

# ARGENTINA

## **Indigenous Peoples**

Activity: 1970-2020

### **General notes**

- The indigenous population of Argentina consists of more than 31 different ethnic groups amounting to over 600,000 indigenous persons or 1.5% of the total population (Girardin 2021: 63). According to Minorities at Risk, these tribes include the Collas, Chiriguano, Tobas, Mapudungun, Guaranies, Wichi, Mapuches, and Selk'namgon, and the Tehuelches. One of the largest groups, the Mapuche, have a population of ca 100,000 (MRGI). The indigenous peoples tend to be religious, and practice a combination of traditional cultural religions and Christianity due to a history of evangelicalism in indigenous areas. These native tribes are not well integrated into Argentinian society, and those who have sought employment in urban areas continue to live in the outskirts of the country. Those who do not travel to urban areas live in extreme isolation in rural areas where several groups continue to practice their hunter-gatherer or nomadic traditions. As a result, the indigenous tribes maintain their own languages and religions, and generally know very little Spanish.

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

- From the 1970s, the indigenous peoples of Argentina have fought for land rights as well as formal recognition of their language and the freedom to name their children using indigenous languages. The Mapuche tribe has been active in fighting for autonomy so that they might unite with Mapuche people living in Chile. Several organizations exist to advance the aims of the indigenous peoples. These include the Coordinating Commission of Indigenous Institutions (CCIIRA) formed in 1970, which later became the Indigenous Association of Argentina (AIRA), as well as the Indigenous Federation of Chaco, the Indigenous Federation of Tucuman, and the Indigenous Federation of Neuquina. Based on the establishment of CCIIRA in 1970, we code the start of a self-determination movement in 1970.
- Reports of land rights movements by the Forest Peoples Programme and Amnesty International suggest that the movement remained active in subsequent years. Additional evidence comes from non-zero MAR protest scores.
- Various sources report continued frictions over the impact of oil and gas exploration on indigenous communities' land rights, suggesting the movement was ongoing as of 2020 (Amnesty International 2003, 2019; Forest Peoples Programmes 2009; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; HRW 2020; MAR; Open Democracy 2017. USDS 2016; Freedom House 2017; BTI 2016). [start date: 1970; end date: ongoing]
  - o Note: see Hewitt & Cheetham (2000: 185) for a short overview of the claims and status of Mapuches in Argentina.

### **Dominant claim**

- The indigenous claim for increased self-determination is represented by several organizations: Coordinating Commission of Indigenous Institutions (CCIIRA), which later renamed the Indigenous Association of Argentina (AIRA), the Indigenous Federation of Chaco, the Indigenous Federation of Tucuman, and the Indigenous Federation of Neuquina (representing Mapuche Indians). According to Minorities at Risk, CCIIRA and AIRA primarily advocated indigenous land rights. This is confirmed by point 3 of the objectives of AIRA. Land rights is also the primary goal of the Chaco and the Mapuche, who demand autonomy in order to unite with

their kin in neighboring Chile. Minority Rights Group International and Minahan (2002: 1185) also note that the Mapuche claim an “autonomous status”. Minahan (2016: 260) suggests that militant Mapuche nationalists have adopted a plan for an independent Mapuche state called Wallmapu, but the autonomy/land rights claims is dominant. [1970-2020: autonomy claim]

### **Independence claims**

- Minahan (2016: 260) suggests that militant Mapuche nationalists have adopted a plan for an independent Mapuche state called Wallmapu during the 2010s. However, the party making this claim highlight the claim as being autonomous within Chile (MRGI). More generally, various sources suggest that claims center around self determination broadly defined as cultural and land rights (MRGI; UNPO 2018; Hewitt and Cheetham 2000: 185). [no independence claims]

### **Irredentist claims**

- There is strong pan-Mapuche identity with kin within Chile (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003: 21), with it noted above that they aim to unite with this group. However, this does not constitute irredentism as it is about unification with the kin group and not the state of Chile. [no irredentist claims]

