

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Panama

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	9	9	0	Democ:	9	9	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	18			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	PAN	CCODE	095	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	6	5	5																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		20 December 1989		Begin Date																					
				21 December 1989																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution																									
1972/1983 (1991, 1994)																									
Executive(s)																									
President Martín Torrijos Espino (PRD); directly elected 2 May 2004, 47.4%																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral: Legislative Assembly (78 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 2 May 2004) Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD): 41 Arnulfist Party (PA): 17 Solidarity Party (Solidaridad): 9 Other parties: 11																									
Judiciary																									
Supreme Court																									

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Politics in Panama have been characterized by frequent coups and rivalries among ruling families. The military has traditionally played a dominant role in national politics; however, constitutional amendments passed in 1991 formally abolished the armed forces. Public provocations by the last military dictator of Panama, General Manuel Noriega, led to an invasion by the United States on 20 December 1989, and the subsequent removal of Noriega to face drug-trafficking charges in US courts. Noriega was replaced by Guillermo Endara, who was assumed to have been the winner of the 1989 presidential election annulled by Noriega. Endara, in turn, endured a number of coup attempts, charges of corruption, and influence from drug traffickers. In May 1994 presidential elections, Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) candidate

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Ernesto Perez Balladares won a narrow victory, thus bringing Noriega's PRD party back into power. In September 1999, Mireya Moscoso of the Arnulfist Party (PA) became the first female president in Panama's history, gaining a plurality of votes in a three-candidate field. Presidential elections in May 2004 returned power once again to the PRD with the election of Martín Torrijos Espino. Martín Torrijos is the son of former military ruler and founder of the PRD, Omar Torrijos. President Torrijos has promised to investigate alleged human rights violations that took place under his father's rule and to reform the PRD to bring it more into line with democratic principals and norms.

Executive Constraints: Near Parity (6)

Panama has had a tradition of strong executive authority (as compared with the legislature's powers). The major constraints placed on executive power have come from the Panamanian military (which supported successive military regimes from 1968 to 1989) and the United States which was granted the right to intervene in Panama's affairs if necessary for the protection of the Canal Zone, in accordance with the original Canal treaty (US control of the Canal Zone formally ended on 31 December 1999). Panama's armed forces were abolished by constitutional changes adopted in 1991. The current Constitution provides broad powers for the legislature: passing national laws, ratifying international treaties, declaring war, and establishing taxes; it acts as a court in cases brought against the president, Supreme Court justices, or members of its own body. The Legislative Assembly endorses high-court justices, appoints committees, and approves any state of emergency. A two-thirds majority vote of the legislature is required to override a presidential veto. The present fluidity of party politics limits the cohesion and continuity of legislative initiatives. Although Panama's judiciary is formally independent, it is reported to be subject to corruption and political manipulation.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

Panama has a lengthy history of multi-party politics, although its parties have traditionally revolved around personalities rather than strict ideologies. In recent times, Panamanian parties have consolidated into broad-based inclusive blocs of liberal and conservative orientation. Respect for human rights and civil liberties are reported to have improved. Anti-government public protests on economic issues in 2000 were tolerated. The government respected the rights of its citizens to join any political party, propagate their views, and vote for candidates of their choice. Domestic and international observers characterized elections since the ouster of Noriega as generally free and fair; however, several local contests were marred by reports of vote buying and even voter intimidation. The government provides semi-autonomous status to several indigenous groups in their homelands. The law prohibits discrimination against any social, religious, or cultural group.