

Bosnia & Herzegovina's Main Ethno-Religious Groups



What are the main ethno-religious groups in Bosnia & Herzegovina and where do they live?

Ethnicity	Croats	Bosniaks	Serbs
Religion	Catholic	Muslim	Orthodox Christian



Croatia

- Croat majority
- Large Serb minority in central Croatia, close to the Bosnian border

Bosnia & Herzegovina

- "Little Yugoslavia"
- 50% Muslim Bosniak
- 31% Orthodox Serb
- 15% Catholic Croat
- 4% other or undeclared

Serbia

- Serb majority
- Bosniak minority in southern Serbia
- Kosovo (status disputed) has a majority Albanian Muslim population with a large Serb minority

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What are the main narratives of each ethno-religious community in Bosnia & Herzegovina?

Timeline	Croats	Bosniaks	Serbs
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Middle Ages & Bosnian Kingdom (1377 - 1463)	After Slavs came to the region in the 6th & early 7th centuries, the region was always a borderland between empires, specifically between the Orthodox Byzantine Empire on one side & the Catholic Kingdom of Hungary & Holy Roman Empire on the other. The region of modern BiH had a long history of an independent "Bosnian Church," mixing with their Catholic and Orthodox neighbors. Although there was conflict between religious groups, most social divisions were between landholders & landless.		
	Medieval Bosnian history is a source of legitimacy & pride in a distinct Bosnian identity, especially for Bosniaks & pro-Bosnia Croats & Serbs. (Bosniak legitimacy)		
Ottoman Empire (1463 - 1878)	The Ottomans conquered parts of modern BiH gradually between 1386 and 1592, with the major victory and beginning of their official rule in 1463.		
	Although Croats remained independent from Ottomans as part of Catholic kingdoms to the West, the Ottoman arrival in 1526 began a period of repression, in which Croats emphasize their role as heroic defenders of Christian Europe (Croat collective trauma & glory)	Census data show that Bosnians converted to Islam gradually, with some family members taking Muslim names, while others keeping their Christian names. Many Bosniaks see this as a golden era , during which all lived together peaceably: Muslims served in the military and paid lower taxes, while Christians paid higher taxes but did not have to serve in the military. Historical documents in Sarajevo show that local churches were under the protection of the Ottomans, by order of the Sultan himself.	Serbian Prince Lazar led an army of mixed ethnic makeup to defend against the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Prince Lazar lost, but Serbian tradition elevates the battle as central to the national identity of modern Serbia & its politics. Serbs see the Ottoman period as a time of enslavement , during which their sons were forced to convert & serve as Janissaries (elite soldiers) in the Ottoman army.
Austro-Hungarian Empire (1878 - 1918)	As the idea of nation-states grow in Europe during Austro-Hungarian rule in BiH, ideas of Serbian & Croatian nationhood circulate. Rather than being part of an empire that has diverse citizens, each community seeks self-determination to live as a majority.		
	Croats have autonomy under fellow Catholics but they long for an independent state of their own.	Muslims lose their favored status under Austro-Hungarians. Muslim leaders encourage Muslims not to emigrate to Muslim lands, but to stay under Christian rule as long as they receive freedom & rights.	Serbs become independent (1878) and form the Kingdom of Serbia (1882) . Just prior to WWI in 1912-1913, they defeat the Ottomans again to free additional "Serbian land."
WWI (1914 - 1918)	Although there has been growing interest among Serbs & Croats in forming their own nation-states, WWI is still primarily a war between multi-ethnic kingdoms and empires. For Serbs, who just suffered significant casualties fighting the Ottomans in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), they suffer additional immense losses in fighting for the Allies against the Central Powers in order to unify the lands of the south slavs.		

Age of Empires

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Kingdom of Serbs, Croats & Slovenes (1918 - 1929) & The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929 - 1941)	<p>All the lands of the South Slavs (Yug - south; Slavia - land of) are united into what becomes the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, ruled by the Serbian dynasty of the former Kingdom of Serbia.</p> <p>From 1929-1941, Serbian controlled Yugoslavia established control over Croatia through Royal Yugoslav police force brutality and the assassination of leading Croats. (Croat trauma or "enslavement")</p> <p>The Ustaša is formed as a revolutionary organization seeking Croatian independence.</p>	<p>Muslims (at this time known as Muslim Croats or Muslim Serbs) are caught in between Croats and Serbs, both of which seek to partition the territory of modern BiH between Croatia and Serbia.</p>	<p>After the formation of Yugoslavia, Serbia attempted to create a "Greater Serbia" by using police intimidation and vote rigging to establish a Serbian controlled Yugoslavia. Over the following years, Croatian resistance against a Serbo-centric policy increased. In 1929, using a political crisis triggered by a shooting as the pretext, the Serbian King abolished the Constitution and introduced a dictatorship.</p>
	World War II (1941 - 1945)	<p>Croats get their independent state led by the Nazi-allied Ustaša. The Ustaša and its militias commit horrific crimes across Yugoslavia, with an official Ustaša policy that 1/3 Serbs be killed, 1/3 expelled, and 1/3 forcibly converted.</p>	<p>Citizenship for "Muslim Croats" under the Ustaša was conditional, depending on showing loyalty. While most Muslims supported Tito's partisans, some were loyal to the Ustaša and committed crimes against Serbs.</p>
Yugoslavia (1945 - 1991)	<p>Josip Broz Tito, still beloved by most people in the former Yugoslavia, held the country together in a careful ethnic balance, sweeping all the horrific crimes under the rug after WWII. Enemies were "fascists," and "our people" were killed, but responsible parties were not named and wounds were not healed.</p> <p style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">"Muslim" becomes a new ethnic category for Yugoslav Muslims in 1971.</p>		
Breakup of Yugoslavia (1991 - 1999) & Bosnian War (1992 - 1995)	<p>Whether Serbs or Croats became nationalist first is a source of significant debate. Regardless, both Serbia and Croatia seek to protect their own people by forming "Greater Serbia" and "Greater Croatia." Bosniaks are again caught between the larger Croat and Serb populations seeking to partition up the land on which they are living.</p>		
	<p>Croats are threatened by rising Serb nationalism under Milošević while they also use Ustaša symbols & language that recall independence, from their point of view, and Nazi-style ethnic cleansing from the perspectives of Serbs & Bosniaks.</p>	<p>Bosniak lands divide up a cohesive, "ethnically clean," Serb territory, so nationalist Serb armed forces and paramilitary units threaten, terrorize, rape & kill Bosniak civilian populations, forcing them to flee.</p>	<p>Some Serb populations claim they are being persecuted. Milošević champions the Serb cause, saying, "No one will ever beat you again." Nationalistic Croat rhetoric feeds Serb fear, allowing Milošević to consolidate power to defend Serbs. Isolated war crimes against Serbs confirm worst fears.</p>

Age of Nation-States