

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Tobagonians

Activity: 1970-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- Anti-Trinidadian sentiment grew among Tobagonians during the early 1970's (Minahan, 2002: 1818; Roth, 2015: 428). The first group making claims for self determination was the Tobago Emancipation Action Committee, which made secession claims from 1970. According to the founder, Tobago would be far better off economically if they seceded or they would at least not be worse off (Luke 2007; 241).
 - o It should be noted that there is evidence of separatist sentiment prior to 1970, but no organized movement was found.
- In 1971, the Democratic Action Congress (DAC) was founded. It favored not only economic and social changes in Tobago but also more autonomy for the Tobagonians (Luke 2007: 245). However, there were also concurrent claims for secession made in 1973 when Tobagonians made the case of separate ethnic identities to a government constitution commission. The commission denied secession. The secessionists rejected this outcome and three years later, secessionists again formally pursued self-determination according to Luke (2007: 242). However, we were unable to identify a concrete organization making secession claims.
- A revival of separatist sentiment in the mid-late 1970's culminated in the raising of the separatist flag on the island by the Fargo House Movement of Tobago in 1977 (Minahan, 2002: 1818; Roth, 2015: 428).
- After pushing for more self-determination through conventional politics from 1976-1979, the Tobago House of Assembly was reestablished in 1980 as an autonomous regional parliament (Luke 2007, 250). However, calls for greater autonomy continued through mainstream Tobagonian parties. In addition, some smaller groups with limited electoral support made secession claims (Nexis, 1980; 1984b).
- In 1983, Tobagonians brought up the issue of secession in the Tobago House of Assembly but this was quickly headed off, with sources noting a more consistent claim for autonomy rather than secession (Nexis, 1983: Online; 1984a). In 1986, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), a party alliance including the DAC, was elected into government. Though NAR rejected secessionism, it pushed for self-government.
- Since being voted out of office in 1991, the NAR has continued to contest in elections as well (Keesing's; Lexis Nexis; Luke 2007; Marshall & Gurr 2003; Minahan 2002; Premdas 2000). As the NAR collapsed in 2005, the DAC returned as an independent party pushing for more autonomy. This evolved into the Tobago Organisation of the People (TOP) party, which made autonomy claims (T&T Guardian, 2019: Online). The Progressive Democratic Party later emerged from the TOP, which has also seen electoral success and made claims for increased autonomy (T&T Guardian, 2020: Online)
- The 2021 elections in the Tobago House of Assembly saw the Progressive Democratic Patriots rout the PNM. A representative of the former subsequently made the following announcement: "Let this win be a strong message that Tobago has rejected your incomplete autonomy bill and we demand more" (Nexis 2021). [start date: 1970; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- In 1970 the Tobago Emancipation Action Committee was formed, which made claims for secession. At this point it was the only organization making SD claims, but it is noted that it issued only one call for independence (Luke, 2007; Marshal). As the only prominent organization making claims, an independence claim is made from 1970.
- In 1971, the Democratic Action Congress (DAC) was founded, which made claims for increased autonomy and had significant electoral success. The DAC existed until 2007, when it joined the Tobago Organisation of the People (TOP), which also made claims for increased internal autonomy. The TOP held seats in the Tobago House of Assembly between 2009 and 2013 when it lost all seats. It eventually joined a coalition of autonomist groups in 2019, the One Tobago Voice, a group which aims to “use the constitution to gain more autonomy for Tobago” (T&T Guardian, 2019: Online). The Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP), which emerged from the TOP and saw electoral success in the Tobago House of Assembly, also made autonomy claims (T&T Guardian, 2020: Online). Finally, another autonomist organization in the 1980s-200s was the National Alliance for Reconstruction, a coalition of parties including the DAC whose aim was to counter the PNM. The coalition made claims for autonomy. It disintegrated in 2005, after which the DAC acted independently again (Minahan, 2002: 1819).
- Overall, therefore, the dominant claim from 1971 (1972 with 1st of January rule) was for increased autonomy instead of secession, though it’s worth noting that secession claims continued to be made. This includes the Fargo House Movement in 1977 (Minahan, 2002: 1818) and the Group With Tobago At Hearth (GROWTH) in 1989. However, secessionists have limited popular support (Nexis, 1980: Online). By contrast, the groups listed above are formalized parties that have seen electoral success in the Tobago House of Assembly since 1980, and represent the broader demands of the Tobago SDM (Nexis, 1978: Online; 1984a; 1984b) whilst calls for secession are considered less serious in news reports (Nexis, 1983: Online; 1984a; 2000a; 2000b). [1970-1971: independence claim; 1972-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

