships between domains and indicators. Our 'local turn' approach allows for more complex interactions but lacks direct validation against established indexes.

Regardless of these limitations, this paper can act as a foundation for other 'local turn' indexes in different areas, offering a unique perspective through its focus on local context and actionable insights.

Ethics statement

All authors have read and follow the ethical requirements for publication in Data in Brief and our work meets these requirements. The research has been approved by the Ethical Committee of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science (No.13-1570/1 from October 1, 2020).

Credit author statement

Nemanja Džuverović – Conceptualization, Validation, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision, Project administration, and Funding acquisition; **Sandro Radovanović** – Methodology, Software, Validation, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, and Visualization; **Goran Tepšić** – Methodology, Validation, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft, and Writing - Review & Editing; **Đorđe Krivokapić** – Methodology, Validation, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, and Project administration

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Balkan Peace Index (Original data) (Mendeley Data)

Acknowledgements

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Further Reading

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