



Panama

Republic of Panama

Latin America

Geography

Area 77,082 sq km. The narrowest point of the Central American isthmus, and bisected by the Panama Canal.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010 3,508,475	1.66%	46/sq km
2020 4,026,687	1.31%	52/sq km
2030 4,487,696	1.02%	58/sq km

Over half the population live close to the Canal.

Capital Panama City 1,378,470. **Urbanites** 74.8%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 29%. **Life expectancy** 75.5 yrs.

Peoples

Considerable racial intermingling, but a fairly stratified society.

Spanish-speaking 66.6%. Latino (Mestizo) 56.8%; Panamanian Caucasian 8.8%.

Amerindian 10.9%. Speaking 12 languages: Guaymí(2) 5.1%; part-Indian 3.0%; Kuna(2) 1.9%.

Caribbean 9.37%. Creole-speaking Jamaicans.

Asian 6.5%. East Indian 4.0%; Chinese(3) 1.5%; Arab(3) 0.6%.

European/American 6.6%. American 4.0%; French 1.0%; Spaniard 1.0%.

Literacy 91%. **Official language** Spanish.

All languages 18. **Indigenous languages**

14. **Languages with Scriptures** 3Bi 6NT 9por 4w.i.p.

Economy

Due to its key geographic location, Panama's economy is service-based, heavily weighted toward banking, commerce and tourism. The Panama Canal sees 4% of the world's trade pass through its length, and a plan to expand the facility is approved and underway. With one of the most developed infrastructures in Latin America, Panama's prospects are good. But

there is a great level of inequity, since most wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few and 40% live in poverty. A porous border with Colombia means that drug cartels wield considerable influence.

HDI Rank 60th/182. **Public debt** 45% of GDP. **Income/person** \$6,784 (14% of USA).

Politics

Republic with a constitutional democracy. With US backing, Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903 and promptly signed a treaty with the US, allowing for the construction of a canal and US sovereignty over a strip of land on either side of the structure (the Panama Canal Zone). The USA Army Corps of Engineers built the Panama Canal between 1904 and 1914. On 7 September 1977, the transfer of the canal to Panama was formalized and was accomplished by the end of 1999. Three consecutive peaceful elections point to political stability.

Religion

Secular state with religious freedom, but also recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the majority.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Christian	90.54	3,176,573	1.4%
Non-religious	4.30	150,864	5.9%
Ethnoreligionist	1.17	41,049	1.1%
Other	1.10	38,593	3.6%
Baha'i	1.05	36,839	2.7%
Buddhist	0.80	28,068	2.4%
Muslim	0.70	24,559	3.2%
Jewish	0.15	5,263	0.4%
Chinese	0.15	5,263	0.4%
Hindu	0.03	1,053	1.7%
Sikh	0.01	351	1.7%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	36	13.85	486,000	3.4%
Independent	46	7.28	256,000	6.2%
Anglican	1	0.74	26,000	1.2%
Catholic	1	66.70	2,340,000	0.3%
Orthodox	1	0.04	1,000	0.9%
Marginal	2	2.65	93,000	3.7%
<i>Doubly affiliated</i>		-0.70	-25,000	0.0%

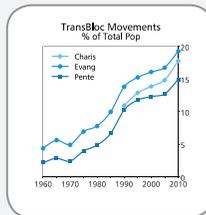
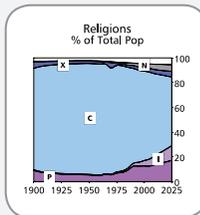
Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Church	C	192	1,307,263	2,340,000
Foursquare Gospel Ch	P	660	63,000	126,000
Assemblies of God	P	395	44,681	105,000
Seventh-day Adventist	P	235	51,497	86,000
Ch of God (Cleveland)	P	140	15,000	49,950
Latter-day Saints	M	121	25,397	48,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	250	13,514	45,000
Episcopal Church	A	17	4,000	26,000
Churches of Christ	P	260	8,700	21,750
Baptist Convention	P	120	8,100	20,250
New Tribes Mission	P	46	5,700	14,250

Other denominations[76]	1,231	110,183	319,511
<i>Doubly affiliated</i>			<i>-24,560</i>
Total Christians[87]	3,634	1,657,035	3,078,711

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Evangelicals			
Evangelicals	19.3	676,573	4.5%
Renewalists			
Charismatics	17.8	624,301	5.4%
Pentecostals	15.0	525,391	5.1%

Missionaries from Panama

P,I,A 94 (77 long-term) in 13 agencies: to Panama 26, Europe 13, South America 12.



Answers to Prayer

- 1 Political and religious freedoms** continue to take root. Since the days of military dictatorship, there is a liberal democracy and spiritual openness for Christians to minister in Panama.
- 2 Continued spiritual interest and responsiveness.** Evangelicals have grown from less than 5% of the population in 1970 to nearly 20% in 2010. Their presence is needed in a nation with many challenges before it.

