



Fact sheet: Unincorporated US territories

	GUAM	NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS	AMERICAN SAMOA	PUERTO RICO	US VIRGIN ISLANDS
<i>How obtained by the United States</i>	Taken in the Spanish-American War	Assigned to the US as a United Nations trust territory; opted not to gain independence	Annexed by agreements with Britain, Germany, and Samoan chiefs	Taken in the Spanish-American War	Purchased from Denmark
<i>US territory since...</i>	1898	1947	1899	1898	1917
<i>Birthright US citizenship since...</i>	1950	1986	<i>Not US citizens</i>	1917	1927
<i>Have a local constitution since...</i>	<i>No constitution</i>	1978	1960	1952	<i>No constitution</i>
<i>Elect their own governor since...</i>	1970	1978	1978	1948	1970
<i>2010 population (rounded)</i>	160,000	54,000	56,000	3,726,000	106,000
<i>Population in poverty</i>	25%	50%	55%	45%	20%
<i>Major languages spoken</i> <i>Italics indicate official languages</i>	<i>English = 99%</i> Philippine languages = 20% <i>Chamorro = 20%</i>	<i>English = 98%</i> Philippine languages = 35% <i>Chamorro = 25%</i> <i>Carolinian = 5%</i>	<i>English = 99%</i> <i>Samoan = 90%</i>	<i>Spanish = 95%</i> <i>English = 20%</i>	<i>English = 90%</i> Spanish or Spanish creole = 15% French or French creole = 10%
<i>Largest racial/ethnic groups</i> <i>Plus white, if not one of the three largest</i>	Chamorro = 35% Filipino = 25% White = 7%	Filipino = 35% Chamorro = 25% Chinese = 7% White = 2%	Samoan = 90% Tongan = 3% Filipino = 2% White = 1%	Hispanic* = 99% White = 80% Black = 15%	Black = 80% Hispanic* = 15% White = 15%
<i>Largest religious groups</i>	Catholic = 75% Protestant = 20%	Catholic = 65% Protestant = 15% Buddhist = 10%	Protestant = 60% Catholic = 20% Mormon = 15%	Catholic = 70% Protestant = 25%	Protestant = 65% Catholic = 25%

* Most Hispanics in Puerto Rico identify also as white; most Hispanics in the US Virgin Islands identify also as black.
Population data from the US Census Bureau and the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project.

Following the Spanish-American War, the United States began to class its territories as “incorporated” or “unincorporated.”

Unincorporated territories *belong to* the United States but are not considered *part of*—hence have not been incorporated into—the United States. Since 1901, the Supreme Court has held that US rule of a territory is not bound by the Constitution unless Congress has acted to incorporate the territory; if and when Congress does that, the Constitution comes into force irrevocably.

The first territories classed as unincorporated were the Spanish colonies that the United States took over in 1898: the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. By contrast, Hawai‘i, also annexed in 1898 (after whites had overthrown the native monarchy), was classed as incorporated. Later acquisitions—American Samoa, the US Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands—were classed as unincorporated.

Today, the United States possesses about a dozen unincorporated territories. All are islands; only five are permanently inhabited. In each of those five territories, there was a length of time—ongoing in the case of American Samoa—when natives were subject to US rule without the rights of US citizenship. Eventually, Congress granted birthright citizenship to people born in four of the five territories. The exception, American Samoans, are defined as “non-citizen nationals”: Americans but not citizens. In 2016, some American Samoans unsuccessfully petitioned the US Supreme Court to rule their non-citizen status unconstitutional. Other American Samoans favor non-citizen status for fear that birthright citizenship would end race-based privileges meant to protect traditional Samoan culture, such as laws restricting land ownership to ethnic Samoans. American Samoans can become US citizens by moving to one of the 50 states and applying for naturalization.

Even though Guamanians, Northern Mariana Islanders, Puerto Ricans, and US Virgin Islanders are now US citizens, the fact that these territories are not states limits their inhabitants’ rights and obligations in relation to the US government. For example: Someone born in Puerto Rico has neither the ability to vote in US presidential elections nor the obligation to pay federal income tax *while they are a resident of Puerto Rico*, but they gain both if they move to one of the 50 states. (By the same token, someone born within the 50 states who moves to Puerto Rico loses the ability to vote for president and the obligation to pay federal income tax *while they are a resident of Puerto Rico*, because Puerto Rico is not a state.) American Samoans who are non-citizen nationals are in a different situation: not being US citizens, they cannot vote in presidential elections regardless of where they live.

People from all of the unincorporated territories, including American Samoa, can travel freely to the 50 states and work there. They carry US passports. They pay into and receive Social Security and Medicare. As a general rule, residents of unincorporated territories do not pay federal income tax, only a territorial income tax (unless they work for the federal government, in which case they do pay federal income tax). While residents of these territories do not vote in US presidential elections, political parties may opt to let them vote in the primaries. Each territory elects a single delegate to the US House of Representatives but none to the Senate; their delegates to the House can vote in committees but not on the floor. Because they are US citizens, males from Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands are subject to the military draft. Non-citizen nationals from American Samoa are not, unless they reside within the 50 states; they can, however, enlist voluntarily and do so in disproportionately high numbers.



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