

Croatia

Ethnicity in Croatia

Group selection

We identify the following politically relevant ethnic groups: **Bosniaks, Croats, Hungarians, Italians, Roma, and Serbs.**

Croats are the majority ethnic group of Croatia, constituting 90.4% of the population according to the census in 2011⁽¹⁵¹¹⁾.

¹⁵¹¹ [Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011]

Serbs are the largest minority group in Croatia, accounting for 4.4% of the population in 2011. This, however, is a sharp decline from the 12.2% that lived in Croatia before the civil war ⁽¹⁵¹²⁾. A number of organizations and parties were formed to represent Serbian political interests, most notably the Serb People's Party (Srpska narodna stranka) formed in 1991 and the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka, SDSS), which was founded in 1997. ⁽¹⁵¹³⁾

¹⁵¹² [Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011]

¹⁵¹³ [Škiljan, 2016]

The Italian minority is based in Istria. The Italian community is highly active in public affairs with many community associations. There are daily Italian radio broadcasts and Italian libraries ⁽¹⁵¹⁴⁾. The Italian minority has a representative in the Croatian parliament ^(1515, 10).

¹⁵¹⁴ [Minority Rights Group International, 2003]

¹⁵¹⁵ [Tatalovic, 2006]

Bosniaks organize cultural and religious events, traditional holidays and have a Bosniak library ⁽¹⁵¹⁶⁾. In 2004, the Bosniak National Community in Croatia asked the Croatian parliament and president to solve the legal status of Bosniaks in accordance with the Constitutional Law on the National Minorities' Rights ⁽¹⁵¹⁷⁾. Although they share a designated representative in parliament with other ethnic groups, they constitute the third largest ethnic group with a population share of 0.73% ⁽¹⁵¹⁸⁾.

¹⁵¹⁶ [Minority Rights Group International, 2003]

¹⁵¹⁷ [One World, 2012]

¹⁵¹⁸ [Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011]

Traditionally, the Hungarian minority lives in Bjelovar, Osijek, Zagreb and Baranj. The Hungarian community has a publishing house, a central library, daily radio broadcasts in Hungarian, and associations that promote frequent visits and exchanges with neighboring Hungary ⁽¹⁵¹⁹⁾. Hungarians also have a designated representative in the Croatian parliament ^(1520, 10).

¹⁵¹⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2003]

¹⁵²⁰ [Tatalovic, 2006]

The official Roma population as recorded in the 2011 census was 16'975, yet unofficial estimates place the number considerably higher ⁽¹⁵²¹⁾. The Roma have advocated for more social and political rights, and their integration has been an ongoing policy issue ⁽¹⁵²²⁾.

¹⁵²¹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

¹⁵²² [Center for Policy Studies, 2019]

According to a report by Amnesty International, socio-economic

discrimination persists against ethnic minorities, particularly Serbs and Roma. Serbian refugees returning to Croatia faced high difficulties in regaining their property in 2016. Furthermore, obstacles prevent Serbs from finding employment in the public and private sector, and even though minority rights exist, they are often only insufficiently implemented. Roma face high obstacles in receiving identity documents and access to public services, housing, education and employment ⁽¹⁵²³⁾. The Roma face many obstacles, including lack of knowledge of the Croatian language, lack of education, lack of citizenship and identity documents, high unemployment, and widespread discrimination ⁽¹⁵²⁴⁾. The U.S. State Department reports that “open discrimination and harassment continued against ethnic Serbs and Roma” ⁽¹⁵²⁵⁾.

¹⁵²³ [Amnesty International, 2017]

¹⁵²⁴ [U.S. State Department, 2006–2009]

¹⁵²⁵ [U.S. State Department, 2006–2009]

Power relations

Croatia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in June 1991, sparking the Croatian War of Independence against the Yugoslav army and Serbian paramilitaries that would last until 1995. Croatia constituted itself with a semi-presidential system of government that was later reformed in favor of a more parliamentary system ^(1526, 1527). The Croatian constitution recognizes 22 minority groups explicitly. In the Croatian parliament, eight seats are reserved for these minorities. The Serbian population is designated three representatives. Hungarian and Italian minorities are designated one representative each. Czech and Slovak minorities share one representative. Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Romany, Romanian, Ruthenian, Russian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vlach and Jewish minorities share another representative. Albanian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Slovenian minorities share a third representative ⁽¹⁵²⁸⁾.

