

Panama

Ethnicity in Panama

Power relations

Panama is one of the most extraordinary cases of indigenous political mobilization in Latin America. Already in 1925, the small Kuna group, living mainly on the San Blas archipelago, rebelled against state presence in what they considered their own traditional territory. Backed by the United States of America (USA), they entered into peace talks with the Panamanian government and achieved partial autonomy in 1930. In 1938, the "comarca" (autonomous zone) Kuna Yala in San Blas was officially established – constituting the first successful autonomy claim of indigenous people in whole Latin America, an unparalleled achievement for any ethnic community in the region in that time (²⁷⁶⁸, 1, 4-6, 15; ²⁷⁶⁹, 31, 35-6; ²⁷⁷⁰, 47-8). Although always threatened by the Panamanian state's "appetite" for their resources, the Kuna have managed to maintain control over Kuna Yala and protect their lands from extensive foreign exploitation (²⁷⁷¹, 48, 52, 54, 62; ²⁷⁷²). The "comarca" is governed by a well-specified set of political institutions that are recognized in the Panamanian constitution (²⁷⁷³; ²⁷⁷⁴, 2; ²⁷⁷⁵; ²⁷⁷⁶, 52). Jordan (²⁷⁷⁷, 18) makes explicit comparisons between the Kuna in Panama and the Atlantic coast minorities in Nicaragua regarding the degree of autonomy actually exercised by the groups. According to his judgment, Kuna autonomy is "radically" more effective. Their example would later serve as a model for the autonomy processes of other indigenous groups in the country (²⁷⁷⁸, 1). Therefore, the Kuna are coded with "regional autonomy" during the whole time period of the dataset. (It must be mentioned that not all Kuna live on the San Blas archipelago. Nevertheless, the San Blas portion forms the majority of the Kuna (²⁷⁷⁹, 1), and over the years other Kuna communities have been granted their own "comarcas" as well.) The Kuna number about 50'000 people (1.5% of the country's total population) (²⁷⁸⁰, 1).

Panama's largest indigenous community is the Ngobe-Bugle group. It makes up about two-thirds of the whole indigenous population (²⁷⁸¹, 1), which is estimated to be about 6% of the total country population (²⁷⁸², 285). (The 6% are indirectly confirmed by Vakis and Lindert (²⁷⁸³, 1) who indicate the Kuna to be one-fourth of the total indigenous population which, in turn, must then be 6% of the country's population.) Thus, the size of the Ngobe-

²⁷⁶⁸ [Jordan, 2004]

²⁷⁶⁹ [Van Cott, 2001]

²⁷⁷⁰ [Wickstrom, 2003]

²⁷⁷¹ [Wickstrom, 2003]

²⁷⁷² [Minority Rights Group International, 2005a]

²⁷⁸¹ [Vakis Lindert]

²⁷⁸² [Foster, 2000]

²⁷⁸³ [?]

Bugle should be about 4% of Panama's total population. Note that the Ngobe and the Bugle are actually two different groups which are, however, culturally related (2784, 1). Therefore, it is common to list the two groups together as one ethnic category (cf. e.g. 2785). The Ngobe-Bugle's political mobilization can be traced back to the early 1960s and the "Mama Chi" revitalization movement, a cultural movement addressing the Ngobe's relation to and status within the "outside" society. It served to construct a common identity and as a catalyzer of the group's politicization (2786, 55-6). Overall, Ngobe political mobilization has also mainly focused on claims for access to and protection of their traditional settlement territories (2787). Over the years, the Ngobe became more included in national politics. However, as a result of their traditional lifestyle, they had the least political leverage of all Panamanian indigenous groups, despite their larger size (2788, 50, 56). It was not until 1997 that the Ngobe-Bugle were granted their "comarca" with regional autonomy (2789, 1; 2790, 58). Therefore, the Ngobe-Bugle were coded as "irrelevant" until 1959, as "powerless" from 1960 (about the time when they started to mobilize collectively) to 1997, and as enjoying "regional autonomy" from 1998 on. The third politically relevant indigenous group in Panama is the Choco group (also called Embera-Wounan). Regarding their political leverage, they can be placed in between the Kuna and the Ngobe-Bugle. Their political mobilization also started in the 1960s when they began making claims for the recognition of their land rights. The government granted them the "comarca" Embera-Drua in 1983 (2791, 2). Thus, the Choco were coded as "irrelevant" until 1959, as "powerless" from 1960 to 1983, and as having "regional autonomy" since 1984.

According to Van Cott (2792, 33), Panama (along with Colombia) has granted the greatest degree of political autonomy to indigenous peoples in Latin America regarding the geographic extension of autonomy, its institutionalization, and access to state resources. Consequently, she places Panama in the category of Latin America's "strongly multicultural" countries (2793, 132). Nevertheless, although some indigenous leaders have achieved political posts at the national level, and a few seats are reserved for them in the National Assembly (2794), indigenous groups remain mostly powerless at the national level.

The three groups are listed separately here because they all have an individual history of autonomy demands and achievements (most notably in the case of the Kuna).

