

# NICARAGUA

## **Miskitos**

Activity: 1974-2020

### **General notes**

NA

### **Movement start and end dates**

- In 1974 Nicaraguan indigenous peoples organized to protect their rights and traditional lands through the organization of ALPROMISU (Alliance for the Progress of Miskitos and Sumus). We therefore peg the start date of the movement at 1974.
- Replacing ALPROMISU in November 1979, MISURASATA (Mascot, Rama, and Sandinista United) was formed to represent the indigenous populations' more serious grievances to the Sandinista government. Over 80 percent Miskito, MISURASATA supported claims for indigenous communal land grants and the promotion of language and culture. When the Sandinistas banned it in 1981, the group began launching attacks on the Sandinista military from Honduras, with funding from the CIA and in collaboration with the Contras. The Sandinistas responded by forcibly relocating 8,500 Miskitos and destroying as many as 100 villages.
- Non-zero MAR protest scores for 1990-2006 indicate that the movement continued to be active. The Miskitos declared independence in 2009 while subsequent protests have centered around land rights (Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Marshall & Gurr 2003; Minahan 1996, 2002; MAR). The movement is ongoing (Minahan 2016: 275; Roth 2015: 443). [start date: 1974; end date: ongoing]

### **Dominant claim**

- Miskito interests were represented by two organization. First, the Alliance for the Progress of Miskitos and Sumus (ALPROMISU) was created in 1974. ALPROMISU demanded the recognition of Miskito communal land (Baracco 2011: 119). In 1979, ALPROMISU was replaced by Mascot, Rama, and Sandinista United (MISURASATA). Over 80 percent Miskito, MISURASATA supported claims for indigenous communal land grants and the promotion of language and culture (Plan of Action 1981). MISURASATA also wanted to take over administrative functions in the governmental department established to govern the Atlantic coast (Baracco 2011: 126). These first years are coded with a claim for regional autonomy. [1974-1981: autonomy claim]
- In 1981, when the Sandinista government claimed to have discovered a CIA plot to create an independent Miskito state ("Red Christmas"), MISURASATA was banned and Miskito villages in the Coco river region were destroyed and its inhabitants resettled. The MISURASATA leadership and many of its followers fled to Honduras launching attacks with the ultimate goal of overthrowing the Sandinista government (Sollis 1989: 507). The leadership of the movement soon split over the question of autonomy or independence, with the independence faction favoring the creation of an English-speaking state (Minahan 2002: 1265). The evidence for this period is ambiguous regarding the dominant claim. Baracco (2011: 151) also mentions both autonomy and independence as goals of MISURASATA. In accordance with the codebook, the more extreme claim is coded from 1982 onwards (first of January rule). [1982-1985: independence claim]
- The ceasefire in 1985, the return of refugees, the release of MISURASATA prisoners and the replacement of Sandanista officials in the Atlantic region with Miskitos, seems to have led to a deradicalization of the Miskoto claim. According to Minorities at Risk, MISURASATA began

negotiating for regional autonomy. An agreement was reached with the Statute of Autonomy for the Atlantic Coast Regions in 1987. In 1987, YATAMA (Yapti Masrika Nani - Descendants of Mother Earth) was founded as a successor to MISURASATA. YATAMA “strives for further autonomy and protection of Indian cultural and land rights”. Following the first of January rule, a claim for regional autonomy is coded from 1986 onwards.

- Claims for independence reemerged and were voiced most loudly in 2009, when the indigenous council of elders officially declared the secession of the Atlantic coast from Nicaragua (BBC 2009). However, this seems to be a minority only, with the majority of Miskitos still favor autonomy (Rogers 2009). In recent years, the most important claims have related to the protection of land rights against illegal settlers (MRGI; Onda 2022). [1986-2020: autonomy claim]

### **Independence claims**

- There are two periods of independence claims. The first is the one coded above. Secondly, there is also the period of a minor independence claim from the indigenous council of elders declaring the secession of the Atlantic coast from Nicaragua (BBC 2009). The independence claim appears to have petered out in subsequent years, so we code the end of the second phase in 2019 in keeping with the ten-years of inactivity rule. [start date 1: 1981; end date 1: 1985; start date 2: 2009; end date 2: 2019]

### **Irredentist claims**

NA

### **Claimed territory**

- The territory the Miskitos claim corresponds to the current North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACN) and South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RAAS), previously known as the Mosquito Coast (Roth 2015: 443f). We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database (GADM 2019).

