

SOUTH SUDAN

Equatorians

Activity: 2017-2020

General notes

- Equatoria is one of South Sudan's three big regions, which spans the southern third of the country and includes Juba, the country's capital (Boswell 2021).

Movement start and end dates

- Equatoria is home to several ethnic minorities including the Azande, the Bari, the Didinga, the Toposa, and several others while the country's largest ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Nuer, live elsewhere. An Equatorian identity and separatist sentiment has started to develop after the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement, which had given a degree of autonomy to South Sudan as a whole. Most of the power in the south has historically been held by the Dinka, and Equatorians remained marginalized in the SPLM/A power structure that control after 2005 (Boswell 2021).
- When civil war broke out in South Sudan in 2013, most Equatorian politicians shied away from involvement and they were subsequently excluded from peace talks. In 2017, an Equatorian general in the national army – Thomas Cirillo Swaka – broke off and declared his own insurgency in the region (International Crisis Group 2021). Among other things, Cirillo made claims for the federalization of South Sudan and autonomy for Equatoria.
- More specifically, Cirillo, an ethnic Bari, formed the National Salvation Front/Movement (NAS) in March 2017 (UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia). According to UCDP, NAS' main goal has been to increase Equatorians' influence at the center; however, NAS has also made claims for increased decentralization and federalization (also see Boswell 2021). NAS has a website on which they explain their claim for federalism (NAS n.d.). According to UCDP, the group was initially operating in Central Equatoria state, but later spread to East and West Equatoria states. NAS remained active as of 2020.
- There are some indications that the start date could be coded before 2017, but the evidence is not clear. Specifically, according to Boswell (2021: 5), Equatorian leaders had started talking about federalism around 2014. Furthermore, Boswell suggests that first demands for decentralization within south Sudan were made as early as 1981 (p. 10), and that there were several regional Equatoria conferences in 2001, 2002, 2011, 2013, and 2014 which discussed decentralization and even confederal solutions (p. 9). However, Boswell suggests that attendees did not come to much agreement on what exactly it is they were demanding, and we found no clear evidence for a political organization making such claims. NAS was the first organization to more clearly articulate previously blurry and ill-defined demands for autonomy for Equatoria.¹ [start date: 2017; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- NAS aims for decentralization and a federal South Sudan, whereby it is though not fully clear whether the goal is to have a single autonomous region (a proposal known as Kokara), or three autonomous sub-divisions (i.e., in keeping with the current administrative structure: Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, and Western Equatoria) (Boswell 2021; International Crisis Group 2021; UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia). [autonomy claim]

¹ Personal communication with Naomi Pendle, May 24, 2023.

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The claim refers to Equatoria region, which consists of three states: Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, and Western Equatoria. For a map of the claimed territory, see Boswell (2021: 4). We code this claim using GIS data on administrative units from GADM.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- According to UCDP/PRIO, NAS was involved in low-intensity armed conflict in 2018-2021 (around 220 battle-related deaths in total). The coding notes suggest that NAS was involved from the start in 2017, but suggests that deaths were too limited. In addition, UCDP/PRIO records significant non-state clashes with SPLM/A – IO, that is, the Nuer/Machar rebel group, starting in 2018. We code this violence as ambiguous due to mixed motives (the rebels were also seeking more influence at the center; see e.g. Boswell 2021; UCDP/PRIO). [2017-2018: NVIOLSD; 2019-ongoing: LVIOLSD]

Historical context

- The 1972 Addis Ababa agreement gave south Sudan a measure of autonomy; however, Equatorians remained relatively sidelined as most power was held by the Dinka and, to a lesser extent, the Nuer (International Crisis Group 2021: 3). Equatorians remained similarly marginalized in the SPLM/A power structure that took control after 2005, including after South Sudan's independence in 2011 (Boswell 2021). As a result of the 2015 peace agreement, the number of states in South Sudan increased from 10 to 28 as part of a divide-and-rule tactic; yet, given that South Sudan's states have limited powers anyway, this is too ambiguous to be considered a restriction.

Concessions and restrictions

- In 2020, the number of states was decreased to 10 again. We do not code this as a concession because South Sudan's states kept having limited powers.²

Regional autonomy

² Personal communication with Naomi Pendle, May 24, 2023.

NA
De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Equatorians
<i>Scenario</i>	1:n
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Azande; Bari; Didinga; Toposa
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	62601000; 62602000; 62621000; 62618000

Power access

- EPR codes several ethnic groups in Equatoria including the Azande, the Bari, the Didinga, and the Toposa. All are coded as powerless throughout 2017-2020. This matches with evidence from case study reports (Boswell 2021; International Crisis Group 2021). [powerless]

Group size

- The region of Equatoria is estimated to have a population of around 3.4 million (2014). This compares to the World Bank's 2014 estimate of 11.21 million for South Sudan as a whole. [0.3033]
 - o The combined group size of the four Equatorial groups EPR includes is 20%, which is broadly consistent given that EPR does not include all Equatorial groups.

Regional concentration

- We could not find precise demographic data, but the Equatorial identity is regionally based and most ethnic groups associated with Equatoria, such as the Azande or Bari, are generally described as regionally concentrated (e.g., Boswell 2021; International Crisis Group 2021). EPR codes all Equatorial groups it includes (see above) as regionally concentrated as well, though EPR does apply a lower bar. Still, it seems likely that 50% of Equatorians live in the region and that they make up an absolute majority in their region. [regionally concentrated]

Kin

- There are more than two million Azande estimated to be in the DRC and, furthermore, Minahan (2002: 271) suggests there were around 80,000 Bari in Uganda in 2002 and 40,000 in the DRC. [kin in neighboring country]

Sources

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