The largest ethnic minority in Panama are the Afropanamanians. Mainly the descendants from immigrants from the West Indian islands (like the black community in Costa Rica), they constitute about 14% of the total population (2795, 285). Their situation within Panamanian society has always been delicate. Viewed as anti-nationalist and pro-USA, as a threat to the mestizo nation, and as taking away the jobs rightfully belonging to Panamanians, they were politically and socially excluded (2796, 50-1). At the same

²⁷⁸⁴ [Vakis Lindert]

²⁷⁸⁵ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005b]

²⁷⁹² [Van Cott, 2001]

²⁷⁹³ [Van Cott, 2007]

²⁷⁹⁴ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005b]

²⁷⁹⁵ [Foster, 2000]

²⁷⁹⁶ [Priestley, 2004]

time, this discrimination led to the formation of a common identity as "Antillanos", later also "Afro-Panamanians" or "Panamanians of West Indian descent" (²⁷⁹⁷, 51). Nationalist leaders called for their repatriation and deportation, and in 1941 a new constitution was drafted excluding Antilleans from Panamanian citizenship. After a military coup in the same year, a Constituent Assembly (for which one Afropanamanian was nominated) drafted yet another new constitution in 1945/6. At this juncture, George Washington Westerman, a well-known Afropanamanian leader and owner of the "Panama Tribune", founded the National Civic League, which began to lobby for Afropanamanian citizenship rights. Also due to this lobbying, the new constitution restored (conditional) citizenship for Afropanamanians (²⁷⁹⁸, 52; ²⁷⁹⁹, 230-1). This led to a significantly greater inclusion of Afropanamanians into the clientelistic political system, "opening the door for Antillean-Panamanian political participation" and "leaving behind the period of political exclusion" (²⁸⁰⁰, 52). Already in 1952, Afropanamanians became members of the Panama City Council or were elected to the national legislature. George Westerman became member of Panama's governments from 1952 to 1960 (²⁸⁰¹, 52, 54, 61), and in 1956 Panama's first anti-discrimination statute was passed (²⁸⁰², 231).

²⁷⁹⁷ [Priestley, 2004]

²⁷⁹⁸ [Priestley, 2004]

²⁷⁹⁹ [Priestley Barrow 2008]

During the 1960s, ethnic mobilization decreased, but by the mid-1970s, during the populist regime of General Omar Torrijos, several Afropanamanian political organizations emerged, such as the "Accion Reinvidicadora del Negro Panameno" (ARENAP), the "Asociación de Profesionales, Obreros y Dirigentes de Ascendencia Negra" (APODAN), and the "Congreso del Negro Panameño" that led an explicitly race-centered discourse. They were at the same time nationalists and "ethnic lobbyists", envisaging a more inclusive Panamanian nation-state that would include Blacks and indigenous peoples equally (²⁸⁰³, 53-4, 61; ²⁸⁰⁴, 231). After initial hostilities, these organizations were tolerated (and even encouraged) by the military regime, not least to utilize their connections to Afropanamanians living in the U.S. during the re-negotiations of the Panama Canal Treaty (²⁸⁰⁵, 55-6; ²⁸⁰⁶, 231-2).

²⁸⁰³ [Priestley, 2004]

²⁸⁰⁴ [Priestley Barrow 2008]

²⁸⁰⁵ [Priestley, 2004]

²⁸⁰⁶ [Priestley Barrow 2008]

Afropanamanian political mobilization continued in the 1980s, with many Afropanamanian individuals at the head of labor movements, human rights and minority rights groups (²⁸⁰⁷). However, during General Manuel Noriega's regime and after the subsequent U.S. invasion in 1989, Afropanamanians' situation worsened considerably.

²⁸⁰⁷ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005c]

Since 1999, the "black movement" has grown more united. Afropanamanian organizations have come together in an overarching, rather heterogeneous national institution called "Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Negras Panameñas". Furthermore, institutions like the "Comité Panameño Contra el Racismo" and the "Afro-Panamanian Forum" were founded (²⁸⁰⁸, 227-8, 242). Yet, social and economic discrimination continues (²⁸⁰⁹). In 2004, one Afropanamanian formed part of Panama's government (²⁸¹⁰). But still today,

²⁸⁰⁸ [Priestley Barrow 2008]

²⁸⁰⁹ [Priestley Barrow 2008]

²⁸¹⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2005b]

Afropanamanians are clearly disadvantaged in the political sphere (²⁸¹¹, 64). Moreover, unlike Panama's indigenous peoples, Afropanamanians do not enjoy any collective rights (such as regional autonomy) as a group (²⁸¹², 298). Nevertheless, as outlined above, since the 1946 constitution, there has always been political participation by and a certain political inclusion of Afropanamanians. Therefore, the Afropanamanians were coded as politically relevant (according to the EPR definition) and "powerless" throughout the entire time period of the dataset.

The population figure for the mestizo/white group (called "Panamanians" here) stems from Foster (²⁸¹³, 285).

