

KOSOVO

Serbs

Activity: 2008-2020

General notes

- It is important to distinguish between Serbs in northern Kosovo (the municipalities of Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok, and partially Mitrovica) and the Serbs that live in other municipalities scattered throughout Kosovo (e.g. Gracanica, Shterpca, Novoberda). The former live in territory contiguous to Serbia and have shown stronger resistance against Kosovo's institutions. Population figures are only estimated (because the Serbs refuse to participate in Kosovo's census), but a slight majority of the Serbs in Kosovo lives scattered throughout Kosovo and not in the North.

Movement start and end dates

- Since Kosovo's declaration of independence, Serbs in the North of Kosovo have protested against Kosovar independence from Serbia. Kosovar Serbs set up a rival assembly in Mitrovica, in the Serb-dominated North of the country. We peg the start date to 2008.
- There has been a lot of tension between Kosovo and Serbia over two security checkpoints in Northern Kosovo. Significant tensions arose in 2011, when Northern Kosovar Serbs announced that they would hold a referendum about whether they would accept Pristina institutions (a move not supported by Belgrade, which instead called for autonomy for the Serbs in Kosovo; Lehne 2012). The referendum was held in 2012 (February) with overwhelming votes against Kosovo (BBC News 2012; Bilefsky 2008; Spiegel 2011).
- The movement is ongoing (Roth 2015: 144), but it is worth noting that Serbs who do not live in northern Kosovo tend to be opposed to the partitioning of Kosovo as they fear this would undermine Serbia's influence over Kosovo and the negatively affect the position of Serbs who remain in the country (Centre for Eastern Studies 2018). [start date: 2008; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- The Serbs in Kosovo, at least in northern Kosovo, do not recognize Kosovo's sovereignty. In 2008 Kosovo's north was declared part of Serbia (see above). In 2011, the Serbs in the North announced that they were planning to organize a referendum on the acceptance of the Kosovar institutions. The Serbian government did not support this referendum (because of ongoing negotiations with the EU about Serbia's possible EU membership). The referendum was held in February 2012. More than 90 percent of the voters voted "no". Although the referendum did not explicitly state that northern Kosovo is part of Serbia, it is clear that the people reject Kosovo's institutions because they prefer Serbia's (The Economist 2012). The movement can also be understood within the context of Great Serbia (see Friman 1996: 4). [2008-2020: irredentism claim]

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

- See above. [start date: 2008; end date: ongoing]

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Serbs in Kosovo is predominantly Serb-populated North Kosovo. We code this claim according to Roth (2015: 137).

Sovereignty declarations

- In May 2008, the Serbs in northern Kosovo established the Assembly of the Community of Municipalities of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija as a rival assembly to Kosovo's assembly (BBC 2008; Zimonjic 2008). In June 2008 a declaration was issued that declares North Kosovo part of Serbia. The declaration starts with the words "we, free and responsible citizens of the Republic of Serbia" (Nova Srpska Politicka Misao 2013). Kosovo had declared its independence in February 2008. [2008: irredentist declaration]

Separatist armed conflict

- There has been sporadic violence, but the LVIOLSD threshold has not been reached.
 - o In 2008, Serbs protested against Kosovo's independence and attacked Kosovo border posts and other governmental and international institutions (Bilefsky 2008).
 - o Violence erupted again in 2011, when Serbs blocked two Kosovo border posts and barricaded the bridge connecting north and south Mitrovica (Spiegel 2011).
 - o International Crisis Group reports desecrations of Serb graves and blasts in north Kosovo in January 2013 (International Crisis Group n.d.). In June 2013, Pristina removed barricades on the Mitrovica Bridge triggering a reaction initially by the Serb community and then riots by Albanian protestors (Lansford 2021: 915). There were injuries but no reported casualties.
 - o In October 2013 there were reports of sporadic violence during local election preparations in North Kosovo, in Serb-held municipalities, including 3 explosions targeting local politicians (International Crisis Group n.d.).
 - o On 23 June 2014 there were demonstrator clashes at the Mitrovica bridge with reported civilian and officer injuries (see BBC News 2014).
 - o In July 2015 there were reported violent incidents in Goraždevac where two cars were shot at (International Crisis Group n.d.).
 - o On 16 January 2018, Serbian leader in Mitrovica, Oliver Ivanovic, was murdered in Kosovo amid tensions rising due to Pristina government raising tariffs on Serbian goods from 10 to 100 percent – the murder sparked outrage and some violent clashes (see Reuters 2018).
- We therefore code for violence not exceeding the required thresholds throughout the period investigated. [2008-2020: NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- From about 1200 to 1455 Kosovo was part of the Serbian kingdom. In 1455 Kosovo fell to the Ottomans. It remained under the Ottomans until 1912 when Kosovo was conquered and divided between Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria; the largest part went to Serbia and became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) after WWI.
- After WWII the share of Serbs in Kosovo declined, dropping from approximately 23% to 10% in 1991. Under Tito's communist Yugoslavia, Kosovo was granted autonomy in 1971/1974. Under

the Albanian-dominated regional government education was increasingly conducted in Albanian and knowledge of both Albanian and Serbian was required for state employment. Under Milosevic, Kosovo lost its autonomy in 1989 and ethnic Albanians were fired from the state administration. The Kosovar Albanians subsequently established a parallel administration, including a separate educational system. Kosovo remained relatively calm during the Yugoslav war(s) from 1991-1995.

