

BOTSWANA

San Bushmen

Activity: 1995-2020

General notes

- Shoup (2012) lists the San Bushmen as 'Khoisan'. In addition, 'Basarwa' is the Setswana/Tswana term referring to San Bushmen people (LaRocco 2020). Setswana/Tswana is an official language and lingua franca of Botswana.

Movement start and end dates

- The San Bushmen are indigenous hunters that live in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Angola. Altogether, there are 100,000 San Bushman, of which 5,000 Gana, Gwi, and Tsila Bushmen reside in Botswana. In Botswana, the San Bushmen live in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, which was created to preserve the traditional territories of the Bushmen tribes. There, they continue to live according to their hunter-gatherer traditions separated from modern Botswana society. However, the 1980s discovery of diamonds in the reserve resulted in forced displacements that began in 1988, destroying Bushmen property and their hunting culture (Harden 1988a, 1988b; Lexis Nexis). Survival International reports, "In three big clearances, in 1997, 2002, and 2005, virtually all the Bushmen were forced out. Their homes were dismantled, their school and health post were closed, their water supply was destroyed and the people were threatened and trucked away" (Survival International 2013).
- The Bushmen have been active in fighting to regain their traditional lands, access to water wells, and retain rights to their traditional hunting and herding lifestyle. In 2002, the Bushmen began a movement to take legal action. The movement has led to a court case in 2006, which resulted in a historic victory for the Bushmen as the Botswana judges deemed the government actions as unconstitutional. However, despite the ruling, the Kenyan government continues to oppress the Bushmen and prevent their return by claiming that "the ruling applies only to the 189 Bushmen named in the original court papers – it refuses to allow the others to enter the reserve without a permit. Permit last just a month..." (All Africa 2013). Those who have been able to return are prohibited from resuming their cultural traditions as they are not allowed to possess hunting permits and livestock used for transportation are banned. Thus despite their victory in 2006, the San Bushmen continue to fight for cultural and regional autonomy. In 2011, they were successful in appealing for the right to create wells in the Game Reserve to ensure access to water. All Africa reports that, for the third time, the Bushmen are fighting against the government in court for unrestricted access to the Game Reserve, which is their ancestral homeland. In 2013, the San Bushmen went to court to demand free access to the reserve and abolishment of the one-month permit policy (Survival International). The first instance of formal protest against such measures seem to have begun in 1995, when the Bushmen hired a lawyer, Roger Chennells, to help regain their ancestral territory (The Observer 1996; Lexis Nexis). Based on this, self-determination movement is coded as starting in 1995, and remains ongoing as of 2020. [start date: 1995; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- According to Minorities at Risk, the San first and foremost "want access to their traditional lands". Furthermore, they want their culture and language to be protected and promoted. The claim for land rights and autonomy is confirmed by other sources, such as Zips-Mairitsch (2009)

or Cultural Survival (2002). The San Bushmen continued to make claims for autonomy and land rights after 2012 (Guardian 2014). [1995-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the San Bushmen is the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, which is supposed to preserve the traditional territories of the Bushmen. We manually geocoded this claim using Google Maps as our basemap (Google 2021).

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- No violence was found, hence a NVIOLSD coding. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The San Bushmen – sometimes referred to as ‘Basarwa’, ‘Khoisan’, or simply as ‘San’ or ‘Bushmen’ – are commonly recognized as descendants of the original inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa (Danver 2015: 74). They speak the languages Khoe, Tuu, or Kx’a. As Bantu farmers emerged in San-populated areas in southern Africa in the 3rd and 4th centuries, the two groups became engaged in long periods of violent confrontations. The San Bushmen are traditionally hunter-gatherers.
- In 1961, the British Protectorate established “reserve zones” for the San hunter-gatherer communities (Winter 2015: 286). In 1979, the government set up Unified Hunting Regulations that introduced the Special Game License (SGL) to curtail San Bushmen’s hunting rights (Hitchcock 1996, 2001), as well as the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act to regulate the issue and use of SGL. The SGL became the primary mechanism through which most San Bushmen were able to continue hunting (LaRocco 2020).
- In the 1960s and 1970s, the Botswanan state allowed White and Bantu farmers to close off central San foodgathering areas and water sources, interrupting San seasonal gathering patterns, leading to widespread starvation (Shoup 2012: 149). By the 1970s, roughly 90 percent of the San “had been dispossessed of their traditional lands and political autonomy” (Danver 2015: 75).

