

# Yugoslavia's history and breakup

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## THEME

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Understanding the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and wars associated with Yugoslavia's breakup in the 1990s

## CONTEXT

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Yugoslavia was a country that existed in Southeastern Europe throughout most of the 20th century. It was founded at the end of the World War I as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. Invaded by the Axis powers in April of 1941, the country was plunged into war, with some of its constituent republics siding with the Axis powers (e.g., Independent State of Croatia – puppet state under the control of Nazis and fascists). During World War II, Yugoslavia was partitioned by Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Largely thanks to the nation-wide Partisan resistance movement, led by Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia was liberated in 1945 and communist rule was subsequently established. Tito ruled the country as its president from 1945 until his death in 1980, and throughout his rule the country was known as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Its constituent socialist republics were Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, with Serbia also managing two autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo. Under Tito's rule, Yugoslavia was uniquely positioned as one of the founding leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement during the volatile Cold War, maintaining friendly relations with both Russia as well as the United States/the West. The country developed its own brand of socialism called worker's self-management, which meant that workers' councils were the ones that managed factories.

In the 1980s, the country was gripped by economic and political crises, and was marked by the rise of nationalism and inter-ethnic strife. Slovenia, Yugoslavia's most prosperous republic, as well as the one most ethnically homogenous (with 88% citizens declaring themselves Slovene in the 1991 census), was the first one to declare independence in June of 1991. After a ten-day war, the Yugoslav national army withdrew from Slovenia.

Croatia declared its independence soon thereafter, but this did not run as smoothly as in Slovenia's case. As the 1991 census showed, 12% of ethnic Serbs lived in Croatia, and after the 1990 multiparty elections, in which the nationalist leader Franjo Tuđman won, the conflict between the Serbs and Croats escalated. The war in Croatia was fought until 1995, when the last remaining occupied territories under Serb control were liberated and rejoined Croatia.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was in a particularly precarious position in the early 1990s, as the Yugoslav republic with most ethnically heterogeneous population. In the 1991 population census, 43.47% of population declared themselves Bosnian Muslims, 31.21% Serbs, 17.38% Croats and 5.54 % Yugoslavs. Following Slovenia's and Croatia's path, the Bosnian government held an independence vote in March of 1992, and it passed despite the Bosnian Serbs' leaders' call for a boycott of the referendum.

The war started a month later, with Bosnian Serbs carving out portions of 'Serbian Autonomous Regions' in Bosnia, that would later be given the name of 'Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.' Situated between the two fires of Croatia and Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina suffered not one but two major conflicts during the 1992-1995 war, first fighting together with Croats against Serbs, which soon led to Croatian attempts to gain Bosnia's territory. The city of Mostar in Herzegovina epitomizes this conflict, as a town divided between the Bosniak/Muslim East and the Croat/Catholic West. The Sarajevo-based Research and Documentation Centre, in its 2012 report, published a list of a total of 101,040 dead or disappeared. The 1425-day long siege of Sarajevo alone resulted in more than 1000 child casualties. The Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by the US in November of 1995, ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, solidifying the division of the country into two entities, one dominated by Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats, and the other by Bosnian Serbs.

Macedonia also embarked upon its path to independence with a referendum in 1991, one which country's ethnic Albanian citizens chose to boycott. Macedonia managed to avoid the descent into an open armed conflict. It developed diplomatic relations with the Milošević-led Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Occasional episodes of ethnic-based violence between Macedonians and Albanians began occurring in the later years, and tensions erupted in 2001. The International community intervened and managed to broker the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which was to improve the rights and position of the ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia.

Montenegro, historically allied with Serbia, initially remained part of Yugoslavia, which was under Milošević' rule throughout the 1990s. However, in a 2006 referendum, Montenegro declared its independence and with this act, Serbia remained alone. The war for independence of Kosovo, launched in 1996 by the guerilla Kosovo Liberation Army, ended with the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, and the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević in 2000. Kosovo proclaimed its independence in 2008.



The former Yugoslavia  
(<https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/yugoslav.html>)

## GOALS

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- Teaching about the history of Yugoslavia and its breakup;
- Raising awareness about the different perspectives of the conflict;
- Promoting critical thinking and discussion about the dangers of nationalism;

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

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- Understanding the mechanism of nation-state, nationalism, conflict, the role of political leaders and propaganda;
- Students/participants are able to identify and explain multiple factors that contributed to the breakup of Yugoslavia;
- Students/participants improve their knowledge of South Eastern Europe, as well as their understanding of conflict repercussions.

## METHODOLOGY

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- Timeline cards;
- Group discussion;
- Small group work and presentations;

## MATERIAL & EQUIPMENT NEEDED

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Yugoslavia timeline cards (printed/hard copy); projector and computer

# Overview of activities (process)

**Duration:** 90 minutes (two school classes, not to be held consecutively but ideally a week apart)

## LESSON 1

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### Group brainstorm: 10 minutes

The teacher/educator starts the class with a brief question for the class:

1. When you hear the word 'Yugoslavia', what is the first thing that comes to mind?
2. What present-day countries used to be a part of Yugoslavia?
3. Read the following quote by Josip Broz Tito 'Yugoslavia is a nation with seven neighboring countries, composed of six states, five nationalities, four languages, three religions, two alphabets, but one political party.', and ask the students/participants for their opinion about this – which states is the quote referring to? Which nationalities? Which languages? Which religions? Which alphabets? Which political party?