- In response to isolated attacks on Serbian police and civilians, Milosevic in 1998 ordered reprisal attacks on ethnic Albanian villages. Violence escalated and NATO intervened in March 1999. In June 1999 Milosevic agreed to withdraw his forces to the installation of NATO peacekeepers along with UN administrators. However, Serbia retained strong de-facto influence over Kosovo's North, where Serbs are concentrated.
- Kosovo's constitutional framework, adopted in 2001, protects human and minority rights, but minority rights provisions "are generally too vague to be effective" and there is limited implementation (thus no concession). There is discrimination against minorities in Kosovo, but (it appears) not as a direct result of government policy.
- Talks to resolve Kosovo's status started in 2005 under the leadership of former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari (Lehne 2012). After talks with Serb and Albanian leaders, UN envoy Martti Ahtisaari unveiled his plan in February 2007, a status settlement proposal which recognized Kosovo's 'statehood'. The Ahtisaari plan, among other things, included "plans for extensive decentralization that would lead to six autonomous Serb districts."

Concessions and restrictions

- In 2008 Kosovo unilaterally declared independence, which was not accepted by Serbia. Upon declaring independence, Kosovo's Prime Minister (Hashim Thaci) pledged to adhere to the Ahtisaari plan (Minority Rights Group International). Following independence Kosovo adopted legislation to enable decentralization (International Crisis Group 2009: 23). Decentralization was not fully implemented, but this has also to do with the fact that Kosovo has very limited control of its Serb-dominated north (which has been de facto independent from Kosovo already before the latter's independence). Even if decentralization has not been fully implemented (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia 2012), we code the 2007 Ahtisaari plan as a concession to the Serbs as there were some steps towards implementation. [2008: autonomy concession]
 - o Additional information: Kosovo's constitution guarantees 10 parliamentary seats (out of 120) to Serbs (European Parliament 2019: 5; Lansford 2021: 918).
- On the 19th of April 2013, Serbia and Albania reached a treaty agreement (formally "First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations" [The "Brussels Agreement (2013)"] (Serbia Government 2013). The agreement among other things established the Community of Serb Municipalities, which provided Serbian-majority municipalities with a degree of autonomy (B92 2013). The Community was expected to be officially established within Kosovo's legal framework in 2015, but in December 2015, Kosovo's Constitutional Court ruled that the Community of Serb Municipalities was unconstitutional (Deutsche Welle 2020; Isufi & Bami 2022; MRGI). While negotiations briefly resumed in 2018, no progress has been made (see European Parliament, 2019: 6). As of 2022, the Community is indefinitely postponed. We do not code a concession.

Regional autonomy

- The decentralization foreseen in the Ahtisaari plan has not been fully implemented, but we code regional autonomy due to the north's de-facto independence. [2008-2020: regional autonomy]

De facto independence

- The authorities of Kosovo have no or at best very little control over the Serb-dominated municipalities in the North and little control of the Serb municipalities in the rest of Kosovo. “Over the past 14 years, North Kosovo has developed in isolation from the rest of the country. Here Serbian flags fly and signs in Cyrillic and English proclaim “This is Serbia.” A system of parallel structures, funded by Belgrade, provides everything from schools and health to the courts system” (Geoghegan 2013). De facto independence remained active in 2020 (Deutsche Welle 2020). De-facto independence had existed already before Kosovo’s independence in 2008, thus we code de-facto independence also in 2008. [2008-2020: de facto independent]
 - o Note that EPR does not code the Serbs with ‘self-exclusion’ (which is very close to our de facto independence) because the “northern Serbs do not constitute the majority of Serbs in Kosovo, who are spread across the country”. Still the northern Serbs make up a significant part of Kosovo’s Serbs and, more importantly, are the epicenter of the separatist activity. Thus de-facto independence is essential to understand center-movement interactions.

Major territorial changes

- In 2008, Kosovo attained independence, implying a host change. [2008: host change (new)]
- The north had been de facto independent already prior to Kosovo’s independence in 2008, so we do not code a major change.

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Serbs
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Serbs
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	34702000

Power access

- We follow EPR. [2008-2020: powerless]

Group size

- We follow EPR. [0.078]

Regional concentration

- Population data for the Serbs in Kosovo is unreliable, in particular because the 2011 census was boycotted by many Serbs and was not conducted at all in the Serb-dominated north. According to OSCE estimates (see European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo), there are around 146,000 Serbs in Kosovo, with approx. 70,000 in Kosovo’s north, and the remaining 76,000 in Kosovo’s south. The Serbs in the north are concentrated in a total of four municipalities where they form the vast majority of the local population: Leposavić, Mitrovicë, Zvečan, and Zubin Potok. The remaining municipalities with Serb majorities are scattered across Kosovo’s south (Gračanica, Štrpce, Novo Brdo, Ranilug, Parteš, and Klllokot). Based on this, we code the Serbs as not concentrated because, while the Serbs make up an absolute majority in Kosovo’s north, the majority of the Serbs reside elsewhere. [not concentrated]

Kin

- Serbs across the former Yugoslavia, in particular in Serbia. [kin in neighboring country]

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