

Richard Lam/Canadian Press. February 24, 2008. *Serbian supporters gather in Vancouver to rally and voice their opposition to Kosovo's declaration of independence on Sunday.*^[18]



This photograph was taken on 24 February 2008, a week after Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. [For a very brief primer about Kosovo's independence, see the other side of this page.]

There are many Serbian flags and one flag of Spain in the crowd and several protestors are holding English-language signs opposing Kosovo's independence (i.e., "Canadians Against Kosovo Secession").

The crowd is likely protesting Kosovo because it draws a parallel to the Canadian province of Quebec. Members of a sovereignty movement there seek self-determination and for Quebec to become an independent nation. The Canadian government considers Quebec's potential independence as a threat to the nation's territorial integrity.

The flag of Spain may allude to the sovereignty movement in Catalonia, Spain, where many citizens seek self-determination and for Catalonia to become an independent nation. The Spanish government considers Catalonia's potential independence as a threat to the nation's territorial integrity.

There are similar scenarios throughout the world which may explain why Kosovo's independence is controversial.

Persistent Issues History...

1. Many nations with regions in their territory seeking independence *do not* recognize Kosovo's national sovereignty (i.e., Spain). However, some nations with regions in their territory seeking independence *do* recognize Kosovo's national sovereignty (i.e., Canada). In a similar situation, what criteria should government officials use to balance their territorial integrity with the self-determination of citizens?
2. Does Kosovo's sovereignty set a precedent for future regions to declare independence or is this situation an outlier, an exception? Explain.

11. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Kosovo-conflict>

12. Kosovo assault 'was not genocide.' BBC. 7 September 2011: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1530781.stm](https://www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1530781.stm)

18. This photograph is from the online news story from the Canadian Broadcasting Company, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hundreds-protest-kosovo-independence-in-3-canadian-cities-1.769771>

Kosovo's Independence: A Very Brief Primer

Tensions between ethnic Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo erupted into armed clashes again in the late 1990s. Ibrahim Rugova, moderate leader of the Albanians, led protests against Serbia (called Yugoslavia at the time) and its leader Slobodan Milosevic. Serbian policies toward Albanians then were similar to those from earlier that century: suppressing the Albanian language, systematic destruction of Albanian homes, denying education to Albanian children, destroying Albanian cultural institutions, and a program of colonization, called Serbianization.^[3]

Many Albanians grew frustrated with Rugova's non-violent approach, he seemed unable to gain international attention or promote Kosovo's autonomy. In 1997 a rebel group named the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) formed and attacked Serbian police. Violence between the KLA and Serbian troops increased and both sides have been accused of war crimes and human rights violations. The international community attempted a settlement; however, the Albanians would not settle for anything less than independence for Kosovo and the Serbs would not discuss Kosovo's independence.

In February 1998, the KLA killed four Serbian policemen, over the next few days Serbian soldiers attacked several Albanian villages; in Prekaz, Serbs massacred 60 members of the Jashari family, nearly half were women, children, and old men. The international community continued to attempt a settlement as the humanitarian crisis increased.^[3]

Membership of the KLA grew and Milosevic increased Serbian attacks on Albanian villages. As the violence escalated, the United States and the United Nations led peace talks.^[3] Again, Albanians would not settle for anything less than independence for Kosovo and Serbs would not discuss Kosovo's independence. Serbian troops continued their systematic program of ethnic cleansing and the KLA regrouped and rearmed.^[11]

In 1999, diplomacy failed and the international community acted; a coalition of 30 nations (i.e., NATO) began air strikes against Serbian military targets. After 11 weeks, Serbia agreed to withdrawal its troops from Kosovo and allow the nearly 1 million displaced Albanians to return. Most Serbs then left Kosovo. A United Nations administered Supreme Court in Kosovo ruled there had been "a systematic campaign of terror, including murders, rapes, arsons and severe maltreatments," but that Serbian troops had tried to remove rather than eradicate the Albanians (i.e., they were guilty of ethnic cleansing, they were not guilty of genocide).¹² Milosevic was tried for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague and died in a cell before a verdict was reached.

The United Nations sent a peacekeeping force to Kosovo and helped Albanians develop their own constitution, elect an assembly, and transition toward a sovereign nation. On 17 February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence. An international debate started: should Kosovo be recognized as an independent nation?

In 2010, the General Assembly of the United Nations asked the International Court of Justice to rule on the issue. By a vote of 10 to 4, it determined Kosovo's independence did not violate international law.

As of 2022, the United States, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and 90 other nations have recognized Kosovo as a sovereign nation. Serbia, Russia, China, Spain, Greece, and 100 other nations have not.