

# HGLO398A: Exploring Global Challenges & Solutions in Panama

Class 02: Panama in Focus: Country Overview Presentations



ONLY  
40

DAYS UNTIL PANAMA

## Assignment Prompt

**Description:** In this assignment, you will create a 3-minute presentation on a specific topic related to Panama, divided into three slides (1 minute per slide). The purpose of the assignment is to start exploring Panama's history, culture, politics, and global significance. You will be expected to present clear, concise, and informative content while practicing public speaking skills. Each presentation will focus on a specific aspect of Panama, and students will explore their assigned topic through research and creative presentation techniques.

**Type of Assignment:** Individual Presentation | **Points:** 30 points

*These slides contain students' presentations.*

# Panama's Geography and Biodiversity

Isthmus of Panama (NASA, n.d.)

- Ocean to land
- Changed currents
  - Gulf Stream
  - Atlantic and Pacific Oceans
- Warming of Europe
- Biodiversity
  - Opossum, armadillo, and porcupine now in North America
  - Bears, cats, dogs, horses, llamas, and raccoons now in South America



# Panama's Geography and Biodiversity

Environment

- Tropical, hot, humid climate with a long rainy season (May to January)
- Darién Gap: occasionally severe storms and forest fires
- Panama's interior: steep, rugged mountains and upland plains. Its
- Coast: plains and rolling hills
- Mesoamerican Biological Corridor
  - North American and South American plants and animals
- Biomes (About Panama, n.d.)
  - Tropical lowland humid forests
  - Tropical mountain forests
  - Tropical dry forests
  - Freshwater wetlands
  - Mangroves
  - Coral reefs
  - Tropical islands



# Panama's Geography and Biodiversity

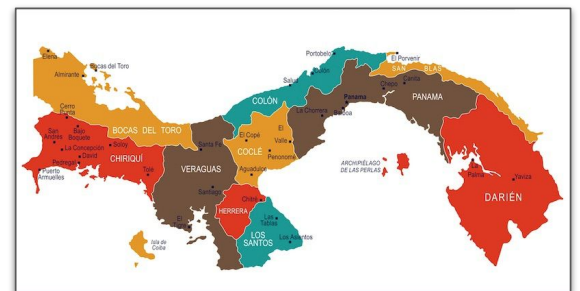
## Biodiversity

- Constant sun energy leads to more life
- Densely packed diversity
- Causes
  - Many different biomes
  - Geography and location
- Threats (Panama | UNDP Climate Change Adaptation, 2012)
  - Deforestation
  - Land degradation & soil erosion
  - Water pollution



## Overview of Panama

- **Location:** Central America - Between Costa Rica and Columbia
  - Panama has 10 provinces



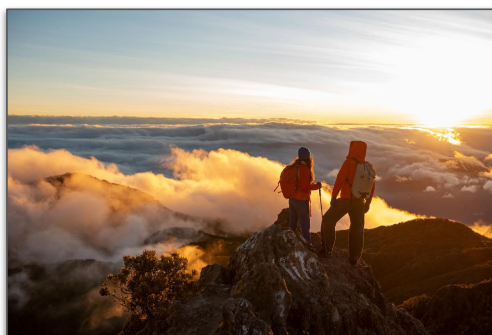
## Overview of Panama

- The **Isthmus of Panama**, which connects North and South America, has its narrowest point near the town of San Pablo in the Darién province, measuring about 30 miles (48 km) from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean.



## Overview of Panama

- **Panama is the only country in the world in which you can see the sun rise in in the Pacific Ocean and set on the Atlantic Ocean from the top of the highest point in the country, Volcan Baru.**
  - Panama runs east to west rather than north to south, like most of Central America.
  - In certain spots, especially in the **Darién region and near the Isthmus of Panama**, you can see the **Pacific Ocean** to the east and the **Atlantic Ocean** to the west.