Challenges for Prayer

- 1 Panama is a nation of great diversity and great potential.** Because of its strategic location and the Canal, Panama is a melting pot of many races. The country's motto is "Panama, Bridge to the World, Heart of the Universe". Pray that this unique nation may bless the world.
- 2 Panama's strategic location and stability** also attract many other forces to the area. Proximity to Colombia and the prevalence of offshore finance mean that drug cartels and other undesirables are strongly present and using much of the economy to launder money. Pray for a government that will root out corruption and oppose wickedness.
- 3 The Church's impact** is significantly less than its size. Nominalism is widespread in both the Catholic Church and in many English-speaking churches. Catholicism has lost much impetus to the more dynamic evangelicals, Jews, Mormons and Muslims. The Church lacks the strength to turn this trend around and is further compromised by many of its members dallying with the false teachings of New Age, astrology and psychics. Pray for the intervention of the Holy Spirit.
- 4 Evangelicals,** despite much growth, face major obstacles and challenges:
 - a) Spiritual unity and vision.** Despite some progress in recent years, too often local churches are more concerned about their own "success" than about working together to transform the nation. Pray for the churches to grow in unity and for the work of the Panamanian Evangelical Alliance to this end.
 - b) Traditional morality** is under siege. Divorce, illegitimate children, domestic violence, immorality and drug use are common. This is partly due to Christians' failure to provide a biblical model and example of godly living. Pray for the conviction of sin and for solid discipleship that shows people how to live.
 - c) Inadequate impact on society.** Evangelicals are strong in number, but have barely begun to engage the wider needs of Panama. Pray for an informed Church that will bring the gospel into the spheres of politics, culture and the marketplace.

d) **Effective ministry to young people.** For many, local church structures and ministry do not connect with them. There is an increasing problem with young people forming gangs and taking drugs. Pray for dynamic and relevant ministries to young people. The Bible Society is having an impact in schools through Bible classes and distribution.

e) **Theological training** that encourages holiness of life and spirituality. There are now nearly 35 Bible schools (20 within **AoG** alone) and seminaries, as well as four TEE programmes. Pray for more Panamanians to be called into full-time service. Godly, mature leadership is needed to energize the Church and to combat widespread proselytism by marginal sects and Islam.

5 Amerindians respond positively to the gospel; there are churches in all tribal groups, many of them active and thriving. The goal of **NTM** and **Avant** is to phase out their work as indigenous churches grow and mature. Pray that other ministries might follow suit and allow the flourishing of indigenous leadership and indigenous expressions of Christian faith. There is a NT in each language, except two which have works in progress; pray for their completion.

6 Missionary vision. Panama is developing into a sending nation. There are over 94 Panamanians serving cross-culturally, a number bound to increase. A number of agencies work to mobilize the Church into world missions (**YWAM**, **AoG**, Baptists, others). The network **PAAM** (“Panamanians Reaching the World”) is at the vital core of the movement and brings together dozens of ministries and denominations. The main obstacles to greater mission sending are lack of unity, lack of vision and lack of training.

7 The less-reached sections of the population. Pray for:

a) **The upper-middle classes.** They are under-represented in the churches, but a number of lively charismatic fellowships have started in recent years. There are now many professional and business people who follow Christ.

b) **The Chinese.** Most still speak Hakka (60%) and Cantonese, with many traditional Chinese religionists and some nominal Catholics among them. Allegedly, the Chinese population in Panama has spiralled upward to 300,000, most of them recently arrived illegal immigrants. There are only 11 congregations among them (none of them speaking Hakka) and a mere handful of workers. Pray for more workers and fruit in this rapidly growing community.

c) **The South Asians,** who are largely Gujarati-speaking. Most are Muslims, some Hindus, and others Sikh. There is no known specific outreach to them.

d) **The 9,000 Jews.** There is a Panamanian Christian outreach to them called Messianic Association “Remnant of Israel”. Most Jews are Orthodox and hard to reach.

8 University students are a key challenge, since 65% of the population are under age 35. There are 120,000 students in 65 tertiary institutions. Campus ministries include **Minamundo** or **CEC (LAM, IFES)** as well as the work of **Campus Crusade**, but the number of groups is few. Pray for greater growth of both evangelism and discipleship among tertiary students.

9 Foreign missionaries. The majority of the mission force is North American. The Panama-Colombia border continues to be a problem area of violence as Colombian guerrillas and drug cartels increase their activities. This endangers both the indigenous peoples and expatriate workers. The largest agencies: **YWAM**, **NTM**, **AoG**, **BBF**, Free Will Baptists.

10 Christian help ministries for prayer:

a) **Literature** – distributed by The Bible Society and a dozen bookstores (one **CLC**). Literature ministry is limited by a lack of literacy and a non-reading culture. **GRN** has audio Scripture in 14 languages.

b) **The JESUS film** is widely shown in seven main languages, including Guaymí and Kuna.

c) **Radio and television** are the media with the most impact and the most potential. There are three Christian TV stations and 16 radio stations; **HOXO**, affiliated with **HCB** Ecuador, broadcasts 24/7. Pentecostal groups are the fastest-growing groups in broadcasting, including **AoG** and **Hosana Apostolic Community**.