

Honduras

Ethnicity in Honduras

Power relations

Ethnicity in Honduras is politically less important than in Guatemala or Nicaragua. Neither those countries' ethnic conflicts nor El Salvador's ethnocide and policy of denial of indigenous existence characterize Honduras. But as in all other Latin American countries, ladinos/mestizos - called "Hondurans" here, in line with the common EPR practice - have exclusive control over the state apparatus. In Honduras, they have always enjoyed "monopoly" power. According to Foster (¹⁴⁵⁸, 279), mestizos and whites together make up 91% of the total population.

¹⁴⁵⁸ [Foster, 2000]

The Garifuna, 1946–1989: Probably the most important minority group in Honduras' "ethno-political history" were the Garifuna, the country's largest single minority. The Garifuna are descendants of African-Caribbean exiles and, together with the English-speaking Creoles on the Bay Islands, form the Afro-Honduran population. During large parts of the 20th century, the Garifuna were discriminated based on their race (¹⁴⁵⁹). Beginning in the 1980s, they embraced a discourse of a combined struggle of Afro-descendants and indigenous people which together, they argued, constituted the "indigenous", later "autochthonous", population of Honduras. This seems to have been a deliberate political strategy in order to frame the black ethnic movement as a part of the more global struggle of indigenous peoples and to benefit from the political gains these indigenous movements achieved in Latin America (¹⁴⁶⁰, 386, 394–5). As Hooker (¹⁴⁶¹, 293) shows: "In the cases where blacks have won the same collective rights as indians, such as Honduras and Nicaragua, they have done so because they have been able to cast themselves as 'autochthonous' groups having an indigenous-like status and distinct cultural identity, (...)." Thus, portraying themselves as one of several "indigenous" peoples in Honduras and representing the Garifuna struggle within a framework of indigenous rights was a conscious strategic decision by the leading Garifuna organizations such as OFRANEH. Today, the Honduran state largely follows this standard treating all ethnic minorities as "indigenous" groups (¹⁴⁶²).

¹⁴⁵⁹ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁶⁰ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁶¹ [Hooker, 2005]

¹⁴⁶² [Anderson, 2007]

Nevertheless, the racial distinction between the "real" indigenous peoples - here in the usual meaning denoting both their pre-Colombian presence and the racial category of "Indian" - and Garifuna/Blacks is still salient and politically relevant. Even the over-

arching minority advocacy organization CONPAH ("Confederación Nacional de Pueblos Autóctonos de Honduras") that followed the "autochthonous discourse" in its name and composition has been affected by this distinction as several leading figures questioned the political "marriage" between indigenous and Garifuna peoples on the basis that the latter were "very distinct" and that their movement had a "different trajectory" (¹⁴⁶³, 386, 400, 407). In 2002, an alternative indigenous macro-organization was formed (although it never turned into an important force) explicitly excluding Garifuna/Blacks (¹⁴⁶⁴, 401). There are also Garifuna organizations explicitly focusing on black racial identity (¹⁴⁶⁵, 387, 407). And it is not uncommon that in disputes over land, indigenous groups and Garifuna both use racist rhetoric against each other (see e.g. ¹⁴⁶⁶). Therefore, the Garifuna are listed as a separate politically relevant ethnic group here. (The English-speaking Creole population is recognized as a distinct ethnic group by the Honduran state but has played a minor role in black ethnic mobilization (¹⁴⁶⁷) - for which reason it is not listed as a politically relevant ethnic group here.) The population figure for the Garifuna is deduced from Foster (¹⁴⁶⁸, 279) who gives the figure of 2% for the whole black population in Honduras. The absolute numbers presented in Anderson (¹⁴⁶⁹, 389; based on the national census 2001) and Anderson (2003, cited in ¹⁴⁷⁰, 293 fn 23) show a ratio of about 4:1 between Garifuna and English-speaking Creoles. Thus, the Garifuna are listed with 1.6% of Honduras' total population.