## Overview of Panama



## Pre-Colonial and Colonial Panama

## Pre-Colonial Panama

- Before Panama was “Panama”, it was home to many native populations including the Monagrillo, Cueva (the largest), Chibchan, and Chocoan
- These populations did not build large cities, and are known to be one of the first pottery-making peoples in the Americas
- Tribes had their own languages
- Inter-tribal trading shown by excavated (metal) artifacts from Columbia
- Indigenous societies had ranking systems
  - Important individuals had deep-mound tombs in the central community



## Colonial Panama

- Conquistador Rodrigo de Bastidas landed in Panama in 1502
- Panama was founded in 1519, and was a part of the Spanish Empire for over 300 years
- Isthmus used to move gold/silver from Panama City to the Caribbean, and is noted by the US Department of State as “the crossroads and marketplace of Spain’s empire in the New World”
- Enslaved Africans were brought to Panama to work in mines
- Panama was the first country on the mainland of the Americas to be mined by Europeans during the Spanish colonial period (1501-1821)
- During the 17th century the Kuna population tried to fight against Spanish expansion but the uprising was decimated



# The Camino Real

- The Camino Real, or “Royal Road”, was a 7ft wide, intercontinental trade road that was built during the Spanish period
- It was used to transport gold and silver
  - Also used to transport loot from the Inca Empire
- Connected Panama City to other settlements and ports
- Contributed largely to the growth of the Panamanian economy as it facilitated trade between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans
- The Camino Real was eventually changed to the Camino de Cruces, then the Panama Railroad, and finally, the Panama Canal
- Much of the original road is underwater due to damming for the canal



# Citations

*Ambasciata d'Italia Panama.* (2019). Esteri.it. <https://ambpanama.esteri.it/en/italia-e-panama/diplomazia-economica/storia/>

Christian Strassnig. (2010). Rediscovering the *Camino Real* of Panama: Archaeology and Heritage Tourism Potentials. *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 9(2), 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2010.0012>

Cosgrove, S., & Dempsey, I. J. B. (n.d.). A Brief History of Panama. *Ucincinnatipress.pressbooks.pub*.

<https://ucincinnatipress.pressbooks.pub/imaginingcentralamerica/chapter/imagining-central-america-short-histories-14/>

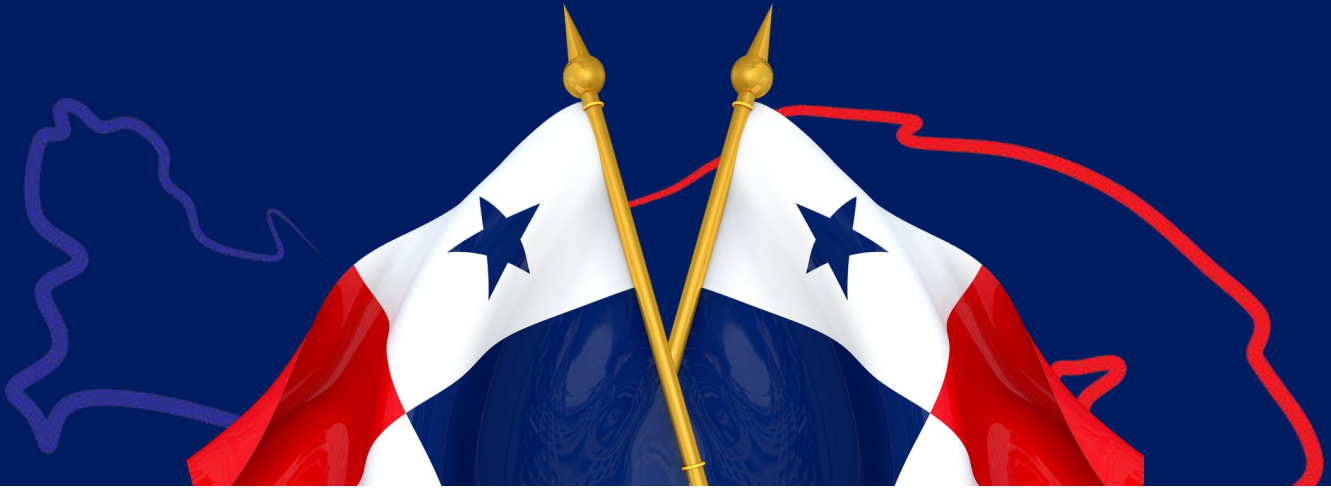
*History of The Panama Rail Road.* (2025). Panamarailroad.org. <https://www.panamarailroad.org/historyb.html>

mnavi. (2019, May 27). *A Deep Dive into the World of Indigenous People in Panama – Exploring Population Health*. Sites.uab.edu.

<https://sites.uab.edu/exploringpopulationhealth/2019/05/27/a-deep-dive-into-the-world-of-indigenous-people-in-panama/>



# Panama



## Before Independence

- In 1821, after Panama gained independence from Spain, they joined the confederacy of The Republic of Colombia which included modern day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia.
- In 1830, the Republic of Colombia separated, and Panama became part of just Colombia.
- Panama is considered an isthmus, which is a strip of land that connects lands separated by sea.
- “Istmeño” refers to someone born in Panama.