¹⁵²⁶ [Minority Rights Group International, 2003]

¹⁵²⁷ [Bertelsman Transformation Index, 2016]

¹⁵²⁸ [Election Guide, 2011]

1992–1995

From independence in 1992 until 1995, during the civil war, Croats held a clear monopoly over political power while other ethnic groups did not play a role on the political parquet. The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) established itself as the major political party, winning clear majorities in both the 1992 and 1995 elections ^(1529, 1530). During the war of independence against Serbia, the Serb ethnic group, although having lived on Croatian territory for centuries, was repressed and many Serbs were forced to flee to Serbia. Until 1995 there were large populations of Serbs living in the Krajina region centered around the city of Knin as well as in Eastern Slavonia. These regions had unsuccessfully declared independence from Croatia in 1991 after Croatia had declared independence from Yugoslavia, thus during the war the Serbs are coded as self-excluded. In August 1995 many ethnic Serbs were expelled, when Croatian forces regained full control over the state’s territory ⁽¹⁵³¹⁾.

¹⁵²⁹ [European Election Database]

¹⁵³⁰ [International Crisis Group Report, 1998]

¹⁵³¹ [Bertelsman Transformation Index, 2016]

1996-2008

From the end of the civil war until after the elections of 2007, the Croats are coded as "monopoly". Croat parties have held clear majorities throughout this period, forming first a left-leaning government led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) until 2002 and later a center-right coalition led by Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) from 2003 until 2008 (¹⁵³²).

¹⁵³² [European Election Database]

The Serbs were reintegrated into society, yet they have faced various forms of socio-economic discrimination. The atmosphere has improved substantially, in particular since the early 2000s, although the government was still slow to address discrimination against returning Serbs, particularly over occupancy, property and status rights. More than a decade after the beginning of the war, most ethnic Serbs from Croatia remained outside the country as refugees (¹⁵³³). Nevertheless, Serbian parties had access to the parliament as granted through the constitution, with the SDSS defeating their Serbian rivals of the Serb People's Party in 2003 by taking all three seats reserved to the Serb minority (¹⁵³⁴). Similarly, Italians, Hungarians and other minorities continue to be represented through the minority seats in parliament. While these groups are not discriminated against, they remain effectively powerless.

¹⁵³³ [Minority Rights Group International, 2003]

¹⁵³⁴ [Škiljan, 2016]

Although efforts have been made to increase socio-economic integration of the Roma (¹⁵³⁵), they also remain politically powerless.

¹⁵³⁵ [Minority Rights Group International, 2008]

2009-2011

As of January 12, 2008, the Serbian minority party SDSS became part of the coalition led by HDZ with Ivo Sanader as Prime Minister, following the parliamentary election of November 2007. Slobodan Uzelac became the first member of the Serb minority to hold a cabinet position in Croatia. Therefore, for this period the Croat majority is no longer coded as having the monopoly, but as the dominant group. While the Serbian minority was nominally represented in the government, the actual political power remained very limited. For example, tensions rose when Sanader decided to formally recognize Kosovo, a policy clearly at odds with the position of the Serbian coalition partners. This led to sharp criticism by the SDSS, and Uzelac to offer his resignation from the cabinet (¹⁵³⁶). However, he eventually served as Deputy Prime Minister until the end of the term in 2011. Since the government position rather resembles a "token" representation than actual policy influence, the Serbs are still coded as powerless for this period.

¹⁵³⁶ [BBC News, 2008]

In the elections of 2007, a Roma candidate was elected for the first time to the Croatian parliament (¹⁵³⁷). Owing to lack of influence in the government, the Roma and the other ethnic minorities, although represented in the parliament, are all considered powerless.

¹⁵³⁷ [OSCE, 2007]

2012-2020

In the elections of December 2011, the government coalition suffered a defeat and was succeeded by a left-leaning coalition of the SDP, the liberal Croatian People's Party (HNS), the pro-pensioner Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU) and the regionalist Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDA) (¹⁵³⁸, ¹⁵³⁹). The IDA is a pro-European, liberal party that derives most of their support from the region of Istria. This is also the region where most members of the Italian minority reside, however seeing the IDA as a minority party for Italians would be a stretch. The party rather resembles values of tolerance and multi-culturalism prominent within the Istria region (¹⁵⁴⁰).