- In 1970, the Tobago Emancipation Action Committee was formed, which made claims for secession. Independence claims continued to be made according to Minahan (2002: 1818). However, one group that made such claims, the Fargo House Movement, had severely limited support (Nexis 1980: Online) whilst we could not find more detailed information on another group that is purported to have made secessionist claims, GROWTH. Therefore no independence claim is coded due to seemingly limited political significance post-1971, when the DAC was founded, which had significant electoral success. [start date: 1970; end date: 1971]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Tobagonians is Tobago Island (Roth 2015: 427f). We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no evidence for violence above the threshold and so code the entire movement as NVIOLSD. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The Tobagonians are descended from a mix of West Indians and African slaves. Tobago was first sighted by Columbus in 1498, who claimed the island for Spain but with no attempt to settle on it (Minahan, 2002: 1816-7). The early colonial period was very turbulent for Tobago, with it changing hands among colonial powers approximately 33 times (Roth, 2015: 427). The English attempted to settle the island in 1616 but were kicked out by the indigenous Caribs. In 1632, the Dutch took control of the island, but between 1854-1883 Tobago was a colony of the Duchy of Courland, modern day Lithuania. However, by the early 18th century, the local, indigenous population were heavily diminished. The British attempted to settle Tobago in 1721, but the island was subject to alternating British and French rule until the Treaty of Paris in 1814, when it came firmly under British control (Minahan, 2002: 1817)
- The island was a sugar colony with a substantial slave population and European plantation owners (Minority Rights Group, 2015: Online). However, the outlawing of slavery and emancipation from 1834 saw the collapse of the local sugar plantation economy, the exodus of Europeans, and establishment of Tobagonians as largely subsistence farmers (Minahan, 2002: 1817). Tobago was granted its own legislature, even after becoming administratively joined to Trinidad in 1888 and was administered separately after becoming part of the Trinidad and Tobago colonial authority in 1899 (Minahan, 2002: 1817-18; Roth, 2015: 427).
- After WWII, Tobago hoped for a separate independence from Trinidad due to fear of becoming a junior partner in governing the new state (Roth, 2015: 427). However, this call was rejected by Trinidad and Britain. Trinidad and Tobago gained independence on 31st August 1962 under the Peoples National Movement (PNM) (Minahan, 2002: 1818)

Concessions and restrictions

- In response to growing separatist sentiment, the central government of Trinidad passed legislation that reestablished the Tobago House of Assembly in 1980, giving the Tobagonians autonomy and a level of self rule on Tobago (Minahan, 2002: 1818; Luke, 2007: 250; Roth, 2015: 428). [1980: autonomy concession]
- The above concession subdued secessionist sentiment for a time, a mood aided by the recovery of oil prices and affiliated relative economic prosperity on Tobago. However, secessionist sentiment was revived during the 1980's. The DAC, which largely represented the interests of Tobagonians, allied with the Trinidad National Alliance of Reconciliation (NAR) in 1984, with the DAC leader, A.N.R. Robinson becoming leader of the NAR and becoming Prime Minister in 1986 (Ameringer, 1992: 578). In response to the continued calls separatism and the political alliances of the Tobagonians, Tobago was granted more internal autonomy in 1987 (Minahan, 2002: 1818; Roth, 2015: 428). This provided devolution of powers in areas "such as revenue raising and collection, agriculture, industry, tourism, environmental conservation, and social services" (Britannica, nd: Online). [1987: autonomy concession]
- In 1996, the Tobago House of Assembly Act repealed and replaced the earlier act of 1980 that established a local assembly on Tobago. This had the effect of enshrining the Assembly and their funding in the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution (Dillon-Remy, 2002: Online). This is not coded as a concession as there was no meaningful change in the level of self rule for Tobago, just a reinforcement of legal protections.
- The Constitution (Amendment) (Tobago Self Government Bill, 2018), was passed and altered the constitution further to outline the vision for future governance of Tobago: "The system of government envisaged has been described as 'quasi-federal' and provides that the Tobago legislature would have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Tobago

in all matters” (Dillon-Remy, 2002: Online; Trinidad and Tobago Parliament, 2018: Online). This gives Tobago a status of equality to determine their political status, for the assembly to make laws excluding responsibility for national security, foreign affairs, and immigration, and the establishment of a Tobago Executive Council with an executive frequently invited to the central government cabinet (ConstitutionNet, 2018: Online). This is a more significant constitutional amendment that increases responsibility of the regional assembly of Tobago and establishes a semi-independent executive. [2018: autonomy concession]

- Another constitutional amendment (Tobago Self Government Bill, 2020), is awaiting approval and under review. If passed, this will provide more powers to the Tobago government, allow the creation of a Tobago civil service, and give more powers to call local elections (TT 2020).