Historically, the Garifuna in Honduras were subject to social and political discrimination. Within the vision of an indio-hispanic mestizo nation there was no space for "negros" which, consequently, were excluded from the nation and suffered from targeted discrimination (including partial segregation). In the second half of the 20th century, only the more overt forms of discrimination were abandoned (¹⁴⁷¹, 391). Already in the 1950s and 1960s, Garifuna organizations (like the "Sociedad Cultural Abraham Lincoln") were formed to fight against racism and segregation, and for an equal treatment as citizens and integration in public institutions, relying on local activism and petitions to the national government (¹⁴⁷², 392).

The strategic alliance with Honduras' ("real") indigenous peoples from the 1980s on finally bore some political fruits in the early 1990s when the country embarked on a more serious (although still incomplete) policy of multiculturalism explicitly integrating the Garifuna group as a "beneficiary" of this policy. The Garifuna started to benefit from land entitlements in the early and mid-1990s (¹⁴⁷³, 385-6, 391, 395, 397-9, 406; ¹⁴⁷⁴, 286, 304-5; ¹⁴⁷⁵). In 1994/5, the Legal Office for Ethnic Groups and Cultural Heritage was founded. In 1995, Honduras implemented the ILO Convention 169 on indigenous rights as one of first Latin American countries which was an important factor for ethnic minorities in their pursuit of political rights (¹⁴⁷⁶). Thus, the Garifuna group is coded as "discriminated" until 1989, and as "powerless" from 1990 on.

¹⁴⁶³ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁶⁴ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁶⁵ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁶⁶ [Mollett, 2006]

¹⁴⁶⁷ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷¹ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷² [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷³ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷⁴ [Hooker, 2005]

¹⁴⁷⁵ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

¹⁴⁷⁶ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

There seems to have been a different treatment of the indigenous population by the Honduran state compared to the Garifuna. "Promulgating glorious images of the Indian past", the indigenous population was seen as part of the nation (¹⁴⁷⁷, 390-1). Already in the early 1980s, there was a National Indigenous Institute mediating between indigenous peoples and the state, and limited recognition of indigenous rights was granted in the 1982 constitution (¹⁴⁷⁸, 393). Thus, the country opened certain political space for indigenous peoples to express their demands, for the struggle for and recognition of collective rights (¹⁴⁷⁹, 393; ¹⁴⁸⁰). Indeed, Honduras could be seen as an "early starter" in recognizing indigenous rights. A certain tolerance – without committing itself to real social or political change – seems to be the general strategy of the Honduran government towards social movements (¹⁴⁸¹).

¹⁴⁷⁷ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷⁸ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁷⁹ [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁸⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

¹⁴⁸¹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

Indigenous people, 1975–1989: Indigenous mobilization in Honduras began in the mid-1970s and really gained momentum in the 1980s when most of the indigenous advocacy organizations were formed (¹⁴⁸²; ¹⁴⁸³). The politically relevant indigenous groups in Honduras are the Lenca (settled mainly in the western departments of La Paz, Intibucá, and Lempira); the Miskito (eastern rainforest region of the Moskitia) whose political mobilization was strengthened by the events in Nicaragua after the Sandinista revolution; the Maya Chorti, the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the Maya city Copán in the country's far western part; the Xicaque (central-north); the Pech; the Nahua; and the Tawahka/Sumu¹⁴⁸⁴). The Tawahka are a subgroup of the Sumu which are mainly based in Nicaragua (¹⁴⁸⁵). At the center of the indigenous struggle in Honduras has usually been the reclamation of traditional lands. To this end, all of the mentioned groups have founded their own advocacy organizations, especially since the 1980s: ONILH (Lenca), MASTA (people of the Moskitia, above all Miskitos); FETRIXY (Xicaque), FITH (Tawahka/Sumu), CONIMCHH (Maya Chortis), FETRIPH (Pech), and FINAH (Nahua) - which are all represented within the national organization CONPAH. Their struggle is partly a common, jointly organized, partly a separate affair (personal communication with Oscar Cerrato, development worker, HEKS Honduras). Based on the main ethnic cleavages described above and in line with the common EPR practice, these different groups were combined into one politically relevant ethnic category "indigenous peoples". The year of 1975 was chosen as the start year of their political relevance since, as mentioned above, indigenous mobilization began in the mid-1970s. Population figures for both the total indigenous population and its different subgroups vary greatly. Foster (¹⁴⁸⁶, 279) provides an intermediate figure for Honduras' entire indigenous population with 7% of the country's total population.