¹⁵³⁸ [European Election Database]

¹⁵³⁹ [Bertelsman Transformation Index, 2016]

¹⁵⁴⁰ [Valenta et al., 2016]

In the parliamentary elections of 2015, neither the left-leaning incumbents nor the opposition parties gained a clear majority. The HDZ was eventually able to form a minority government with support of the MOST, which is a party that emerged regionally, but does not represent a specific ethnic group. The new coalition was led by Tihomir Orešković as Prime Minister and was supported by several minority groups in parliament.

After a vote of no confidence, the cabinet of Orešković had to resign and new elections were held in September 2016 (¹⁵⁴¹). The HDZ was able to retain their position as the strongest party, yet again there was no clear majority. A new government with Andrej Plenković as Prime Minister was formed in October 2016 (¹⁵⁴²). All members of the cabinet belong to the HDZ or MOST. The three ministers that are “independent” are Croats. Therefore, it can be stated that the Croats are in a monopoly position of power.

¹⁵⁴¹ [Politico 2016]

¹⁵⁴² [Reuters 2016]

Bosniaks, Italians, Roma and Hungarians as well as the Serb minority are represented in parliament yet remain powerless.

2021-

In the beginning of 2020, presidential elections were held, with the leftist candidate Zoran Milanović defeating the incumbent conservative candidate Kolinda Grabar Kitarović (¹⁵⁴³, ¹⁵⁴⁴). Later that year, on 5th of July, parliamentary elections were held in Croatia. The ruling conservative HDZ remains the strongest party in parliament with roughly 37% of the votes, followed by the left-leaning Restart Coalition (consisting of the SDP, together with the Croatian Peasant Party HSS, Glas, IDS, HSU, and other small parties) with only around 25% of the votes (¹⁵⁴⁵). As in previous years, and also due to the reserved seats for ethnic minorities, the various minority groups are represented in the parliament (¹⁵⁴⁶). Croatia's new cabinet was set in place in July 2020, headed by prime minister Andrej Plenković. Most members of Croatia's new cabinet are from the HDZ. However, the new cabinet also includes one member of the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), Boris Milošević, who represents the Serbian minority. Milošević is appointed deputy prime minister responsible for social affairs as well as human and minority rights (¹⁵⁴⁷, ¹⁵⁴⁸, ¹⁵⁴⁹, ¹⁵⁵⁰).

¹⁵⁴³ [Bandic, 2020]

¹⁵⁴⁴ [Croatiaweek, 2020a]

¹⁵⁴⁵ [Politico, 2020]

¹⁵⁴⁶ [Politico, 2020]

¹⁵⁴⁷ [Tatić, 2020]

¹⁵⁴⁸ [Croatiaweek, 2020b]

¹⁵⁴⁹ [Vladislavljivic 2020a]

¹⁵⁵⁰ [Vladislavljivic 2020b]

Although a member of the Serbian minority has received an influential role within the new cabinet, the Serbian ethnic group is still coded as powerless. The Croats change from a monopoly position to a dominant one. All other ethnic groups are coded as powerless.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia

From 1992 until 1995

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Croats	0.781	MONOPOLY
Serbs	0.122	SELF-EXCLUSION
Roma	0.0077	POWERLESS
Bosniaks	0.0047	POWERLESS
Italians	0.0044	POWERLESS
Hungarians	0.004	POWERLESS

From 1996 until 2008

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Croats	0.896	MONOPOLY
Serbs	0.045	POWERLESS
Bosniaks	0.0047	POWERLESS
Italians	0.0044	POWERLESS
Hungarians	0.0037	POWERLESS
Roma	0.0021	POWERLESS

From 2009 until 2011

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Croats	0.904	DOMINANT
Serbs	0.043	POWERLESS
Bosniaks	0.0073	POWERLESS
Italians	0.0042	POWERLESS
Roma	0.004	POWERLESS
Hungarians	0.0033	POWERLESS

From 2012 until 2020



Figure 285: Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1992-1995.