²⁸¹¹ [Priestley, 2004]

²⁸¹² [Hooker, 2005]

²⁸¹³ [Foster, 2000]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Panama

From 1946 until 1959

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.8	MONOPOLY
Afropanamanians	0.14	POWERLESS
Ngobe-Bugle	0.04	IRRELEVANT
Kuna	0.015	POWERLESS
Choco (Embera-Wounan)	0.003	IRRELEVANT

From 1960 until 1983

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.8	MONOPOLY
Afropanamanians	0.14	POWERLESS
Ngobe-Bugle	0.04	POWERLESS
Kuna	0.015	POWERLESS
Choco (Embera-Wounan)	0.003	POWERLESS

From 1984 until 1997

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.8	MONOPOLY
Afropanamanians	0.14	POWERLESS
Ngobe-Bugle	0.04	POWERLESS
Kuna	0.015	POWERLESS
Choco (Embera-Wounan)	0.003	POWERLESS

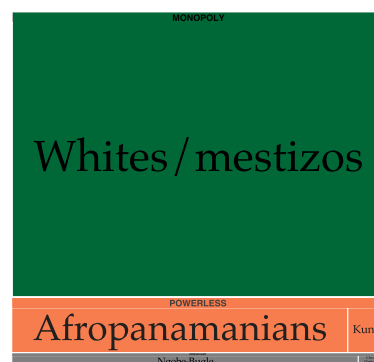


Figure 585: Political status of ethnic groups in Panama during 1946-1959.

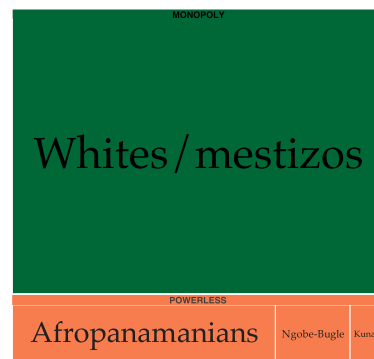


Figure 586: Political status of ethnic groups in Panama during 1960-1983.



Figure 587: Political status of ethnic groups in Panama during 1984-1997.

From 1998 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Whites/mestizos	0.8	DOMINANT
Afropanamanians	0.14	POWERLESS
Ngobe-Bugle	0.04	POWERLESS
Kuna	0.015	POWERLESS
Choco (Embera-Wounan)	0.003	POWERLESS



Figure 588: Political status of ethnic groups in Panama during 1998-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Panama

From 1946 until 1959

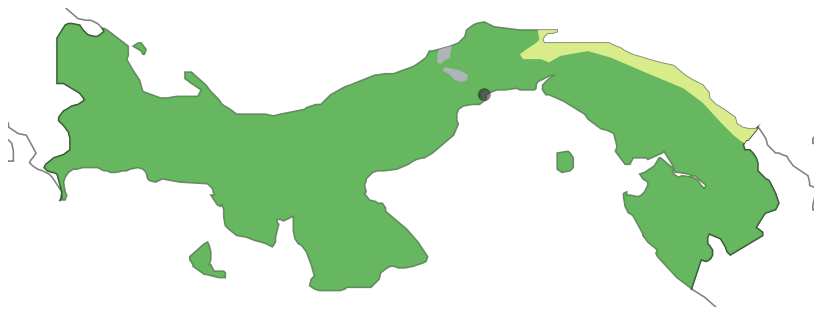


Figure 589: Map of ethnic groups in Panama during 1998-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Whites/mestizos	74 446	Statewide
Kuna	2921	Regionally based
Afropanamanians	341	Regional & urban

Table 171: List of ethnic groups in Panama during 1946-1959.

From 1960 until 2013

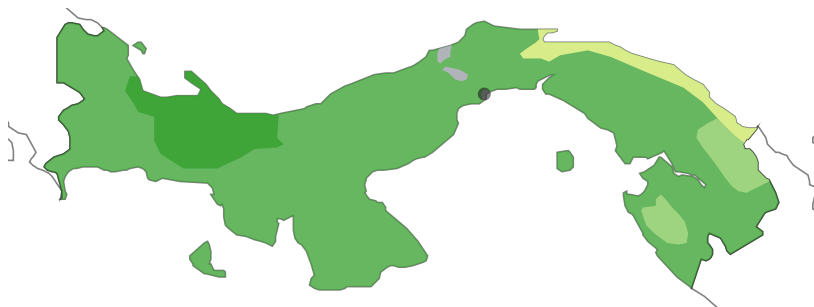


Figure 590: Map of ethnic groups in Panama during 1998-2013.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Whites/mestizos	74 446	Statewide
■	Ngobe-Bugle	6856	Regionally based
■	Choco (Embera-Wounan)	3426	Regionally based
■	Kuna	2921	Regionally based
■	Afropanamanians	341	Regional & urban

Table 172: List of ethnic groups in Panama during 1960-2013.

Conflicts in Panama

Starting on 1989-10-03

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Panama	Military faction (forces of Moisés Giroldi)	Whites/mestizos	1989-10-03	No	Yes, from EGIP	No

Starting on 1989-12-16

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Panama	Government of United States of America		1989-12-16			