

EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Bubis

Activity: 1989-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- According to Minahan (2002: 332-333), the decolonization of Ghana in 1957 fuelled ethnic conflict in the island of Bioko (the homeland of the Bubis), then part of Spanish Guinea. The first evidence for organized activity we found is in 1958, when Bubi nationalists organized demonstrations to support demands for separation of their island from the mainland of the Spanish colony (Minahan 2002: 333). In 1963 Bioko was granted autonomy, and when Equatorial Guinea gained independence in 1968, Bioko was vested with autonomy and guaranteed representation in the national parliament. We found no evidence of a self-determination movement in the immediate post-independence phase.
- In 1973, the Bubis' autonomy was effectively revoked and in subsequent years, the Bubis faced harsh repression. According to Minahan (2002: 333), the movement re-emerged in 1989, when Bubi nationalists stepped up demands for independence. Note: the report in Minahan refers to exile nationalist organizations and remains ambiguous about whether they had already existed beforehand. We still use 1989 as the start date, which is also roughly in line with Marshall & Gurr (2003: 64), who note that the movement had been active since the early 1990s.
- It is possible that there were exile organizations even before 1989, but it does not appear as if there was any significant activity between independence and 1989 in Equatorial Guinea itself.
- According to Minahan (2002: 334), Bubi nationalist groupings remained forbidden in the early 1990s. According to Keesing's and Minahan (2002: 334), a group called the Movement for the Self-Determination of Bioko Island (MAIB) was alleged to have murdered 5 government soldiers in 1998. The group denies the allegations, saying that it advocates only peaceful means for gaining Bubi self-rule. Said group has remained active in subsequent years making claims for self-rule (Nexis), and thus the movement is coded as ongoing. [start date: 1989; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- The first organized activity of the Bubis is evident in 1958, where nationalists demanded the separation of the island of Bioko, the homeland of the group. However, after the independence of Equatorial Guinea, the island was granted substantial autonomy, and no self-determination movements were present.
- The call for independence reemerged in 1989 after the island's autonomous rights were revoked in 1973, and the group faced repressions from the government. The main group making the claims to independence is the Movimiento para la Auto-determinación de la Isla de Bioko (Movement for the Self-Determination of Bioko Island, MAIB), founded in 1993. Oil discoveries around Bioko in 1995 gave the independence movement an economic incentive (Minahan, 2002: 334; 2016: 83). [1989-2020: independence claim]

Independence claims

- See above. [start date: 1989; end date: ongoing]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Bubis is the island of Bioko off the west coast of Africa (Roth 2015: 249). We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no separatist violence above the LVIOLSD threshold and thus classify the entire movement as non-violent. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The Bubi are thought to have migrated to the island of Bioko from coastal areas of modern day Nigeria and Cameroon. Bubi legend has it that this migration occurred around 3000 years ago as a result of being pushed from the mainland by other groups. (Minahan, 2002: 330-1; 2016: 83)
- The Bubis on Bioko were first contacted by the Portuguese in 1572, who used the island as a base to raid the mainland for slaves. The island was used by European slavers and traders throughout the 18th century. Portugal ceded Bioko to Spain in 1779 as part of colonial boundary agreement. However, in 1827 Spain gave the island over to British administration. The British used the island as a base for anti-slavery operations. Between 1829- 1843, the island was used to land freed slaves, a group who would become known as the Ferdinandos. The island was returned to Spain in 1849, becoming a separate colony in 1859, and was eventually united with the mainland colony of Rio Muni in 1885 to form its modern boundaries (Minahan 2002: 332; 2016: 83).
- The island remained largely unexploited by Europeans, with active colonial rule by Spain beginning in 1900. This activity sparked resistance from local Bubis for ten years, with all resistance against Spanish rule ceasing in 1928 (Danver, 2015: 609). Systematic exploitation began in 1926, with the intention of using the volcanic rich island for plantations. However, the Bubis resisted efforts to make them the primary source of plantation labour (Minority Rights Group International, NA). Instead, the Bubis established a role in colonial society as comparatively advantaged small farmers and minor civil servants. Their position in society, religious conversion, and fear of the demographically dominant Fang group led to the Bubis largely supporting Spanish rule. With decolonization across Africa, the Bubis demonstrated in 1958 in favour of the island separating from the mainland colony and becoming a part of the Spanish state. The island gained autonomy within the colony in 1963 (Minahan 2002: 332-3; 2016: 63).
- Equatorial Guinea became independent 1968 as a federal system. The islands autonomy was guaranteed, with 1/3rd of parliamentary seats reserved for Bubis. However, the perceived favour towards the Bubis led to unrest. In response, president Macias Nguema ended all Bubi autonomy, created a one party state, and declared himself president for life. Importantly for Bubis, Roman

Catholicism was banned in 1978. Repression against the Bubis was consistent, even after the 1979 coup of Macias's nephew Obiang. Token, rigged elections have been held by the Nguema dictatorship which has been continuously repressive, including towards the Bubi. This includes restrictions to Bubi movement, a fishing ban, forced labour, and denial of political rights (Minahan 2002: 333; Vogt et al, 2015; Cederman et al, 2010).

- No concessions or restrictions were found in the ten years before the start date.

Concessions and restrictions

- The Bubis have been met with considerable ethnic discrimination (Minahan, 2002: 334; 2016: 83; Vogt et al, 2015; Cederman et al, 2010; Minority Rights Group International, Online). However, while we found ample evidence for government repression (US Department of State, 1999; Alcalde, 2021; Minahan 2002: 334; Roth, 2015: 250; US Department of State, 1999; Amnesty International, 2019), we found no evidence for concessions or restrictions of ethnic rights as defined here (i.e., concerning political self-rule or cultural rights).

Regional autonomy

- Equatorial Guinea is a de-facto one party state with the current dictator in power since 1979. There is no room of any political independence or autonomy for the Bubis, especially given the frequent violent suppression of this group. Therefore no autonomy can be coded. [no autonomy]

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Bubis
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Bubi
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	41103000

Power access

- EPR code the Bubi as Discriminated. This is confirmed the the history of repressive measures against the Bubi, and the state of political order in Equatorial Guinea at large (Vogt et al, 2015; Cederman et al, 2010). There is indication that there was a political tradition of appointing a Bubi PM, but this was removed in 2006 and was likely a symbolic position given the nature of the government of Equatorial Guinea. [1989-2020: discriminated]

Group size

- We adopt EPR's relative group size code. [0.065]

Regional concentration

- EPR codes the Bubis as regionally concentrated, but EPR applies a lower bar. Minahan (2002: 330) suggests that a majority of the Bubis live on Bioko Island, where they make up 58% of the local population. [regional concentration]

Kin

- EPR does not code transborder ethnic kin and we found no other evidence for numerically significant kin. [no kin]

Sources

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