Concessions and restrictions

- On January 31, 2002, in a push to “expedite the removal of the remaining [San Bushmen], the government of Botswana “ceased provision of all basic services to the [Central Kalahari Game] Reserve, including drinking water, [all] borehole access [and] food rations” (Sarkin and Cook

2010: 14). Reporters operating in the area “discovered the smashed wellheads the government officials had been sent in to destroy”, a testament to a deliberate plan to drive the San out of the area. The action followed several failed “encouragements” communicated through “clearances” issued by the Botswanan state, the first dating back to 1997 (Winter 2015: 290, 292). One scholar concludes that the policy was a “coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of [the San Bushmen]” (Workman 2009: 182). Economic blockades can be considered restrictions according to the codebook. More generally, the blockade could be considered, a denial to live in the group’s homeland territory, which is also considered a restriction. [2002: autonomy restriction]

- In 2002, the Special Game License (SGL) was suspended formally and no SGL have been issued since 2004 (Just Conservation 2012). SGLs were the primary mechanism through which many San Bushmen had been able to continue hunting and therefore maintain their traditional lifestyle (LaRocco 2020). [2002: cultural rights restriction]
- In 2006, after a two-year long court battle spurred by the 2002 relocation policy, the San Bushmen in Botswana won their supreme court case to be allowed to return to their homeland in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Shoup 2012: 150). 189 plaintiffs, their spouses, and their minor children were given the right to return (U.S. Department of State 2018: 16). Since the ruling changed the autonomy status of affected San Bushmen for the better, while also establishing an important legal precedent, we do code an autonomy concession. However, it should be noted that the implementation was not flawless. For one, the UN Human Rights Council criticized Botswana in 2008 “for selectively not allowing some of the San to return” (Shoup 2012: 150). Negotiations between San Bushmen representatives and the government regarding the interpretation of the 2006 ruling – notably on whether land access should be unrestricted or subject to permits – continued as late as in 2012 (U.S. Department of State 2018: 16). Still, following the SDM coding scheme, the 2006 ruling (i) changed the aggrieved San Bushmen’s situation for the better and (ii) saw significant steps towards implementation. Therefore, we code it as a concession. [2006: autonomy concession]
- Three years after the court victory, in 2009 the government of Botswana revised its so-called “Remote Area Development Programme” (under which the resettlement had been implemented). A UN report applauded these “important measures to address this problem [of land access] (HRC 2010: 8). Under the new plan, San communities were promised priority by land boards for land near their settlements, as well as affirmative-action measures that allow “preferential allocation of nearby land” to San Bushmen (Ibid.). In the years since, however, human rights reports have found few signs of implementation of the revised plan (Winter 2015). For instance, successive U.S. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on Botswana notes continued discrimination and relocation of San Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game. The 2018 report notes that “the Basarwa [San] remained marginalized economically and politically and generally did not have access to their traditional land” (U.S. Department of State 2018: 16). In the absence of significant steps towards implementation, we do not code an autonomy concession in 2009.
- In 2014, Botswana’s government introduced a national hunting ban citing declining wildlife numbers. This ban denied the San Bushmen their right to hunt game animals and fundamentally upended and criminalized their game-meat culture (LaRocco 2020). [2014: cultural rights restriction]
- In 2019, the blanket hunting ban was lifted. However, the Special Game Licenses (SGL) were not re-authorised (LaRocco 2020; Hitchcock et al. 2020). [2019: cultural rights concession]

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	San Bushmen
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	San
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	57111000

Power access

- We adopt the EPR powerless code. [powerless]

Group size

- We use the EPR group size estimate (2%). [0.02]

Regional concentration

- MAR codes the group as dispersed. EPR, which uses a lower bar to code regional concentration compared to both MAR and SDM, also codes the group as dispersed. [not concentrated]

Kin

- MAR codes ethnic kin due to the presence of San in Namibia and Angola. However, according to MRGI the San number <50,000 in Namibia and the community in Angola is even smaller than that. MRGI notes that there are also San in South Africa, but puts their number at <10,000. As our numerical threshold is not met, we do not code ethnic kin. [no kin]

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