

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

Nevisians

Activity: 1983-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- Marshall & Gurr (2003) peg the start of the movement to the early 1960s. However, we could not find organized activity before the formation of the Nevis Reformation Party (NRP) in 1970. Premdas (2000) in line with M&G argues that separatist sentiment increased in the 1960s, but he does not give evidence of organized activity before the formation of the NRP in 1970. Minahan (2002: 1362), too, reports that the Nevisians had repeatedly indicated a preference for a separate status in the late 1950s and 1960s, but does not give clear-cut evidence of organized separatist activity before the formation of the NRP in 1970 either. Since St. Kitts and Nevis did not become an independent state until 1983, we code movement activity from 1983. The start date is pegged at 1970.
- In 1982, NRP moderated its demand to increased autonomy for Nevis in the context of the London Independence Constitutional Conference. In 1990, NRP shifted to a secessionist platform again.
- In 1986 (formally: 1987), the Concerned Citizens Movement (CCM) was founded, which led a push for Nevisian independence in the mid-1990s.
- In 1998, the Nevisians voted on their independence; the proposal was narrowly defeated.
- The CCM and NRP continue to make claims for increased self-determination today, hence the movement is coded as ongoing (Concerned Citizens Movement ; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Midgett 2004).
- Sanders (2018: 85) reports that the secessionist movement on Nevis eased after the 2015 general election because the government that was formed included the major political party on Nevis, the CCM. However, there continue to be claims for greater autonomy and self-rule (Griffiths 2020: 310). [start date: 1970; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- The start date of this movement is in 1970, when the Nevis Reform Party (NRP) was formed. From its inception in 1970, the NRP pursued a secessionist platform (Midgett 2004: 54). Then, in 1982, NRP moderated its demand to autonomy within an independent St. Kitts and Nevis in addition to a constitutional guarantee that Nevis could leave the federation later on (Midgett 2004: 57). The 1983 constitution gave Nevis autonomy and a right to secede, thus satisfying many of NRP's demands. In the following years, NRP did not run on a secessionist platform but advocated increased autonomy for Nevis (Griffiths 2020: 310; Minahan 2002: 1363). In 1990, the NRP switched to a secessionist platform again (Midgett 2004: 59).
- In 1986 (formally: 1987), the Concerned Citizens Movement (CCM) was founded, and CCM became electorally dominant in Nevis after the 1993 election. CCM advocated for increased autonomy for Nevis (Caribbean Elections) or even independence (Midgett 2004: 60), and in the mid-1990s led a push for Nevisian independence, claiming Nevis' constitutional right to hold an independence referendum (Midgett 2004: 61). Minahan (2002: 1363f) suggests that Nevisian activists continued to work for Nevisian independence after the 1998 referendum, which narrowly missed the required two-thirds threshold for independence. Bishop et al. (2021) confirm that the

movement “has not gone away” and that “every Nevisian political party still genuflects to a hypothetical secession, even though it has never been invoked in practice.” [1983-1990: autonomy claim; 1991-2020: independence claim]

Independence claims

- The CCM was formed in 1986. Midgett (2004: 61) suggests tha the CCM had led a push for independence in the mid-1990s. Yet, Midgett (2004: 60) suggests that in the early 1990s they did not say anything specific about secession. Caribbean Elections appears to suggest that CCM initially made claims for autonomy, but the evidence we could find is not fully clear regarding CCM’s claims in 1986-1990.
- The NRP became secessionist (again) in 1990, after having abandoned the independence claim prior to St. Kitts and Nevis’ independence (see above). This suggests a start date of 1990.
- The independence movement is ongoing (see above). [start date: 1990; end date: ongoing]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Nevisians is Nevis Island (Roth 2015: 430). We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no reports of separatist violence, hence we note prior non-violent activity and classify the entire movement as NVIOLSD. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- Originally Nevis was claimed by the Spanish, but they ignored the island. In the early 17th century, the nearby St. Kitts became an English colony, and settlers from St. Kitts soon started to colonize the hitherto largely unhabitated island of Nevis. The majority of Nevisians today are descendants of black slaves imported from Africa to work on plantations. (Minahan 2002: 1360f).
- In 1871 Nevis became part of the British colony of the Leeward Islands. In 1882, the islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla were united in a federation. Between 1958-62, Nevis was part of the St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla presidency of the West Indies Federation. The West Indies Federation collapsed in 1962 when the larger islands of the federation, Jamaica and Trinidad, sought separate independence and withdrew. In 1967 Nevis was included in the new British Associated State St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, but Anguilla soon seceded, opting to remain a British colony (Minahan 2002: 1362).
- In 1977, Nevis voted overwhelmingly for separate independence in a referendum. Nevisian resistance delayed the joint independence of St. Kitts and Nevis for several years. In 1982, an agreement was reached under which St. Kitts and Nevis would achieve independence. The