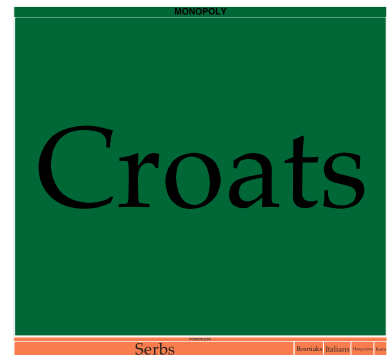


Figure 286: Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1996-2008.

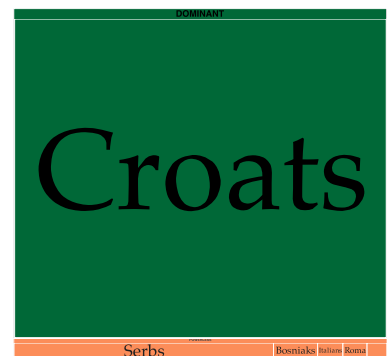


Figure 287: Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia during 2009-2011.

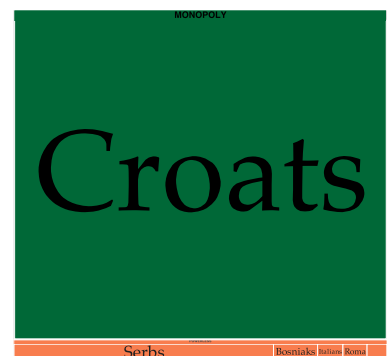


Figure 288: Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia during 2012-2020.

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Croats	0.904	MONOPOLY
Serbs	0.043	POWERLESS
Bosniaks	0.0073	POWERLESS
Italians	0.0042	POWERLESS
Roma	0.004	POWERLESS
Hungarians	0.0033	POWERLESS

From 2021 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Croats	0.904	DOMINANT
Serbs	0.043	POWERLESS
Bosniaks	0.0073	POWERLESS
Italians	0.0042	POWERLESS
Roma	0.004	POWERLESS
Hungarians	0.0033	POWERLESS



Figure 289: Political status of ethnic groups in Croatia during 2021-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Croatia

From 1992 until 1995

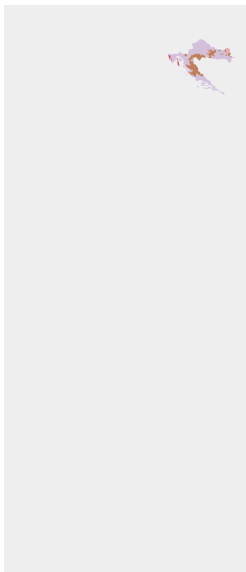


Figure 290: Map of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1992-1995.







Group name		Area in km ²	Type
	Croats	42 395	Regionally based
	Serbs	13 671	Regionally based
	Hungarians	1295	Regionally based
	Italians	751	Regionally based
	Bosniaks	0	Dispersed
	Roma	0	Dispersed

Table 97: List of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1992-1995.

From 1996 until 2021

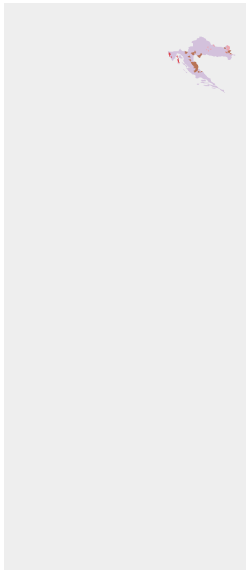


Figure 291: Map of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1996-2021.







Group name		Area in km ²	Type
	Croats	55 823	Statewide
	Serbs	5065	Regionally based
	Hungarians	1295	Regionally based
	Italians	751	Regionally based
	Bosniaks	0	Dispersed
	Roma	0	Dispersed

Table 98: List of ethnic groups in Croatia during 1996-2021.

Conflicts in Croatia

Starting on 1992-04-28

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Croatia	Serbian Republic of Krajina	Serbs	1992-04-28	Explicit	Yes	Yes
Government of Croatia	Serbian irregulars	Serbs	1992-05-30	Explicit	No	Yes