### **Sovereignty declarations**

- In 2009, the indigenous council of elders officially declared the secession of the Atlantic coast from Nicaragua (BBC 2009). [2009: independence declaration]

### **Separatist armed conflict**

- Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019) suggest that a civil war broke out in 1981 between MISURATA and the government over land rights and territorial self-determination. SSW estimate the number of deaths at around 500-1,000 killed and around 10,000 indigenous replaced. MISURATA included both Sumos and Miskitos, but we could not find disaggregated casualty rates. Yet, according to the SSW coding notes, MISURATA is over 80% Miskito while the remaining 20% is mostly Sumo and Rama.
- In 1982, a second, ideological civil war broke out between the left-wing Nicaraguan government (Sandinistas) and right-wing rebels known as Contras. According to SSW, the Miskitos were involved in this conflict as well and it is difficult to separate the two episodes. EPR suggests that the Sumos were involved as well, which appears to be supported by UCDP/PRIO. According to SSW and UCDP/PRIO, indigenous people constituted only a minority of the Contra fighters; however, much of the fighting took place in the north and north-east, where Miskitos and Sumos are located. We could not find disaggregated casualty data, but based on this account code

continued violence. This conflict was primarily over government, though the indigenous peoples also sought autonomy; therefore, we apply an ambiguous code from 1982 onward. According to the L.A. Times, Miskitos were involved in the war until the very end, i.e., 1990 (L.A. Times 1990). Total deaths are estimated at between 10,000-43,000. Casualty figures for Miskitos and Sumos specifically are not clear. Given the Sumos' smaller size, we apply an LVIOLSD code while for the Miskitos we use HVIOLSD.

- An ongoing source of conflict between Miskito and peasants settling illegally in their lands. Tensions between the two groups escalated in 2015, leaving a number of people dead including two Miskito leaders, Rosmeldo Solórzano and Mario Leman Müller, while many others experienced aggressive tactics and intimidation (MRGI; Onda Local 2022). In 2017, the indigenous rights organization Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (CEJUDHCAN) reported that, 32 indigenous people had been killed in land rights conflicts over the past 5 years and 66 people were missing (MRGI). By 2020, the number of killed had climbed to 40 (Guardian 2020). Much of the violence is perpetrated by settlers and not the government. Due to this, and also because the 25-deaths threshold was never met, we do not code LVIOLSD.
- [1974-1980: NVIOLSD; 1981-1990: HVIOLSD; 1991-2020: NVIOLSD]

## Historical context

- Originally migrating to the Caribbean lowlands from present-day Colombia, the Miskitos fiercely resisted Spanish colonization in the early sixteenth century and successfully prevented the Spanish colonization of their homeland. The Miskitos established good relations with the English, who established a colony on Providence Island in 1630. The status as an English ally was institutionalized in 1687, when the Miskito kingdom was established. In the context of the British-Spanish warfare of the eighteenth century, there were a series of clashes between the English protectorate of Mosquito Coast and the Spanish colonial power. The contestation continued also after Nicaraguan and Honduran independence from Spain in 1835. With the support of the United States, the two newly independent states claimed the Caribbean coast from the United Kingdom. With the Bulwer-Clayton Treaty of 1850, the northern part of the Mosquito Coast was ceded to Honduras, the southern part to Nicaragua. The Miskito were promised political, religious, and linguistic autonomy by their new states. However, autonomy only lasted until 1894, when Nicaraguan president Zelaya occupied the Miskito territory, deposed the king, and renamed the region after himself. During the Somoza years, the Miskitos were largely ignored by the center. The Miskitos maintained their traditional lifestyle and remained English-speaking. The Sandinista approach and their anti-American ideology, was mostly rejected by the Miskitos (Minahan 2002: 1264).

