

Bosnia-Herzegovina Country Report

December 2021

During the late 20th century, ethnic violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina peaked as Yugoslavia broke up. Bosnia-Herzegovina, like most Yugoslav states, was historically multi-ethnic. According to the [1991 census](#), approximately 44% of the population identified as Muslim Bosniak, 32.5% as Orthodox Serb, and 17% as Catholic Croat. Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito stifled nationalist dissident groups and separatist movements during his regime. However, upon Tito's death in 1980, Yugoslavia's devolved into identity-based polar factionalism and [ethnic nationalism](#). Nation-states began calling for independence, spurring nationalist independence movements. Serbian nationalism was particularly dangerous, as many advocated for a pan-Serbian state and the expulsion of Bosniaks and Croats.

When Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence in April 1992, Bosnian Serb forces [attacked](#). Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević used inflammatory rhetoric to foster discontent between Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats. Military forces perpetrated [atrocious crimes](#) against all three ethnic groups, including extermination, torture, deportation, detainment in [concentration camps](#), and shelling and attacking civilians. Approximately 100,000 people (military and civilians) were [killed](#) during the Bosnian War, with 61.4% of whom being Bosniaks, 24.7% Serbs, and 8.3% Croats. Serb soldiers also deported Bosnian women to "rape camps" and forcibly impregnated them with "Serbian" children, using [sexual violence](#) as a tool of genocide due to the patrilineal nature of Yugoslavian ethnic identity.

The United Nations intervened by establishing "safe-zones" for Bosnian refugees at Srebrenica, Gorazde, and Zepa. However, on July 11, 1995, the Serbian military advanced on Srebrenica, overwhelming the peacekeeping forces. Serbian forces separated males and females, deported and/or sexually assaulted the women, and killed the men. Around 8,000 Bosnian men and boys were murdered in what became known as the [Srebrenica genocide](#).

The UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993 to prosecute those involved with the Yugoslav Wars. Slobodan Milošević, Radovan Karadžić, and Ratko Mladić were among the top authority figures [prosecuted](#) for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Bosnia-Herzegovina still struggles with political division and is at increased risk for violence following deteriorating political stability and Serbian separatists' [secession threats](#). Policy analysts warn this is the biggest security threat to Baltic states since the Bosnian War. International actors are urgently calling for intervention before violence erupts.

Recent concerns stem from the October 25th [announcement](#) by Milrod Dodik, the Serb president of Bosnia's triple-shared presidency, that Republika Srpska will withdraw from several institutions, including the military and judicial bodies, and establish Serb-only replacements. Dodik has [repeatedly threatened](#) to secede from Bosnia in favor of the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska and even [denies](#) the existence of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide.

Genocide denial has plagued Bosnia-Herzegovina since the end of the Yugoslav Wars. Bosnian Serbs and [Serbian nationalists](#) minimize the genocide, denying massacres of Bosniaks and Croats. Serbian politicians and military leaders attempted to [cover up](#) the massacres in the late 1990s by exhuming bodies from mass graves and burying them in secondary and tertiary gravesites. Dozens of Serb politicians have attempted to [revise](#) the timeline and documented casualties of the Srebrenica genocide, while others claim it was [entirely fabricated](#).

Due to a history of ethnic violence, heightened genocide denial, and political instability after recent threats of secession, Genocide Watch considers Bosnia-Herzegovina to be at Stage 6: Polarization and Stage 10: Denial.

Genocide Watch recommends the following:

- Bosnia-Herzegovina join the European Union to promote and assist political and economic stability.
- International actors encourage Bosnian politicians to adhere to the principles of the Dayton Peace Accords.
- The international community support the ICTY rulings regarding genocide during the Bosnian War.
- The international community commit to not supporting separatist movements.