



THE INVESTIGATOR



STUDY GUIDE

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The Investigator

History of Yugoslavia

The nations of the former Yugoslavia are in the west-central Balkan Peninsula, which is an area in southeastern Europe. They are bordered by the Adriatic Sea to the west, Romania and Bulgaria to the east, Hungary and Austria to the north, and Macedonia and Albania to the south.

Throughout history there have been three different iterations of Yugoslavia. The first—The Kingdom of Yugoslavia—was created in 1929. It was made up of the former kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro (which included Macedonia), Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Austrian territory in Dalmatia and Slovenia, and Hungarian land north of the Danube River. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia ended after it was invaded in 1941, during World War II.

The second Yugoslavia was created in 1946 and named the Socialist Federation Republic of Yugoslavia. It included six republics: Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Macedonia. The two separate regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina were autonomous provinces within Serbia. Overall, the country included most of the same areas of land as the first Yugoslavia. While there was a lot of underlying tension between the six republics, they were held together under communist rule, with leader Josip Broz Tito suppressing much of the tension. However, Tito died in 1980 and tensions quickly started to re-surface. In 1991, Slovenia and Croatia seceded from the federation. They were followed by Macedonia, Bosnia, and Croatia.

The third Yugoslavia was much smaller than the first two. It was proclaimed in 1992 and consisted of Serbia and Montenegro. In 2003, it was renamed as the Federated Union of Serbia and Montenegro. That union was dissolved in 2006.

Ethnic Conflict

Much of the conflict that has occurred in Yugoslavia and its successor nations is related to the fact that there are so many different ethnic groups in this part of the world. These different groups have often struggled to coexist. The name Yugoslavia translates to “Land of the South Slavs.” The country of Yugoslavia was created out of numerous Slavic ethnic groups, and while they are all Slavic, these groups also have different identities and beliefs. They also have a number of different religions: the majority of Bosnians are Muslim, most Serbs are Orthodox Christians, and most Croats and Slovenes are Catholics.

Even after Yugoslavia broke apart into a number of smaller countries, ethnic conflict remained, in part because each of these smaller countries still contained a mix of different ethnic groups. This is particularly true with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which borders Croatia and Serbia, and has a sizable population of Bosnians, Croatian, and Serbians. With so many different ethnic identities trying to live so closely together, there has been ongoing conflict in this part of the world, from the creation of the first Yugoslavia until today.

War in the Former Yugoslavia

Following the breakup of the Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, there was war between the different ethnic groups in this region. The first round of conflict happened after Slovenia and Croatia succeeded in 1991. The Yugoslavian army, which was comprised mainly of Serbians, attempted to stop the succession. It was defeated relatively quickly in Slovenia. However, there was a longer and deadlier conflict in Croatia, which contained a sizeable number of Serbians, who wanted to remain part of Yugoslavia. A United Nations-monitored ceasefire was imposed in 1992, however conflict continued in this area.

The next, and most deadly, part of the war happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina after this republic also tried to break away from Yugoslavia. According to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in 1992 Bosnia and Herzegovina was made up of about 43 percent Bosnian Muslims (or Bosniaks), 33 percent Bosnian Serbs, and 17 percent Bosnian Croats. In 1992, the republic held a referendum, which was boycotted by Bosnian Serbs, where it voted for independence. Bosnian Serbs rebelled against the results of the vote, and they were supported by the Yugoslavian army. Soon after that, Bosnian Croats also rebelled against the Bosnian government. ICTY says, “The conflict turned into a bloody three-sided fight for territories, with civilians of all ethnicities becoming victims of horrendous crimes. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people were killed and two million people, more than half the population, were forced to flee their homes as a result of the war that raged from April 1992 through to November 1995.”¹

Many people describe the war in Yugoslavia as the deadliest armed conflict in Europe since World War II. War crimes including ethnic cleansing, genocide, and rape were widespread. Tens of thousands of people were killed, and millions were displaced. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Since 1991, as a result of the wars in the successor states of former Yugoslavia, between 3.7 and 4 million people were displaced or became refugees within former Yugoslavia.”²

Ovčara Massacre

The Ovčara massacre happened in 1991, after the Yugoslav army and other Serbian forces took control of the town of Vukovar in Croatia. After the fall of Vukovar, many of the city’s residents went to the city hospital, believing that they would be safely evacuated. However, Serbian forces took more than 200 Croatians and other non-Serbian prisoners from the Vukovar hospital to Ovčara farm, which was located about five miles southeast of Vukovar. According to the United Nations, most of those people—194 in total—were killed.³ Their bodies were buried in a mass grave. The site is now marked by the Ovčara Memorial, which is dedicated to the people who died there.

