

President, two Vice-Presidents and the Ministers of State. The President and Vice-Presidents are elected, by direct popular vote, to single five-year terms. The Legislative Assembly is composed of representatives elected to five year terms, by popular vote, from 40 electoral districts. Supreme Court justices are appointed by the executive branch, subject to approval by the Legislative Assembly.

Population

Panama has a multi-racial population of about 2.2 million (1985), growing at 2.2% per year.

Language

The official language of Panama is Spanish. Nevertheless, Government officials and businessmen frequently have a good command of English, reflecting Panama's traditional close ties with the USA. Few Panamanians speak French.

Religion

Over 90% of Panama's population is Roman Catholic. Other significant religious groups are, however, present and enjoy full freedom of worship.

Education

Education is free and compulsory at the elementary level (first six years). The literacy rate is 84%. There are two universities in Panama, the University of Panama (state-run; approx. 40,000 enrolled) and the University of Santa Maria (run by the Catholic Church; approx. 3,500 enrolled). The number of Panamanian professionals trained abroad, particularly in the USA, is substantial.

Principal Cities

Panama City, with a population of approximately 800,000, is by far the largest urban area and is the commercial as well as political and administrative centre of the country.

Following Panama City in importance are:

Colon – population 125,000 – located at the Atlantic end of the Panama Canal, site of both the Colon Free Zone and Panama's main port (Cristobal), and a major centre for regional commerce and trans-shipment, and;

David – population 85,000 – capital of Chiriqui Province and the centre of Panama's agricultural sector.