## Concessions and restrictions

- After the revolution of 1979, the Sandinistas, who desperately needed the natural resources of the Miskito territory, implemented a plan to integrate the Miskitos into the Sandinista state (Minahan 2002: 1264). The new regime launched modernization and educational campaigns. According to Street (1984), the Spanish literacy programs ('Literacy Crusade') was primarily a way for the Sandinistas to promote their political project. The new regime refused to recognize the independent cultures of the Miskito and other indigenous groups in the region (Minorities at Risk). This constituted a downgrade from the situation under the Somoza regime, which largely ignored the Miskitos. The Literary Crusade was started in 1980. Furthermore, the new regime denied indigenous land rights, which historically had at least de-facto been accepted (Hannum 1996: 208; Minorities at Risk Project). [1980: cultural rights & autonomy restriction]
- MISURASATA boycotted the 'Literacy Crusade' programs in Spanish and forced the government to develop materials in Miskitu, English and other native languages. As a consequence, the government granted the right to be educated in one's native language through

the official decree 255 in 1980 (Wortham 2011: 192; Cultural Survival 1989; Minorities at Risk). [1980: cultural rights concession]

- In 1981, when the Sandinista government claimed to have discovered a CIA plot to create an independent Miskito state (“Red Christmas”), MISURASATA was banned and Miskito villages in the Coco river region were destroyed and its inhabitants forcefully resettled to artificially create villages designed to be more easily controlled by the Sandinista regime. 85,000 refugees were driven from their homes (Minahan 2002: 1265) and more than 20,000 Miskitos escaped into Honduras (Minorities at Risk Project). The forced resettlement – the denial to live on a given territory - constitutes a restriction of group autonomy according to the codebook. [1981: autonomy restriction]
  - o Note: This restriction appears to have occurred *after* the onset of separatist violence in 1981 (Dennis 1993: 216).
- In 1984, the Sandinistas and MISURATA, the main indigenous organization, began negotiations on an autonomy solution. MISURATA dropped out of the negotiations in 1985, but the autonomy process continued (Hannum 1996: 224). The 1986 constitution recognizes the Nicaraguan people as “multi-ethnic” and provides for autonomous indigenous governments to be established by law. In 1987, the Sandinista government adopted the Statute of Autonomy for the Atlantic Coast Regions which promised autonomy, land rights, powers over natural resources, and the status of regional official languages for indigenous languages as well as certain educational guarantees (Hannum 1996: 212, 216-217, 224; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000: 198; Larson & Lewis-Mendoza 2012; Sollis 1989: 515). We code an autonomy concession in 1986, the year of the constitutional change. [1986: autonomy concession]
- In 2003, the Autonomy Statute, also referred to as Law 28, was complemented and reinforced by the Law of Communal Property Regime of the Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Rivers Bocay, Coco, Indio and Maiz, also known as Law 445. The new law regulated the communal property regime, and guaranteed the full recognition of indigenous land rights, including the removal of illegal settlers (Oakland Institute 2020). The titling of indigenous territories has advanced rapidly since, with two million hectares titled by mid-2010 (Larson and Lewis-Mendoza 2012). [2003: autonomy concession]
- According to a detailed report from 2020, Law 445 has not been fully implemented, however, and the government has failed to protect indigenous communities from constant streams of illegal settlers and incursions by mining companies. According to the same report, the government has actively undermined the protections provided to indigenous peoples in 1987 and 2003 in recent years, and facilitated illegal displacements, inter alia by providing mining concessions on indigenous territories. A particularly important development was in 2017, when the Nicaraguan government increased the total land under mining concession from about 1,200,000 ha to 2,600,000 ha – over 20 percent of the country’s area. A significant part of the land opened up to mining belonged to indigenous peoples (Oakland Institute 2020). [2017: autonomy restriction]