# The Fight for Independence

- José Agustín Arango, born in Panama, begins the movement of Panamanian independence.
- The Panamanians desired independence because Colombia was enforcing economic policies that only benefitted them (not the people of Panama).
- The US supported Panama's movement for independence in exchange for what would become the Panama Canal.
- Panama becomes independent in 1903 and the Panama Canal is built in 1914.



# Why is this Important?

- Since Panama is an isthmus, it is a very important geopolitical spot for relations between North and South America.
- Control over Panama and the Panama Canal does not only affect the people of Panama but all of the Americas because of its location.
- As globalization and international relations continue to change and develop, it is necessary to understand the role Panama plays in history and our world.



# Independence from Colombia & U.S. Involvement

- After nearly 80 years as a province of Colombia, Panama sought independence due to **neglect and economic struggles**.
- The **U.S. supported Panama's separation from Colombia in 1903** to secure control over the construction of the Panama Canal.
- The **Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty** granted the U.S. control over the Panama Canal Zone until Panama regained full sovereignty over the canal on December 31, 1999.

## Panama's Economic Growth and Key Industries

### Banco Nacional de Panamá credit ratings:

- S&P: BBB-
- Moody's: Baa3

### Tourism:

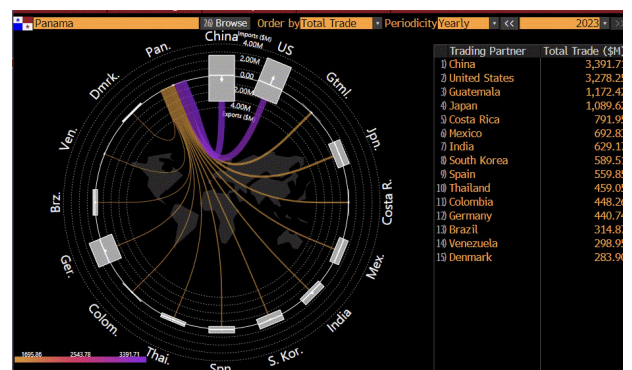
- Accounts for 10 - 15% of the economy
- Attracts international visitors for the country's natural beauty and culture

### Trade:

- Panama Canal handles about 5% of all global trade
- Flow of goods, services, and migrating people

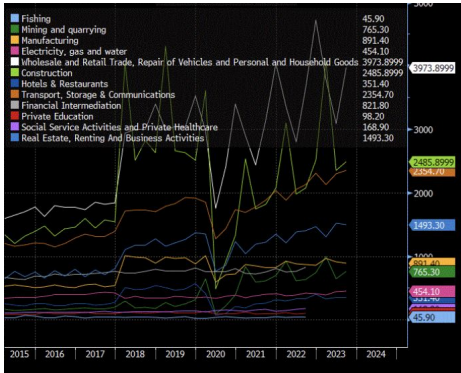
### Significance of the Colon Free Trade Zone

- Largest free trade zone in the Americas
- Contributes to ~8% of the economy
- Businesses operating in the CFTZ benefit from duty-free imports, tax exemptions, and have previously benefited from tariff related benefits

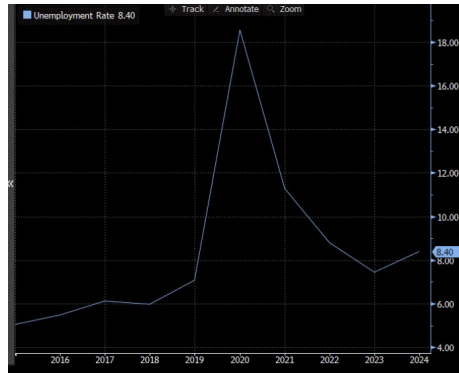


# Panama's Economic Growth and Key Industries

GDP Expenditures by Sector



Unemployment Rate



Government debt (\$bn)



## Panama's Political System and Government- Overview

- Panama is a **Democratic Republic**- elected representative government with executive, legislative, and judicial branches
- Like the US, Panama is a **Constitutional Democracy**
- Since universal suffrage in 1907, all Panamanians 18 years and older have the right to vote
- Panama is divided into **10 provinces, 75 districts, 3 indigenous counties, and 620 towns**, each with a **municipal government** headed by a **mayor** and two alternatives elected by popular votes for five year terms The current president of Panama is **José Raúl Mulino**
- Politics are often decided through **personalismo**, where the country is loyal to a strong leader, and sometimes extended to a spouse or second generations