### Answers:

- 7 neighboring countries = Italy, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania
- 6 states = Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro
- 5 nationalities = Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins (note that Muslims were introduced as a separate national constituent group in 1971, and that various groups such as Albanians, Hungarians, Germans were considered ethnic minorities)
- 4 languages = Serbo-Croatian, Croato-Serbian, Slovenian, Macedonian

- 3 religions = Roman Catholicism, Eastern/Serbian Orthodoxy, Islam
- 2 alphabets = Latin alphabet and Cyrillic alphabet
- 1 political party = Communist party of Yugoslavia

### **Timeline activity: 25 minutes**

In this part of the class, use the Yugoslavia timeline cards to take a brief, yet deeper, look into some of the aspects of Yugoslavia's history and breakup. (Choose one of the timeline methods presented in the 'Using the Timeline Method' overview.)

### **Homework assignment allotment: 10 minutes**

This class was used to get students/participants more interested in the subject of the history of Yugoslavia and its breakup. The next class will be based on a deeper analysis of different elements related to the breakup of Yugoslavia, based on students'/participants' group presentations. Divide the students/participants into groups of 4-5 members, and then have each group draw an envelope that contains that group's assignment for next week's class (cut out the assignments and put them into unmarked envelopes):

#### **Homework assignments:**

**Group 1:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the topic of '**KEY POLITICAL LEADERS INVOLVED IN THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA**', and outline who they were and what their involvement/contribution was: Josip Broz Tito, Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman, Alija Izetbegović, Ratko Mladić, Bill Clinton

**Group 2:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the topic of '**WARTIME PROPAGANDA DURING YUGOSLAVIA'S BREAKUP**'. In what way did media machines in different countries (e.g. Croatia, Serbia, later Western media) cover and justify their country's role in the conflict? How do we define the word 'propaganda'? In what ways does media (including false reporting) contribute to the formation of public opinion? Why did NATO bomb the Radio-Television-Serbia building during its operation in 1999?

**Group 3:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the topic of '**DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY IN SOCIALIST FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA**.' Yugoslavia was known as a country of many diversities – geographic, cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic. Create a presentation that outlines these diversities. The country's slogan in the post-1945 era was 'Brotherhood and Unity' – explain its origin and meaning. Was there such a thing as 'Yugoslav national identity'?

**Group 4:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the subject of '**1992-1995 WAR IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA**', answering the key questions of who the war was fought between (armies, factions, sides in the conflict); what was the impact or repercussions of the war (data on casualties, refugees and internally displaced, countries of emigration); Dayton Peace Agreement; current (political) situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Is the country an EU member? What are its key statistics as compared to your own country, e.g. average salary, GDP? etc.)

**Group 5:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the subject of '**NATIONALISM**'. What is nationalism? How do we define it? Is there a difference between 'nationalism' and 'patriotism'? What role did nationalism play in Yugoslavia's breakup? What is the definition of 'ethnic cleansing' and how was it implemented during the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution?

**Group 6:** Prepare a PowerPoint presentation, no longer than 7 slides, or 4 minutes in duration on the subject of '**COMPARISON BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND YUGOSLAVIA**'. In what ways could we compare the European Union of states, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (look at number of member states, rationale for joining/creation of the union, diversity in languages/religions)? How are (structural, investment, cohesion) funds distributed in the European Union and how were they distributed in Yugoslavia? In both cases, can we find some countries resentful towards some other countries?

## LESSON 2

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### Group presentations: 30 minutes

The student/participant groups do their presentations (the teacher/educator selects the order of the presentations), keeping to their respective allotted times. Clarification questions can be raised, but discussion should be kept to a minimum (postponed for the end of the class).

### Group discussion: 15 minutes

Now that all the groups have presented, the teacher/educator asks the following group discussion question: "Why is it that Yugoslavia no longer exists – how come this country fell apart?". The teacher/educator facilitates the discussion, taking notes of the students'/participants' comments on the board.

If there is time, one final group discussion question could be posed: "Could this happen to our country/the EU?"

## ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION OPTIONS

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You can evaluate the students'/participants' group work, the quality of their presentations and engagement in the group discussion.

## SOURCES, ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & ADAPTATION ALTERNATIVES

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If the students/participants show additional interest in this subject, depending on the age group and their openness, you could together watch one of the following (awarded) films:

- **The Death of Yugoslavia**, a BBC documentary series first broadcast in 1995, also the title of a BBC book by Allan Little and Laura Silber that accompanies the series;
- **No Man's Land**, a movie about two soldiers, a Bosnian and a Serb, stranded in No Man's Land – a trench between enemy lines during the Bosnian war. Won Best Foreign Film at the 2001 Oscars.

## ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION

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This lesson can be easily transferred to the online education environment by using the online version of the Breakup of Yugoslavia timeline cards. After facilitating the initial discussion in the online plenary, the teacher/educator goes through the online timeline, asking students/participants to select images they find particularly interesting. The final 15 minutes of the first class are dedicated to assigning students/participants group homework on specific Yugoslavia breakup-related topics. In the second online class (ideally one week after the first one, giving students/participants enough time to prepare their homeworks), the students/participants present their group homework online, with the teacher/educator and peers offering feedback, questions and comments after each brief group presentation.



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