Regional autonomy

- The establishment of the Tobago House of Assembly in 1980 marks the beginning of regional autonomy for Tobagonians (Minahan, 2002: 1818; Luke, 2007: 250; Roth, 2015: 428). This assembly was largely made up of DAC representatives from its establishment, and from 1988 by the allied NAR (Ameringer, 1992: 578). This covers the era prior to the 1987 establishment of full internal autonomy in the constitution. [1981-2020: regional autonomy]

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

- See above. [1980: establishment of regional autonomy]

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Tobagonians
<i>Scenario</i>	n:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Blacks
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	5202000

Power access

- EPR codes two groups in Trinidad and Tobago: Blacks and East Indians. East Indians are concentrated in Trinidad, whereas Blacks are on both islands. According to Minahan (2002: 1816), the Tobagonians are a West Indian nation, more closely related to the peoples of the islands to the north than to the Trinidadians of the larger island of the joint state. The Tobagonians, Minahan continues, are primarily descendants of African slaves. As such, they can be qualified as a regionalist movement of Blacks. According to EPR, Blacks had representation in the executive throughout the movement’s duration and even single-handedly dominated the national government for much of the 1970s and 1980s, and also part of the 1990s.
- The account in Minahan (2002: 1818f) suggests people from Trinidad generally had more representation in the national executive. Still, we found evidence for meaningful representation throughout the movement’s duration:
 - o Benjamin Llewellyn Basil Pitt, who represented Tobago West from 1961-1976, served in various ministerial roles including Minister of State for Tobago Affairs in the 1960s,

- Minister of National Security from 1971-1973, and Minister of Legal Affairs in 1973-1976 (<https://www.aspiringmindstandt.com/basil-pitt>).
- Arthur N.R. Robinson, who represented Tobago East between 1961 and 1981 and 1986-2000 served as Trinidad and Tobago's first Finance Minister from 1961, and subsequently served Minister of External Affairs. From 1981-1991, Robinson was Prime Minister, and in 1997 he became head of state (-2003) (http://www.caribbeanelections.com/knowledge/biography/bios/robinson_arthur.asp).
- Pamela Nicholson, who represented both Tobago East and West, had several ministerial appointments between 1987 and 1991 and was Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs 1995-98 (<http://www.ttparliament.org/members.php?mid=26&pid=10&id=PNC04>).
- Stanford Callender, who represented Tobago West, had several ministerial roles between 2001 and 2010 (<http://www.ttparliament.org/members.php?mid=26&pid=5&id=SCA01>).
- Delmon Baker, who represented Tobago West, had several ministerial appointments in 2010-2015 including the ministry of Finance.
- Eudine Job-Davis, who represented Tobago East, had ministerial appointments in 2001-2002 and 2004-2007 (<http://www.ttparliament.org/members.php?mid=26&pid=6&id=EJD01>).
- Vernella Alleyne-Toppin, who represented Tobago East, also held ministerial posts in 2010-2015.
- In 2015, Keith Rowley became PM. Rowley is from Tobago and a member of the anti-secessionist PNM (<http://www.news.gov.tt/content/dr-honourable-keith-rowley-mp#.Y5iKv3bP23A>). Based on this, we code the Tobagonians as junior partner until 2015 and senior partner thereafter.
- [1970-2015: junior partner; 2016-2020: senior partner]

Group size

- According to Minahan (2002: 1816) the Tobagonians number approx. 58,000; the WB pegs Trinidad & Tobago's population in 2002 at 1.278 mio. [0.0454]

Regional concentration

- According to Minahan (2002: 1816), the Tobagonians made up 88% of the population of Tobago in 2002 and >80% of all Tobagonians in Trinidad & Tobago lived on Tobago at the time. [regional concentration]

Kin

- We found no evidence for transborder ethnic kin >100,000. [no kin]

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