# Panama's Political System and Government- History



- 1968- A coup took place by the National Guard, suspending the national legislature, and administered a provision government led by **General Omar Torrijos**
- 1972- new constitution (fourth in their history), gave Torrijos majority control, but also established the elected body, **the National Assembly of Municipal Representatives**
- 1978- constitution amended and democracy returned to Panama in 1999 following the removal of **Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega Morena**, Torrijos successor
- 2009-14: **Ricardo Martinelli** served as President, became highly unpopular, accused of nepotism, corruption, and more, arrested in 2017, but found not guilty



## Panama's Political System and Government- Branches

- Since 1983, Executive power is held by a popularly elected **president** for one five-year term, along with an elected **vice president**, and appointed **cabinet**
- There is a unicameral **National Assembly** of 71 members elected for five years terms, eligible for reelection
  - initiates legislation, rules on international treaties, approves the budget, and establishes political divisions
- **Supreme Court** has Judicial Power- nine members appointed by president, approved by National Assembly with 10-year terms
  - Divided into civil, penal, and administrative cases, and includes lower courts
- Political Parties- Democratic Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Democrático), Democratic Change (Cambio Democrático), and the Panameñista Party



# Panama's Political System and Government- Citations

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Panama/Government-and-society>

<https://oig.cepal.org/en/countries/18/system>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ricardo-Martinelli>

## The Panama Canal

- **The Panama Canal is one of Panama's most important assets**, but its **strategic geographic position** (connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans) is what makes it invaluable for global trade.



## The Panama Canal

- **1914: The Panama Canal was completed.**
  - Officially opened on **August 15, 1914** with the first official transit by the SS Ancon.



## The Panama Canal

- **Cost to Build: \$375–\$400 million.**
  - The U.S. spent around \$375 million on construction, but when including earlier French efforts (1881–1894), total costs were closer to \$400 million.
- The construction of the Panama Canal resulted in the deaths of between 22,000 and 30,000 people.



## The Panama Canal

- **Panama Canal itself has 3 main sets of locks** (Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, and Gatun).
- **The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties.**



Panama's Culture: Art, Music,  
and Festivals 🎨🎵🎉

# Introduction to Panama's Cultural Heritage

- Panama's culture is a blend of African, Indigenous, Spanish, and North American influences
- This mix is mainly seen in music dance, art, and festivals
- Panama is known as a cultural melting pot. It adapts old traditions while still valuing innovation



## Music and Dance in Panama

### Music:

- Influences from salsa, cumbia, reggae, and soca
- National dance: Tamborito (includes drumming and couple dancing)
- Instruments: drums, castanets, and mejoranas (a small guitar-like instrument)



### Art:

- Woven baskets, pottery, and jewelry influenced by Indigenous traditions
- Kuna molas: fabric made by the Kuna people



## National Festivals and Celebrations

- Carnaval de Panamá (Pre-Lenten festival, like Brazil's Carnival) – music, dancing, colorful costumes
- Semana Santa (Holy Week) – religious parades and celebrations
- Cristo Negro Festival (Black Christ Festival in Portobelo) – a significant religious event with African and Catholic traditions
- Festival de la Mejorana – folk music and dance festival in Guararé



## Citations

Anguizola G., Millett, R. L., Gordon, B. L. (1999). Cultural Life in Panama. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Panama/Cultural-life>

# Panama's Political System and Government

## Political Structure and Institutions

**System of Government:** Presidential representative democratic republic

- President serves as Head of State and Head of Government
- **Multiparty system:** 2 major parties and many smaller parties
  - Realizing Goals: Right Wing Populism, Conservative Liberalism (**current administration**)
  - Democratic Revolutionary Party: Social Democracy, Populism
  - Others
- Executive power exercised by the government, legislative power vested in the government and the National Assembly
- **National Assembly** is elected by proportional representation in electoral districts
- **Presidential elections** require a plurality, not a majority



The National Assembly

# Timeline



Peaceful transitions of power  
between presidential  
administrations

1903: Panama declares independence from Colombia with help from the US

1968: Panama National Guard ousted elected President Arnulfo Arias Madrid in a military coup; Omar Torrijos took power

1981: Omar Torrijos died in a plane crash; General Manuel Antonio Noriega took control of the military dictatorship

