

SURINAME

Indigenous Peoples

Activity: 1976-2020

General notes

- This umbrella group refers to the 20,344 indigenous people that inhabit Suriname and represent 3.8% of the total Surinamese population. The four largest indigenous groups are the Kali'a (Caribs), Lokono (Arawaks), Trio and Wayana, although a number of smaller settlements in the south of the country are also included, including the Akurio, Apalai, Wai Wai, Katuena and Mawayana (IWGIA, 2019). Despite being considered as tribal peoples, Maroons (descendants of African slaves) are not included in this group because they are not connected to the Surinamese indigenous rights movement (Haalboom, 2009: 36).

Movement start and end dates

- The earliest indigenous rights organization that we found evidence for was KANO; their first visible event with broad mobilization was a protest march 1976, where they spelled out demands for autonomy and land rights by marching from the east of the country to the capital, Paramaribo – hence the start date of the movement (Apapoe, 2020).
- KANO later evolved to become the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Suriname (OIS 1), though an additional movement, the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS 2), also emerged from KANO (Haalboom, 2009). The largest and most politically significant indigenous rights movement today is the Association of Indigenous Village Leaders of Suriname (VIDS), which was established in 1992 following the end of a civil war that heavily affected indigenous territories and populations. VIDS claims to represent all 51 indigenous villages in Suriname, and has taken a leading role in advocating for the indigenous right to self-determination, the legal recognition and protection of collective land rights, and the protection of indigenous cultural rights (Forest Peoples Programme, n.d.; Kambel, 2002).
- VIDS has remained active as of 2022 (VIDS, n.d.; Suriname Herald, 2017). [start date: 1976; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- According to Haalboom (2009), there are three indigenous rights organizations in Suriname: The VIDs (Veriniging van Inheemse Doorpshoofden in Suriname or The Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname), the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS 1) (formerly KANO) and the Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Suriname (OIS 2.) No evidence could be found suggesting that there were significant claims beyond autonomy and self-determination within the framework of the state of Suriname. According to Haalboom (2009), all three organizations focused on legal land rights and cultural claims and representation at regional and international levels. This is confirmed by Kambel (2002), who also states that the indigenous claim in Suriname was centered on demands that traditional authorities and village territories be legally recognized. Indigenous peoples continued to make claims for land rights in subsequent years (VIDS, 2022). [1976-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- We were unable to find a specific definition of the territory to which these claims are tied. We therefore flag this territorial claim as ambiguous and code it based on the group's ethnic settlement area as indicated by the GeoEPR dataset, which offers the best available approximation in this case.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no evidence of violent activity during the period we cover, and thus code the entire movement as NVIOLSD. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- Suriname was originally inhabited by a number of distinct indigenous tribes such as the Kali'a (Carib), Arawak, Wayana and Akurio. With the arrival of the Dutch to the Americas in 1581 and their purchase of present-day Suriname from the English in 1667, indigenous groups were forced to retreat into the country's interior forests to avoid extinction under the brutal settler control of the Dutch. Colonial policies included the enslavement and killing of indigenous people, as well as the display of natives in human zoos in Europe (Minority Rights Group International; Apapoe, 2020).
- Suriname was ruled by a small group of Europeans and Creoles until universal suffrage was introduced in 1949. In 1954, the government passed an Electoral Act based on racially demarcated constituencies, which institutionalized economic, cultural and linguistic divisions among Suriname's different ethnic groups into the state's political organization (Minority Rights Group International). The Act recognized the existence of indigenous tribes for the first time but failed to offer them any special protection under national law, and therefore, no demarcation of their lands (US State Department, 2019).
- After Suriname was granted independence by the Dutch in 1975, the Surinamese parliament chose to uphold colonial legislation and did not introduce any provisions on indigenous peoples' rights or land claims (IWGIA, 2019).
- No concessions or restrictions were found in the ten years before the first year we cover the movement in the dataset.

Concessions and restrictions

- In 1982, the Surinamese parliament passed the 'Domain Land' law, a law governing land tenure whereby all land in Suriname belongs to the state unless it is privately owned. In the absence of land titles in indigenous territories, the land where native groups had lived for centuries were also deemed to belong to the Surinamese state, which further eroded the right to land for indigenous people (Apapoe, 2020). [1982: autonomy restriction]
- Between 1986 and 1992, Suriname experienced a civil war between armed guerillas and the government. Insurgents often used indigenous territories as refuge, which turned these areas into

active conflict zones that were frequently bombed and militarized by government forces. As a result, hundreds of Arawak, Kali'a and Wayanas had to flee their homes (Minority Rights Group International). We do not code a restriction here because the displacement of indigenous people appears to have been an unintended consequence of the civil war, rather than a deliberate attempt from the government to drive indigenous communities away from their homelands.