## Regional autonomy

- The Miskitos were promised a measure of autonomy in 1987 (see above). In 1990, two North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACN) and the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (SACN) were set up for Nicaragua’s “Atlantic” indigenous peoples, including the Miskitos (Larson & Lewis-Mendoza 2012). Therefore, we code autonomy from 1991 onwards. [1991-2020: regional autonomy]
  - o It should be noted that this coding is ambiguous because the Nicaraguan government has not fully implemented the 1987 autonomy statute (Minority Rights Group International; IWIGA 2011; Unger 2010; Minorities at Risk Project; UNDP 2005). According to Larson and Lewis-Mendoza (2012: 183), it took 16 years for the implementing regulations to be passed. In these 16 years, the central government “resisted granting any significant decision-making power or funds to the regional councils or governments, while continuing to exploit the region’s natural resources.” Another example is that in 1990, the Violeta Chamorro government began to reassert central control over the

Atlantic coast through the Regional Development Institute, and the central government – in violation of the autonomy statute – continued “its unilateral handling of the Caribbean Coast natural resources”. Another example is that the regulation of communal property was not ratified until 2003.

### **De facto independence**

NA

### **Major territorial changes**

- [1990: establishment of regional autonomy]

### **EPR2SDM**

<i>Movement</i>	Miskitos
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Miskitos
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	9303000

### **Power access**

- We follow EPR. [1974-2020: powerless]

### **Group size**

- We follow EPR. [0.035]

### **Regional concentration**

- In their two autonomous regions (RAAS and RACN), the Miskitos make up 52% of the population. This includes almost the entire Miskito population in Nicaragua. [regionally concentrated]

### **Kin**

- According to Minahan (2002: 1261), there are approximately 25,000 Miskitos in Honduras – according to the 2013 census the number is 80,000. This is too small to be coded here. [no kin]

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## **Sumos (Mayangnas)**

Activity: 1974-2020

### **General notes**

NA

### **Movement start and end dates**

- The relevant organization representing Mayangna interests is the Sumu Kalpapakna Wahaini Lani (SUKAWALA – “National Organization of Indigenous Mayangna Communities of Nicaragua”). SUKAWALA was founded in 1974, hence the start date. SUKAWALA has advocated, among other things, for the Nicaraguan government to defend indigenous land rights; they protest the lack of initiative and action on the titling of the Indigenous Mayangna (Sumu) communities’ territories, guaranteeing the legal control of property and recognition of the rights of the use, administration, and management of the traditional lands and natural resources, by means of their boundary, demarcation and titling (Baracco 2011; Greer et al. 2010; IWGIA 2011; Lexis Nexis).
- The Nicaraguan government has been accused failing to protect indigenous peoples and their land rights from violent attacks that frequently go unpunished (Munguia 2020).
- The Mayangana have continued to make claims for land rights in recent years (Silva 2014). Arisio Genaro Selso, the current President of Mayangna Indigenous Territorial Government, has spoken out against the lack of action taken by the Nicaraguan government to protect land that belongs to the indigenous peoples from deforestation and illegal settlers (Sefton, 2021a; Sefton 2021b). [start date: 1974; end date: ongoing]

### **Dominant claim**

- Various sources indicate that the Mayangnas movement lobbies for land rights and regional autonomy (Barocco 2011; Hannum 1996; Greer et al. 2010; Macdonald and Wetterslev 2020; Unger 2010). [1974-2020: autonomy claim]

### **Independence claims**

NA

### **Irredentist claims**

NA

### **Claimed territory**

- The Mayangna Nation’s homeland is mainly located in the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve and at times there are overlapping claims to the land made by neighboring Miskito communities (Macdonald and Wetterslev 2020; Sefton 2021a). We were unable to find a clear definition of the territory to which the Sumos’ claims are tied, however. 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.



