

## Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Report August 2023

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Bosnia and Herzegovina was once part of [Yugoslavia](#), a multi-ethnic communist federation formed after World War II. Its long-term leader, Josip Tito, died in 1980, allowing ethno-nationalist politicians to [stoke hatred](#) among the country's ethnic groups, which caused Yugoslavia's republics to begin seceding from the Yugoslav federation. Bosnia's ethnically [diverse population](#)—43% Bosniak Muslim, 33% Orthodox Serb, and 17% Roman Catholic Croat—left it divided.

In a 1992 referendum, Bosniaks and Croats voted for Bosnian [independence](#). Bosnian-Serbs [boycotted](#) the plebiscite. When Bosnia declared independence, Bosnian Serb militias [launched](#) a war to secede from Bosnia and join Serbia. In Serbian president Slobodan Milošević's euphemism for forced displacement and genocide, they "ethnically cleansed" Serb areas. Bosnian Serb forces [expelled](#) families from their homes, [destroyed](#) houses and mosques, and [operated](#) concentration camps. They [shelled](#) civilian cities and [massacred](#) thousands. [Rapes](#) of Bosniak women were [widespread](#). Over 90% of the above crimes were [later attributed](#) to Bosnian-Serb militia units. Of over 100,000 people killed during the Bosnian war, [60% were Bosniak, 25% Serb, and 8% Croat](#).

In July 1995, Serb soldiers invaded Srebrenica, [a town](#) the United Nations had declared a "safe zone" that housed over 34,000 Bosniak refugees. As hundreds of Dutch UNPROFOR "peacekeepers" watched, Bosnian Serb forces under General Ratko Mladić [deported](#) 25,000 women, children, and elderly and [massacred](#) the remaining 8,372 men and boys. This massacre was recognized as genocide by the [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia](#) and the [International Court of Justice](#). NATO finally intervened, bombed Belgrade, and generated the conflict's end through the Dayton Peace Accords.

The Dayton Accords stopped the war, but they also [legitimized](#) Bosnia's ethnic division, recognizing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for Bosniaks and Croats, and the Republika Srpska, for Bosnian Serbs. The federal government today is [divided along tripartite lines](#), with a rotating presidency. [Segregation](#) divides Bosnia's healthcare, [education](#), and government services. Bosnia's constitution limits political power to the three constituent peoples, so people from ethnic minorities, such as Roma, [cannot attain office](#). Dayton has thus entrenched cross-communal divides within Bosnia, making reconciliation between ethnic groups difficult to attain.

Justice remains distant for many survivors. Hundreds of war crime cases [await trial](#) in Bosnia's courts, with only a handful decided each year. A societal stigma persists around rape and sexual assault, [preventing women](#) from coming forward to prosecute their abusers. Women who do sue [face legal hurdles](#). Laws in the Republika Srpska force victims who lose claims to ["pay excessive court fees."](#) [96,305 individuals](#) are still internally displaced. Placement of memorials where atrocities happened meets [strong resistance](#) from Bosnian Serb authorities.

Genocide denial is rampant. Bosnian-Serb nationalists continue to [deny](#) that the Srebrenica genocide occurred. Serb media [glorifies](#) convicted war criminals through [monuments](#) and [celebrations](#). Milorad Dodik, Republika Srpska's president, recently called Srebrenica a ["fabricated myth."](#) Dodik has threatened Republika Srpska's [secession](#) from Bosnia and he [withdrew](#) the Republika Srpska from Bosnia's military, judiciary, and tax administration, [igniting concerns](#) that another war could break out.

Genocide Watch considers Bosnia at **Stage 3: Discrimination, Stage 6: Polarization, and Stage 10: Denial**.

### Genocide Watch recommends:

- Bosnia's High Representative under Dayton, Christian Schmidt, must use his authority to stem rampant secessionism and genocide denial from the Republika Srpska.
- The European Union must condition Bosnia's potential membership upon its willingness to desegregate public accommodations and grant all peoples full political rights.
- Bosnia must provide its judiciary the necessary resources to conduct war crimes trials.
- Bosnia, the U.N., U.S., and E.U. should revise the Dayton Accords to meet current crises.