1989: US invaded Panama to depose the military regime on accusations of drug trafficking, human rights, abuses, and corruption; Panama reinstated democracy

2009: Ricardo Martinelli, conservative businessman, won presidential election by a landslide 60%

2024: Jose Raul Mulino, ally of Martinelli, sworn in as president

## Significant Historical Figures



**Arnulfo Arias Madrid:** Winner of 1968 presidential elections marked by violence and unrest, deposed by military after he tried to restructure the National Guard a week after taking office



**Omar Torrijos:** Military dictator who orchestrated coup against Arias Madrid and ruled from 1968-1981, when he died in a plane crash



**Antonio Noriega:** Assumed control of brutal dictatorship after Torrijos died, accusations of drug trafficking sparked US military intervention after years of US turning a blind eye to Panama human rights abuses



**Mireya Moscoso:** Panama's only female president, widow of Arias Madrid, presided over the handover of the Panama Canal from US control to Panama



**Ricardo Martinelli:** President in 2009 who won by a landslide; under his administration Panama had economic booms. After he left office, investigations found him guilty of money laundering and he was ordered arrested in 2024

# Citations

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Panama/Government-and-society><https://www.britannica.com/biography/Omar-Torrijos>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ricardo-Martinelli>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-68478723>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/30/world/americas/manuel-antonio-noriega-dead-panama.html>


<https://www.councilwomenworldleaders.org/mireya-moscoco.html>

## Panama and United States Relations

### In Panama, Rubio Says China Threatens Canal, Demanding 'Immediate' Action

The secretary of state said the United States could take steps to "protect its rights." Panama's leader said he was sure that President Trump wouldn't seize the canal.

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On Sunday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with the president of Panama to demand changes with the Panama Canal.

Photo: Associated Press

On his first foreign trip as secretary of state, Marco Rubio met with President José Raúl Mulino and visited the Panama Canal. Nathalia Angarita for The New York Times

POLITICS

### Rubio warns of U.S. action if Panama does not curb Chinese influence around the canal

FEBRUARY 2, 2025 - 8:05 PM ET

 Juliana Kim



Panama's Foreign Minister Javier Martínez-Acha (R) shakes hands with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio while leaving a meeting at the presidential palace in Panama City, Panama, on Sunday.

Mark Schiefelbein/Pool/AFP via Getty Images

# Panama and United States Relations

## Rubio hails Panama's move to exit Chinese infrastructure plan

By Simon Lewis and Michael Martina

February 3, 2025 1:22 PM EST · Updated 37 min ago



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks to the media after watching people board a repatriation flight bound for Colombia at Albrook Airport, in Panama City, Panama, Feb. 3, 2025. Mark Schiefelbein/Pool via REUTERS [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)



## Rubio lays down ultimatum to Panama over canal

Shaun Tandon and Maria Isabel Sanchez

Mon, February 3, 2025 at 2:19 AM EST · 4 min read



On his first trip overseas as the top US diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio (L) took a guided tour of the Panama Canal accompanied by its Panamanian administrator Ricaurte Vasquez (Mark Schiefelbein)

Mark Schiefelbein/POOL/AFP [Less](#)

# Panama and United States Relations

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES POLITICS

## 'Taking it back': Internal House GOP memo outlines case for Trump to buy Panama Canal

House Republicans have been lining up behind President Donald Trump's policy goals

By Elizabeth Elkind · Fox News

Published January 30, 2025 9:33am EST

## Panama pledges to end key canal deal with China, work with US after Rubio visit

State Department estimates around 72% of all vessels that travel through the Panama Canal are coming from or going to a US port

By Stephery Price · Fox News

Published February 2, 2025 9:50pm EST



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- Nature & Wildlife in Panama City

### HAPPENING NOW

Trump speaks after agreement to pause tariffs on Mexico for one month. Watch CNN

World / Americas

## Trump reiterates threat to retake Panama Canal 'or something very powerful' will happen

By Samantha Waldenberg and Michael Rios, CNN  
3 minute read · Updated 11:40 PM EST, Sun February 2, 2025



## Reflection Questions

- What are your first impressions or reactions based on the news?
- In what ways do you think media coverage shapes public perception of international relations, especially regarding Panama and the U.S.?
- Do you think the U.S. should prioritize its relationship with Panama over other countries in the region? Why or why not?
- Do you think the U.S. should prioritize its relationship with Panama over other countries in the region? Why or why not?

## An Informative Introduction to Panama City