¹⁴⁸² [Anderson, 2007]

¹⁴⁸³ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

¹⁴⁸⁴ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

¹⁴⁸⁵ [Herlihy Leake, 1990]

¹⁴⁸⁶ [Foster, 2000]

As a response to this mobilization, the government made some concessions in form of land entitlements but the implementation has often been inconsistent and halfheartedly enforced (as has also

been the case for Garifuna land entitlements). Indigenous peoples as well as Garifuna still suffer from land expropriation – especially when powerful economic interests are at stake – and frequently come into conflict with local landowners when they try to actively defend their land rights. Violent responses are frequent, often committed by criminal actors connected to powerful economic forces. A common method of repression is the assassination of indigenous leaders. These cases of political murders - like almost all criminal acts in a country pervaded by profound lawlessness - are usually not investigated or solved (¹⁴⁸⁷). Yet, although tolerated by state authorities this repression is usually not directly state-led. Moreover, it does not have an explicitly "ethnic nature" as the same kind of violent repression also affects the majority of poor mestizo Hondurans. Thus, the indigenous group was coded as "powerless".

¹⁴⁸⁷ [Orozcoo Rouse, 2010]

1990–2009: Overall, also the Garifuna group today is not politically discriminated anymore according to the definition of EPR. In 2005, for example, three Garifunas became members of the parliament although their influence obviously remains marginal (¹⁴⁸⁸, 12). Like the indigenous peoples, the Garifuna suffer from political marginalization and the state's inability or unwillingness to protect their interests and rights (¹⁴⁸⁹; ¹⁴⁹⁰; see also ¹⁴⁹¹). Again, however, this also affects the large majority of the mestizo population in a country completely dominated by a tiny oligarchic elite unwilling to give up only the slightest part of their entrenched political and economic privileges. Thus, indigenous and Garifuna rights movements are treated similarly to any other human rights, labor rights, anti-corruption etc. movements. Van Cott (¹⁴⁹², 132) places contemporary Honduras (like Nicaragua and Guatemala, but not El Salvador) in the category of countries which provide "modest" recognition of indigenous rights in regard to land, language and other rights, and political autonomy. Consequently, indigenous peoples and Garifuna are both coded as "powerless" from 1990 to 2009.

¹⁴⁸⁸ [Orozcoo Rouse, 2010]

¹⁴⁸⁹ [Orozcoo Rouse, 2010]

¹⁴⁹⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

¹⁴⁹¹ [Bertelsmann, 2003-2010]

¹⁴⁹² [Van Cott, 2007]

2010–2013: According to the sources consulted (¹⁴⁹³, ¹⁴⁹⁴, ¹⁴⁹⁵, and the ¹⁴⁹⁶) - the situation has remained virtually unchanged in the last four years. While there is no targeted ethnic discrimination in Honduras, the Garifuna and indigenous groups still suffer from land expropriation - especially in the context of natural resource exploitation, such as timber -, abuses by security and other state agents, and pervasive socio-economic discrimination. After the 2009 elections, the national parliament included one Miskito and one Garifuna representative. There has also recently been some cabinet-level representation of the Garifunas (e.g. as secretary of state for indigenous and Afro-Honduran affairs or as minister of culture). Moreover, in September 2013, the government granted indigenous Miskito inhabitants title to approximately 2.4 million acres of land (approximately 7 percent of the country's territory). However, the implementation of such grantings has usually been very deficient

¹⁴⁹³ [Freedom House, 2013]

¹⁴⁹⁴ [U.S. State Department, 2009-2013]

¹⁴⁹⁵ [Bertelsmann, 2003-2010]

¹⁴⁹⁶ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005]

(see text above). Overall, the indigenous and Garifuna groups in Honduras remain clearly powerless in the national political arena, without having any significant access to regional political power either.