## **Sovereignty declarations**

NA

## **Separatist armed conflict**

- Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019) suggest that a civil war broke out in 1981 between MISURATA and the government over land rights and territorial self-determination. SSW estimate the number of deaths at around 500-1,000 killed and around 10,000 indigenous replaced. MISURATA included both Sumos and Miskitos, but we could not find disaggregated casualty rates. Yet, according to the SSW coding notes, MISURATA is over 80% Miskito while the remaining 20% is mostly Sumo and Rama.
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- An ongoing source of conflict between Miskito and peasants settling illegally in their lands. Tensions between the two groups escalated in 2015, leaving a number of people dead including two Miskito leaders, Rosmeldo Solórzano and Mario Leman Müller, while many others experienced aggressive tactics and intimidation (MRGI; Onda Local 2022). In 2017, the indigenous rights organization Center for Justice and Human Rights of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (CEJUDHCAN) reported that, 32 indigenous people had been killed in land rights conflicts over the past 5 years and 66 people were missing (MRGI). By 2020, the number of killed had climbed to 40 (Guardian 2020). Much of the violence is perpetrated by settlers and not the government. Due to this, and also because the 25-deaths threshold was never met, we do not code LVIOLSD.
- [1974-1980: NVIOLSD; 1981-1990: LVIOLSD; 1991-2020: NVIOLSD]

## **Historical context**

- Nicaragua's Atlantic coastal indigenous peoples, including the Miskitos but also the Mayangnas, had far-reaching autonomy until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British established colonial rule. The semi-autonomous colonial entity was dominated by the Miskitos, and the Mayangnas faced harsh repression and discrimination (Hannum 1996: 204). In 1894 Nicaragua annexed the territory, and the Miskitos lost their autonomous status (though some communal land grand titles had been granted by 1905, see Minorities at Risk Project). Mestizo immigration and assimilation pressure followed, though the Atlantic coast region continued to be relatively isolated from the rest of Nicaragua and many indigenous communities continued to exercise de-facto control over their territories (Minority Rights Group International; Hannum 1996: 205-207).

## **Concessions and restrictions**

- Nicaragua's inaccessible coastal region had been relatively isolated and left to its own devices until 1979, when the Sandinistas took over government. The Sandinistas aimed to extend the

state's reach into the region; furthermore, they denied indigenous land rights, which historically had at least de-facto been accepted (Hannum 1996: 208; Minorities at Risk Project). Moreover, the Sandinistas' literacy campaign, initiated in 1980, had an exclusive focus on Spanish, which alienated indigenous groups, in particular the Miskitos, according to Minority Rights Group International (also see Hewitt & Cheetham 2000: 198). The imposition of Spanish does not seem to constitute a new policy, however, since there had been long-standing assimilationist pressure and policies. Still, the combination of the literacy campaign with the land rights policy and the centralizing tendencies of the Sandinistas make us code restrictions. [1980: cultural rights restriction; autonomy restriction]

