



## Country Profile: Kosovo

In the aftermath of the Balkan wars that were fought in the 1990s, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008. However, this independence is contested by Serbia and tensions between the Albanian majority and Serb minority in the country remain extremely high.

After the death of the President Tito of Yugoslavia in 1980, pressure for independence of the Kosovo province was growing within the Kosovar Albanian population, who felt that the Serb authorities discriminated against them. Serbia did not permit Kosovar Albanian to be taught in the schools, and there was no Kosovar Albanian representation in the Serb parliament. Kosovo's independence movement was violently suppressed by Serb troops under Slobodan Milosovic, the leader of Serb nationalism, who advocated creation of a "Greater Serbia," that would include part of Bosnia and Croatia, as well as Kosovo.

When a passive resistance movement in the 1990s failed to secure independence, a rebel movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) left the path of non-violent resistance and started to attack Serb targets in the mid-nineties. Meanwhile, the Serbian forces started an "ethnic cleansing" (forced displacement) campaign against the Kosovar Albanians. They used genocidal massacres of entire villages as a terror tactic to drive over 800,000 Kosovars into Albania.

In 1999, NATO decided to intervene and NATO bombings of Serbia began. After the Serb Army was driven out of Kosovo, NATO and the UN took over the administration of Kosovo. Justice for the atrocities during the war came through The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which charged Milosevic with genocide and other crimes against humanity. However, in March 2006 after a four-year trial, Milosevic was found dead in his cell from a heart attack. Other trials for crimes against humanity and war crimes have been heard in international courts established in Kosovo.

In 2008, Kosovo Albanians declared their country independent from Serbia, but Serbia refuses to recognize this independence. Kosovo is still deeply polarized between the Albanian majority and the Serb minority, which mainly lives in the northern corner of the country. While the Serbs hate the Kosovo Albanians because they have taken part of what they consider Serbia, the Albanians won't forget, nor forgive the atrocities committed by Serbs during Milosevic's rule.

In their latest report, the International Crisis Group examined the on-going instability in the North of Kosovo. In July 2011 tensions rose again in northern Kosovo, when Pristina's police and local Serbs got into conflict about custom gates along the border with Serbia. Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosovo's sovereignty, especially in northern Kosovo where Serbs are a majority, is "halting Kosovo's and Serbia's fragile dialogue and threatens Kosovo's internal stability and Serbia's EU candidacy process", says the International Crisis Group, a key member of the International Alliance to End Genocide.

Because of Kosovo's history of ethnic tensions and the current risk for further conflict, Genocide Watch considers Kosovo to be at stage 5: Polarization.