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Political status of ethnic groups in Honduras

From 1946 until 1974

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.91	MONOPOLY
Indigenous peoples (Lenca, Maya-Chorti, Miskito, Tawahka/Sumu, Xicaque, Pech, Nahua)	0.07	IRRELEVANT
Garifuna	0.016	DISCRIMINATED

From 1975 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.91	MONOPOLY
Indigenous peoples (Lenca, Maya-Chorti, Miskito, Tawahka/Sumu, Xicaque, Pech, Nahua)	0.07	POWERLESS
Garifuna	0.016	DISCRIMINATED

From 1990 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.91	MONOPOLY
Indigenous peoples (Lenca, Maya-Chorti, Miskito, Tawahka/Sumu, Xicaque, Pech, Nahua)	0.07	POWERLESS
Garifuna	0.016	POWERLESS

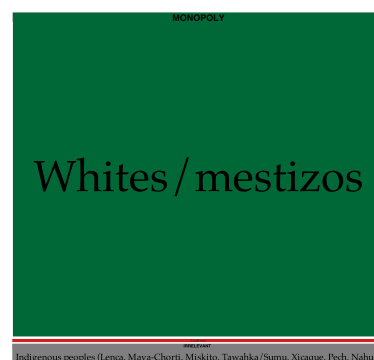


Figure 325: Political status of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1946-1974.



Figure 326: Political status of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1975-1989.



Figure 327: Political status of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1990-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Honduras

From 1946 until 1974

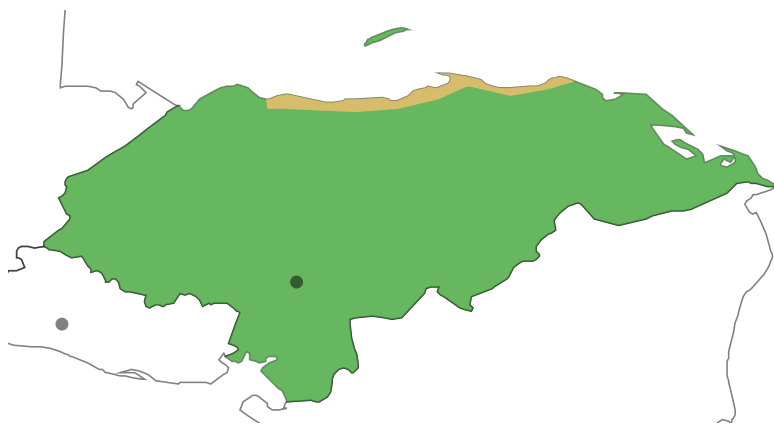


Figure 328: Map of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1990-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Whites/mestizos	112 619	Statewide
Garifuna	2 919	Regionally based

Table 96: List of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1946-1974.

From 1975 until 2013

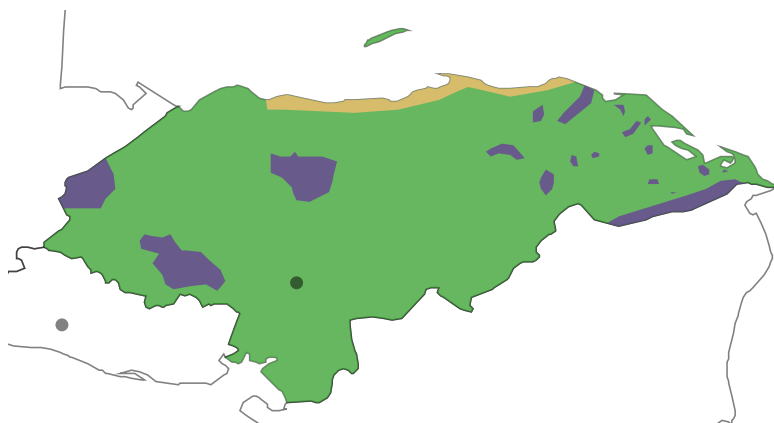


Figure 329: Map of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1990-2013.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Whites/mestizos	112 619	Statewide
■	Indigenous peoples (Lenca, Maya-Chorti, Miskito, Tawahka/Sumu, Xicaque, Pech, Nahua)	9214	Regionally based
■	Garifuna	2919	Regionally based

Table 97: List of ethnic groups in Honduras during 1975-2013.

Conflicts in Honduras

Starting on 1957-05-01

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Honduras	Government of Nicaragua		1957-05-01			

Starting on 1969-07-03

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of El Salvador	Government of Honduras		1969-07-03			