- MISURASATA boycotted the 'Literacy Crusade' programs in Spanish and forced the government to develop materials in Miskitu, English and other native languages. As a consequence, the government granted the right to be educated in one's native language through the official decree 255 in 1980 (Wortham 2011: 192; Cultural Survival 1989; Minorities at Risk). [1980: cultural rights concession]
- In 1984, the Sandinistas and MISURATA, the main indigenous organization, began negotiations on an autonomy solution, the Sandinistas' policy was reversed. MISURATA dropped out of the negotiations in 1985, but the autonomy process continued (Hannum 1996: 224). The 1986 constitution recognizes the Nicaraguan people as "multi-ethnic" and provides for autonomous indigenous governments to be established by law. In 1987, the Sandinista government adopted the Statute of Autonomy for the Atlantic Coast Regions which promised autonomy, land rights, powers over natural resources, and the status of regional official languages for indigenous languages as well as certain educational guarantees (Hannum 1996: 212, 216-217, 224; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000: 198; Larson & Lewis-Mendoza 2012; Sollis 1989: 515). We code an autonomy concession in 1986, the year of the constitutional change. [1986: autonomy concession]
- In Mayagna (Sumo) Awas Tingni Community v. Nicaragua (2001) brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), the Awas Tingni (a Mayangna community) challenged Nicaragua's failure to demarcate their communal lands and the granting of a timber concession on the community's land without consulting them. The court ruled in favor of the indigenous people. After a protracted struggle to ensure implementation, in 2008, the Nicaraguan formally demarcated and titled 73,394 hectares of land to the Mayangna community (Minority Rights Group; Cultural Survival 2020). We code the concession in 2001, when the concession was initiated. [2001: autonomy concession]
- In 2003, the Autonomy Statute, also referred to as Law 28, was complemented and reinforced by the Law of Communal Property Regime of the Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and of the Rivers Bocay, Coco, Indio and Maiz, also known as Law 445. The new law regulated the communal property regime, and guaranteed the full recognition of indigenous land rights, including the removal of illegal settlers (Oakland Institute 2020). The titling of indigenous territories has advanced rapidly since, with two million hectares titled by mid-2010 (Larson and Lewis-Mendoza 2012). [2003: autonomy concession]
- According to a detailed report from 2020, Law 445 has not been fully implemented, however, and the government has failed to protect indigenous communities from constant streams of illegal settlers and incursions by mining companies. According to the same report, the government has actively undermined the protections provided to indigenous peoples in 1987 and 2003 in recent years, and facilitated illegal displacements, inter alia by providing mining concessions on indigenous territories. A particularly important development was in 2017, when the Nicaraguan government increased the total land under mining concession from about 1,200,000 ha to 2,600,000 ha – over 20 percent of the country's area. A significant part of the land opened up to mining belonged to indigenous peoples (Oakland Institute 2020). [2017: autonomy restriction]

## Regional autonomy

- The Sumos (Mayangnas) were promised a measure of autonomy in 1987 (see above). In 1990, two North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACN) and the South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (SACN) were set up for Nicaragua's "Atlantic" indigenous peoples,

including the Sumos (Larson & Lewis-Mendozo 2012). Therefore, we code autonomy from 1991 onwards. [1991-2020: regional autonomy]

- It should be noted that this coding is ambiguous because the Nicaraguan government has not fully implemented the 1987 autonomy statute (Minority Rights Group International; IWIGA 2011; Unger 2010; Minorities at Risk Project). According to Larson and Lewis-Mendoza (2012: 183), it took 16 years for the implementing regulations to be passed. In these 16 years, the central government “resisted granting any significant decision-making power or funds to the regional councils or governments, while continuing to exploit the region’s natural resources.” Another example is that in 1990, the Violeta Chamorro government began to reassert central control over the Atlantic coast through the Regional Development Institute, and the central government – in violation of the autonomy statute – continued “its unilateral handling of the Caribbean Coast natural resources”. Another example is that the regulation of communal property was not ratified until 2003.

### **De facto independence**

NA

### **Major territorial changes**

- [1990: establishment of regional autonomy]

### **EPR2SDM**

<i>Movement</i>	Sumos (Mayangnas)
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Sumos
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	9305000

### **Power access**

- We follow EPR. [1974-2020: powerless]

### **Group size**

- We follow EPR. [0.002]

### **Regional concentration**

- According to MRGI, the Sumos live in an isolated area in northern Nicaragua: “There are now approximately 8,000 Mayagna consisting of three separate peoples each with a distinct identity. These are the Twahka, the Panamaka and the Ulwa all of whom still speak related dialects of a common Mayagna language and mainly live in villages along the rivers of the RAAN [Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte] in some of the region's most isolated areas.” GeoEPR also suggests that the Sumos are concentrated. [regionally concentrated]

## Kin

- No kin according to EPR, though it has to be added that there are small Sumos communities across the border in Honduras (approx. 1,000, see Joshua Project). This does not cross the numeric threshold, of course. We found no other evidence for a larger group that would qualify as kin. [no kin]

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