agreement entitled Nevis to a third of the seats in the national parliament and also granted Nevis its own assembly and autonomy within a federal structure. Furthermore, Nevis was allowed to secede if 2/3 of its residents confirm the secession in a referendum (Minahan 2002: 1362f). [1982: autonomy concession, independence concession]

- Minahan (2002: 1362f) also suggests that an independence referendum was held in March 1985. According to Minahan, Nevisians voted to remain part of St. Kitts and Nevis. We did not find supporting evidence for a referendum in 1985 but there was a referendum in 1998 (see below).

Concessions and restrictions

- In 1996, Nevis' premier announced a referendum on independence. The referendum was held in 1998. 62% of voters voted for independence, just short of the two-thirds threshold needed under the constitution. The referendum was agreed with the central government in St. Kitts (Minahan 2002: 1363). This is not a new concession as Nevis has the right to call independence referendums under the 1983 constitution (see above). We found no other concessions or restrictions in 1983-2021.

Regional autonomy

- St. Kitts and Nevis is a federal parliamentary republic according to its 1983 constitution. Nevis has its own parliament, the Nevis Island Assembly, which has significant powers except in external affairs and defense (BBC 2022; Minahan 2002; Meditz & Hanratty 1987). [1983-2020: regional autonomy]

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

- [1983: host change (new)]

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Nevisians
<i>Scenario</i>	No match
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	-
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	-

Power access

- At independence in 1983, the Nevis Reform Party (NRP) was in a coalition with the People's Action Movement (PAM), a St. Kitts-based party. PAM and NRP again coalesced after the 1984 election (Meditz & Hanratty 1987). The PAM/NRP continued also after the 1989 and 1993 elections (Global Security; Midgett 2004: 60). The 1995, 2000, and 2004 elections were won by the St. Kitts-based St. Kitts and Nevis Labour Party and the Nevis-based parties (NRP, CCM) were not represented in the government. Nevis had little to no representation during this time; the only cabinet minister born in Nevis we could find for most of this time was Asim Martin, who held various cabinet minister posts between 1995 and 2015 (cf. Political Database of the

Americas). However, while born in Nevis, Martin moved to St. Kitts early during childhood and represented a constituency on St. Kitts. In 2010, Patrice Nisbett from the NRP became a government minister (-2015). An alliance of two St. Kitts-based parties (PAM, People's Labour Party) and the Nevis-based CCM formed the government after the 2015 election and remained in power after the 2020 election. The alliance is referred to as Team Unity. [1983-1995: junior partner; 1996-2010: powerless; 2011-2020: junior partner]

Group size

- Minahan (2002: 1360) reports a population estimate of 30,000 in 2002. However, Minahan refers to the Caribbean as a whole and not just St. Kitts and Nevis. 30,000 also seems too high when considering that Nevis is the smaller of St. Kitts and Nevis' two constituent islands and that the World Bank pegs St. Kitts and Nevis' population at 45,000 in 2002. Instead of Minahan, we use the share of people living in Nevis according to the 2011 census – ca. 11,000 out of the country's total population of 46,000. [0.2391]

Regional concentration

- Minahan (2002: 1360) suggests that Nevisians make up 95% of the population of Nevis. The narrative also suggests that a majority of Nevisians in St. Kitts and Nevis live on Nevis, though Minahan does not provide concrete figures. [regional concentration]

Kin

- Minahan (2002: 1360) suggests that there are Nevisian communities outside of St. Kitts and Nevis, but they are clearly below the 100,000 threshold. [no kin]

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