



Andorra — Va-PoReg Country Report

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08/09/1278 Start Electoral Oligarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under foreign co-princes]: The co-principality arrangement originated in a 08/09/1278 agreement that resolved territorial disputes by establishing shared sovereignty between the Bishop of Urgell and the Count of Foix.¹ This diarchic structure positioned both rulers as external heads of state while preserving indigenous legislative institutions. The General Council maintained autonomous decision-making authority over domestic governance from its establishment in 1419, though the co-princes retained control over foreign relations, defense matters, and certain ceremonial functions. Legislative elections operated under rules codified in the 1867 Nova Reforma, which established biennial elections for half the General Council's seats and limited voting rights to male household heads. This institutional framework contradicts LIED's assertion that legislative elections were absent during this period. The existence of regular parliamentary elections to the General Council demonstrates electoral procedures, though franchise restrictions were severe. LIED correctly identifies the absence of political liberties. V-Dem provides no coverage of Andorra. From 01/01/1900 onward, effective governance operated through a dual structure: the French head of state and the Spanish Bishop of Urgell served as external co-princes, while the elected General Council exercised genuine legislative authority over internal policy domains. This arrangement differs fundamentally from colonial regimes because indigenous institutions possessed substantive decision-making power rather than merely advisory roles, and external rulers lacked the metropolitan override capacity that characterizes colonial administration. The severely restricted franchise, limited to male heads of families, produced oligarchic representation despite the electoral mechanism. LIED's characterization of executive elections without legislative elections appears to conflate the syndic selection process with the General Council elections, which were clearly legislative in character. Universal male suffrage was introduced on 08/31/1933, following political upheaval initiated by the Young Andorrans movement, which had occupied the parliamentary building in April and demanded electoral reforms.² The co-princes dissolved the existing General Council and mandated new elections under expanded franchise rules that permitted all men over twenty-five to vote and those over thirty to seek office. These elections featured competition between two informal political groupings: the Andorran Union aligned with reform advocates, and the Integral Nationalist Group supporting the traditional co-principality structure. The latter secured a decisive electoral majority, which ended the reform movement and preserved the existing constitutional arrangement.³ Despite franchise expansion to all adult males, oligarchic structures persisted through the exclusion of women from political participation. Since women constituted approximately half the adult population, the electoral system continued to represent only a minority demographic segment. Although competing political groupings emerged, these operated as informal factions rather than legally recognized parties, as formal party organization remained prohibited.⁴ The franchise extended to women on 04/23/1970, with voting rights granted to those over twenty-five and the general voting age later reduced to twenty-one.⁵ This marked the achievement of universal adult suffrage. However, oligarchic governance persisted because electoral oligarchy encompasses not only franchise restrictions but also systematic barriers to genuine political competition. The prohibition on political party organization remained in force until 1993, requiring all candidates to contest elections as parish-based independents rather than as representatives of programmatic alternatives. This institutional design prevented voters from selecting between alternative governing visions or

ideologies. The absence of organized parties eliminated the possibility of coherent opposition platforms or systematic accountability mechanisms. Additionally, the syndic system concentrated both legislative leadership and executive coordination functions in a single office without formal separation of powers, and the co-princes retained veto authority over parliamentary decisions. According to Va-PoReg classification principles, electoral oligarchy persists when structural mechanisms prevent meaningful electoral choice even under universal franchise conditions. The party prohibition constituted such a mechanism, maintaining oligarchic control through the suppression of organized political competition rather than through franchise limitation. Institutional reforms established a separate executive office of prime minister (Cap de Govern) on 01/04/1982, with Oscar Ribas Reig becoming the first officeholder. This innovation created formal separation between legislative and executive functions for the first time in Andorran governance. Despite this modernization, oligarchic structures endured because party organization remained illegal, co-princely veto powers continued, and no constitutional framework defined the new institutional relationships. The prohibition on organized parties persisted as the primary barrier to electoral competition, preventing the institutional reforms from transforming the character of the regime. Freedom House assigned Andorra scores indicating partly free status during the 1972-1976 period, with ratings of 6-7 in 1972 (interpreted by us as relatively free) declining to 8 from 1973 onward (interpreted as relatively unfree). However, LIED's characterization as a one-party autocracy is empirically inaccurate, as no single party monopolized power. Popular referendum approved with 74 per cent Andorra's first codified constitution on 03/14/1993, which entered force on 05/04/1993.⁶ The constitutional framework established formal parliamentary democracy with explicit separation of powers across executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Critically, the constitution legalized political parties and labor unions for the first time, enabling organized political competition. The co-princes' role transformed to ceremonial heads of state without veto authority over government decisions.⁷ Party legalization represented the decisive institutional change, as it permitted voters to choose between programmatic alternatives through organized political competition.⁸

03/14/1993 End Electoral Oligarchy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, the new constitution, drafted by the Andorran Co-Princes and General Council, was approved in a national referendum. The institutional reform was initiated by the ruling elite without being under pressure, which is why we code this regime change event as a strategic restructuring. This event shifted the regime from electoral oligarchy, where universal suffrage existed without competitive party structures, to an electoral democracy, where multiparty competition operates despite remaining democratic deficits. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held since 1993, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Political liberties have been present since 1993 according to LIED. As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. V-Dem's PCLI does not provide data for Andorra. However, amid unique circumstances as Andorran citizens constitute a minority within Andorra, leaving almost two thirds of the population without political representation.⁹ Since 12/12/1993 the government was authorized to generate income through taxation, establish an independent judiciary, grant citizens the freedom to establish political parties and trade unions, and manage foreign policy and participation in international organizations. Andorra has since 1993 experienced regular peaceful transfers of power and held fair and free parliamentary elections in 2023. In 2014, the electoral law was amended so that only persons of Andorran nationality over the age of 18 are eligible to vote.¹⁰ While civil liberties and political rights are well established, more than 50% of the population are non-citizens and are thereby not eligible to vote.¹¹ Therefore, we classify the democracy as still deeply defective constituting even a borderline case to an electoral hybrid regime.

Electoral Democracy [as joint protectorate of France, Liberal Democracy and Spain, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Marxer/Pállinger 2009, Mickoleit 2010)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-Princes_of_Andorra
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1933_Andorran_parliamentary_election
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andorran_Revolution
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Òscar_Ribas_Reig
- ⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/04/24/archives/the-women-of-andorra-receive-right-to-vote.html>
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Andorran_constitutional_referendum; <https://history.state.gov/countries/andorra>
- ⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Andorra>
- ⁸ <https://www.sudd.ch/event.php?lang=en&id=ad011993>
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Andorran_parliamentary_election;
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Andorra_1993?lang=en
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_Andorra#Election_system
- ¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/andorra/freedom-world/2023>

References

- Mickoleit, Arthur (2010): Andorra, in: Nohlen, Dieter & Stöver, Philip (Hrsg.), Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook, 1. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 149–169.