### **Claimed territory**

- One of the largest groups associated with this movement are the Mapuche, who have made claims for their traditional territory, Wallmapu. The term was coined in the 1990s and has become more popular since, but Wallmapu’s exact territorial contours are ambiguous. Broadly, Wallmapu includes Gulumapu and Puelmapu in the southern Argentine province of Chubut. However, the territorial claim of this umbrella group also includes claims by other groups. We were unable to find a specific definition of the territory claimed by all indigenous groups. We therefore flag this territorial claim as ambiguous and code it based on the group’s settlement area as indicated by the GeoEPR dataset, which serves as an approximation.

### **Sovereignty declarations**

NA

### **Separatist armed conflict**

- Though there were deaths resulting from forced displacement and subsequent protests, deaths do not reach the 25 deaths per year threshold and thus the entire movement is coded NVIOLSD. [NVIOLSD]

### **Historical context**

- The indigenous population of Argentina consists of more than 31 different ethnic groups amounting to over 600,000 indigenous persons or 1.5% of the total population (Girardin 2021: 63). They inhabit what outsiders often have termed *el desierto*: the regions of Pampas, Patagonia, and the Gran Chaco. To ‘civilize’ these areas, the Argentinian state initiated large military campaigns, land expropriation, mass European immigration, and enforced agrarian capitalism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cordillo and Hirsch 2003: 4). In the 1940s and 1950s, President Juan Perón changed the indigenous people’s minority rights for the better, removing the slave-like

conditions and wages of rural indigenous workers and reducing the authoritarian control of so-called 'hacienda owners' (Van Cott 2005: 187). In the 1960s, the state's indigenous policy became subject of dispute between the regional and central levels of government, with the former level growing more influential (*ibid.*).

### Concessions and restrictions

- In 1976, following the collapse of the Isabel Perón government, the now robust indigenous movement was crushed, its leaders jailed, and its organizations dismantled (Sérbin 1981: 425–30). The new regime instigated a policy of repressive measures that “selectively targeted the indigenous movement” (Girardin 2021: 64). Beyond restricting the SDM’s freedom to organize, the regime began “an active attempt by the state to reconstitute old hegemonic narratives about indigenous groups” (Cordillo and Hirsch 2003: 18). It is possible that this changed the indigenous people’s minority rights for the worse. As one study notes, the regime “cut off the achievements gained by popular movements in general and Indian [*sic!*] organisations in particular” (Balazote and Radovich 1999: 1). Yet, we were unable to find a concrete policy measure. We do not code a restriction.
- After the fall of the military regime in 1983, a period of active mobilization for greater rights and autonomy followed. SDM lobbying culminated in the passing and implementation, in 1989, of *Ley de Protección y Apoyo a las Comunidades Indígenas* (“Law for the Protection and Support of Indigenous Communities”). The bill was a landmark victory for the SDM, fulfilling many of the demands made by its various organizations (Balazote and Radovich 1999: 3). Notably, it created the *Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas* (INAI) – a unified, autonomous institution to deal with indigenous issues (Cordillo and Hirsch 2003: 18). The bill thereby increased the SDM’s cultural autonomy; however, the change did not come in the form of regional autonomy but increased cultural rights. [1989: cultural rights concession]
- In 1994, the Argentinian constitution was reformed. After successful SDM lobbying, it ended up including, in Article 75, an explicit validation of indigenous rights. The Article stipulates, *inter alia*, that the state: “Guarantee[s] the respect of their identity and the right for a bilingual and intercultural education” and “recognize[s] the [legal status] of their communities, the collective possession and ownership of the lands they traditionally occupy” (Cordillo and Hirsch 2003: 19). As these were fundamental issues around which the SDM mobilized – rights which had not hitherto been recognized through law – the 1994 amendment increased the indigenous people’s cultural rights status, including linguistic and land-ownership rights (see also Balazote and Radovich 1999). However, due to continued land seizures (New York Times 2016), we only code a cultural rights concession and not a concession regarding land rights. [1994: cultural rights concession]
  - o The Argentinian government has been complicit in seizing indigenous lands, despite having passed laws preventing such actions. For example, the Forest Peoples Programme notes, “[e]xcessive police actions in February and March 2007, which include using tear gas, shooting rubber bullets and beating indigenous women, children, and men, resulted in the displacement of 22 families, the burning and destruction of 15 houses, and the damage and theft of other structures and personal belongings” (Forest Peoples Programme 12/1/2009). Similar forced evictions occurred on September 17, 2009, and October 12, 2009. Amnesty International has reported extensively on the treatment towards indigenous peoples, noting that they “have been treated like second class citizens, subjected to violence, intimidation and discrimination with their human rights ignored” (Amnesty International 8/9/2013). In particular, Amnesty International reports that indigenous tribes are not consulted on developmental projects that take place on indigenous lands and exploit resources on which the indigenous peoples depend (also see Freedom House 2017).
- In 2006, following large-scale mobilization from the Ranquel indigenous community, the Argentinian government passed a law on land rights that secured indigenous people special rights to land where they have traditionally resided. The law also suspended all planned evictions of indigenous people, and a fund was created to aid the locals with legal fees (Ministerio de Justicia