¹ <https://www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts>

² <https://www.unhcr.org/see/where-we-work>

³ <https://www.irmct.org/en/mip/features/vukovar>

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

The rules of war are rules about what can and cannot be done during an armed conflict, and they are set out in a number of treaties that have been signed by the majority of the nations in the world. The purpose of these rules is to protect both those who are fighting and those who are not by putting limits on the way that combatants can act, and the types of weapons that they can use. For instance, under the rules of war, combatants should not intentionally target civilians. Most of the rules were established at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the most important collections of rules is the Geneva Conventions, which is a set of protections for soldiers, civilians, and prisoners. War crimes are violations of the rules of war. Under the rules of war, when individuals or groups are accused of war crimes, the rest of the world's countries are obligated to investigate.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was created in 1993 by the United Nations to deal with the war crimes that took place during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. According to the court website: "The key objective of the ICTY is to try those individuals most responsible for appalling acts such as murder, torture, rape, enslavement, destruction of property and other crimes listed in the Tribunal's Statute. By bringing perpetrators to trial, the ICTY aims to deter future crimes and render justice to thousands of victims and their families, thus contributing to a lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia."⁴ The court was based in the Hague in the Netherlands, and its mandate lasted from 1993 to 2017. In total, the court indicted 161 people, sentenced 90, acquitted 19, and referred 13 to countries in the former Yugoslavia for trial. The four types of crimes found were: genocide, crimes against humanity, violations of the wars or customs of war, and grave breaches of the Geneva conventions.⁵

Former Yugoslavian Nations Today

At present, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia are all separate nations.

- The *CIA World Factbook* provides population statistics for these countries.⁶ According to its data:
- Croatia has a population of just over 4 million people. According to the CIA's most recent population estimates, 90 percent of the people living in Croatia are Croat, and 4.4 percent are Serb.
- Serbia's population is 6.7 million. 83 percent are Serb, 3.5 percent are Romani, and 2 percent are Bosniak.
- Kosovo has a population of almost 2 million people. 92 percent are Albanian, 1.6 percent Bosniak, and 1.5 percent Turk.

⁴ <https://www.icty.org/en/about>

⁵ <https://www.icty.org/node/9590>

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>

- The population of Slovenia is 2.1 million. 83 percent are Slovene, 2 percent Serb, 1.8 percent Croat, and 1.1 percent Bosniak.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina has a population of 3.8 million. About half are Bosniak, 30 percent are Serb, and 15 percent Croat.
- The population of Montenegro is approximately 600,000 people. The country is 45 percent Montenegrin, 29 percent Serb, 9 percent Bosniak, 5 percent Albanian, 3.3 percent Muslim, 1 percent Romani and 1 percent Croat.
- North Macedonia has a population of 2.1 million. It is 58 percent Macedonian, 24 percent Albanian, 4 percent Turkish, 2.5 percent Romani, and 1.3 percent Serb.
- (*The CIA notes that certain ethnic groups have been underestimated, so percentages may not be completely accurate.)
- While the people who live in the countries of the former Yugoslavia are no longer at war, there is ongoing tension and many disagreements within the area. For instance, Bosnia and Herzegovina is comprised of two autonomous entities; the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is dominated by Bosniaks and Croats, and the Republika Srpska is dominated by Bosnian Serbs. In recent years, Serbian separatists have been pushing for the succession of Republika Srpska.
- There is also ongoing disagreement between Serbia and Kosovo. Kosovo is mainly populated by Albanians, and it declared independence from Serbia in 2008. However, Serbia still refuses to recognize Kosovo as a separate state and continues to consider it part of Serbia.

Glossary

- **Belgrade:** Belgrade is the capital of Serbia.
- **ethnic cleansing:** Ethnic cleansing is the forced removal of unwanted ethnic groups from a certain area in order to make it more ethnically homogenous.
- **Interpol:** The International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) is an international organization that helps police work together to fight international crime.
- **Slobodan Milošević:** Milošević was the president of Serbia from 1989 until 1997 and president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1997 until 2000. In 2001, he was arrested for war crimes. In 2006, he was found dead in his prison cell before the conclusion of his trial.
- **Sanski Most:** Sanski Most is a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Ovčara:** The Ovčara farm is located five miles southeast of the city of Vukovar, in Croatia. Serbian forces used it as a prison camp during the war. It was also the site of a massacre of Croatian prisoners.
- **Red Cross:** The Red Cross is a nonprofit humanitarian organization. It provides aid to people affected by humanitarian disasters such as the conflict in former Yugoslavia.
- **United Nations General Assembly:** The United Nations General Assembly is the main policymaking body of the United Nations.

- **UNPROFOR:** The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) is a peacekeeping force of the United Nations that was deployed in the former Yugoslavia between 1992 and 1995.
- **Vukovar:** Vukovar is a city in Croatia.
- **Zagreb:** Zagreb is the capital city of Croatia.

Additional Resources

Books

- Noam Chomsky, *Yugoslavia: Peace, War, and Dissolution*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018.
- Sergej Flere, *The Rise and Fall of Socialist Yugoslavia: Elite Nationalism and the Collapse of a Federation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019.
- Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić, eds., *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1991-1995*. Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001.
- Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

Online Sources

- Emma Daly, “Beyond Justice: How the Yugoslav Tribunal Made History,” Human Rights Watch, December 19, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/19/beyond-justice-how-yugoslav-tribunal-made-history>
- History.com, “Bosnian Genocide,” updated January 10, 2023. <https://www.history.com/topics/1990s/bosnian-genocide>
- Justice Truth Dignity, “Transitional Justice in the Former Yugoslavia,” January 1, 2019. <https://www.ictj.org/publication/transitional-justice-former-yugoslavia>
- United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, “About the ITCY.” <https://www.icty.org/en/about>

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