- Peace was eventually restored with the Treaty of Lelydorp in 1992, which gave attention to the land rights of indigenous people for the first time. Article 10 of the treaty addresses the right to land of indigenous people, stipulating that “the Government will see to it that it will be arranged by law that citizens living in tribal societies will obtain a real title to the living areas requested by them, and that the Government will determine economic zones where the communities of citizens living in tribal societies can perform economic activities” (Haalboom, 2009: 53-54). Despite the hopes raised by the agreement among indigenous rights groups, none of these provisions were implemented and no meaningful steps for implementation were taken (Kambel and MacKay, 1999). This is confirmed by Weitzner (2007) and Haalboom (2009). Since then, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the government to resolve indigenous land rights issues, such as the Commission on Domain Land of Indigenous People and Maroons of 1996, the Buskondre Protocol of 2000, the Presidential Commission on Land Rights of 2006, and the Special Presidential Envoy on Land Rights Issues in 2013 (Apapoe, 2020). However, none of these initiatives have increased the level of indigenous self-determination or enabled indigenous groups to exercise their rights in practice (Minority Rights Group International).
- Following his election in 2010, President Desi Bouterse promised to grant indigenous people increased decision-making rights relating to their tradition and culture (US State Department, 2019). However, we found no evidence of steps being taken by the Bouterse government to improve indigenous groups' cultural rights, nor did we find information about cultural protections being enshrined in law under his administration.
- In 2017, the Surinamese Parliament approved an amendment to the 1982 Domain Land. The amendment “sets to ‘protect’ the traditional lands of Indigenous and tribal peoples by prohibiting the State from giving any concession right or land title in areas that are within a radius of five kilometres of Indigenous and tribal peoples’ villages, without the community’s consent” (IWGIA, 2019). Yet, IWGIA also notes that the amendment upholds pre-existing third-party rights, and it reaffirms that “all land remains domain land over which the State has exclusive decisive authority”. We code a land rights concession, though noting that the extent of the concession is limited. [2017: autonomy concession]
- In December 2018, the government launched the *Multi-Step Plan for the Legal Recognition of the Land Rights of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Suriname*. The project established three technical commissions: one to develop draft legislation, one on land demarcation, and one on awareness raising. All three commissions are made up of government representatives, indigenous authorities, and other stakeholders such as notaries and land surveyors (US State Department, 2019; IWGIA, 2020). In October 2019, the Commission for Legislation delivered a draft law on the collective rights of indigenous people – focusing on the rights to self-determination, political participation, access to land, and cultural integrity – and also proposed a Constitutional amendment recognizing the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples (IWGIA, 2020; Apapoe, 2020). According to the sources consulted, the law was submitted to the Surinamese parliament in April 2020 but by late 2020, no steps had been taken by the parliament to discuss the Commission’s proposals.

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Indigenous Peoples
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Indigenous Peoples (Arawaks and Caribs)
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	11504000

Power access

- We use EPR data. [1976-2020: powerless]

Group size

- We use EPR data. [1976-2011: 0.02; 2012-2020: 0.038]

Regional concentration

- EPR codes regional concentration, but EPR applies a much lower bar. According to MRGI, most indigenous people live “in the forests”. GeoEPR suggests that Suriname’s indigenous people do not live in a single spatially contiguous territory but that there are three areas with higher proportions of indigenous people, all in the country’s northern part. IWGIA suggests that there are further areas with indigenous concentrations in the country’s southern part. According to GeoEPR, the indigenous peoples’ settlement areas furthermore overlap with the country’s East Indians and Creole groups, which are both much more numerous. Overall, it is highly unlikely that our criteria are met. This case would profit from better spatio-demographic data. [not regionally concentrated]

Kin

- EPR does not code transborder ethnic kin. While several of the indigenous peoples in Suriname can also be found in other countries, we found no other evidence for transborder ethnic kin above the 100,000 threshold. [no kin]

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