y Derechos Humanos 2006; see also New York Times 2016). However, as one report notes, “Shortly after its adoption this law was converted into a dead letter as members of the Diaguita indigenous community of the Tucumán Province were subjected to violent forced evictions” (Forest Peoples Programme 2009). The report further notes that “the Government promised a number of constructive actions, but they were not fully carried out” (*ibid.*). Evictions of this part were nothing new (New York Times 2016), so we do not code a restriction; however, they do suggest that the 2006 law change led to limited change on the ground. Indigenous peoples’ influence on political decision-making has not increased in recent years with multiple sources claiming that indigenous communities face huge difficulties in having their constitutional rights converted into practice (Amnesty International 2019, Human Rights Watch 2017). Therefore, we do not code the 2006 law as a concession.

- Similar to the above law, the governmental body the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (INAI), started a survey on indigenous territories in 2006 in order to enhance the land titling process for indigenous populations (a reform process by which individuals and families are given formal land rights for land that they have customarily or traditionally held). However, there have been significant delays and few concessions to indigenous land holders have been made (HRW 2020). We do not code a concession.

### **Regional autonomy**

NA

### **De facto independence**

NA

### **Major territorial changes**

NA

### **EPR2SDM**

<i>Movement</i>	Indigenous Peoples
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Indigenous peoples
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	16002000

### **Power access**

- We draw data on central state power access from EPR. [1970-1975: powerless; 1976-1983: discriminated; 1984-2020: powerless]

### **Group size**

- We draw data on relative group size from EPR. [0.015]

## Regional concentration

- EPR codes Argentina's indigenous peoples as regionally concentrated, but EPR applies a lower bar. MAR, which uses a definition closer to ours, also codes regional concentration but notes that indigenous people do not have a regional base, perhaps because different indigenous groups live in different parts of the country. MRGI suggests that the three largest indigenous groups in Argentina - the Mapuche, the Toba, and the Wichi/Mataco – all have their own regional bases, but also notes that many of their members live in other areas of Argentina. Minahan (2002: 1180) suggests that the Mapuche, the largest group associated with this movement, are regionally concentrated in a large area combining parts of Chile and Argentina, in which they make up 76% of inhabitants and where around 85% of all Mapuche live. However, the Mapuche make up only around a third of the country's total of 600,000 indigenous group members. Overall, while regional concentration is clearly given for certain tribes, the indigenous groups as a whole cannot be considered regionally concentrated. [not concentrated]

## Kin

- There are more than a million Mapuche in Chile according to Minahan (2002: 1180). EPR in addition codes ethnic kin in Bolivia and Paraguay. [kin in adjoining country]

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