



Belize — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1862 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: First colonized in the early 17th century by English woodcutters and shipwrecked sailors, the territory was historically known as British Honduras. In 1862, Belize became a Crown dependency governed from Jamaica, and it was established as a separate colony in 1884. The country's western boundary was defined in an 1859 convention, which Guatemala repudiated in 1940 (Lansford 2021: 160). A parliament was introduced in 1935, although its members were initially nominated. LIED confirms the absence of multiparty legislative elections prior to 1954. LIED classifies political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI doesn't contain information about Belize. While limited legislative elections for the legislative council did occur before 1954, it was dominated by the governing country and elected officials held very limited powers. Political parties only existed informally. Until 1935, according to our observations, no multiparty legislative and executive elections were held. From 1935 to 1954 we only classify non-legislative elections as present, which contradicts the observations of LIED. From 1954 onwards, we agree with LIED, that multiparty legislative elections were present.

04/28/1954 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: With the enactment of the British Honduras Constitution on 03/25/1954, the parliament was defined as comprising a Speaker, three ex officio members, three nominated members (British subjects), and nine elected members.¹ After years of political struggle, universal adult suffrage was won in 1954 by the People's United Party (PUP) with the support of the people. On 04/28/1954, the first general elections were held, and the PUP won eight of the nine elected seats and 67 per cent of the vote.²

01/01/1964 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this day, Belize became a self-governing unity as a new constitution came into force that decreased the governor's powers, formed a cabinet headed by a premier, and established a bicameral parliament. Moreover, it declared that general elections were held every five years and granted complete internal self-rule.³ In 1964, following the implementation of universal suffrage, the composition of the legislature shifted, with a majority of its members being elected rather than appointed. Specifically, of the eighteen seats in the legislature, thirteen were elected and five remained appointed. From 1964, the British government only controlled the defense, foreign affairs, internal security, and public service in British Honduras.⁴ Political liberties have been present since 1964 according to LIED. In preparation for its independence, the official name was changed into Belize on 06/01/1973. According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

09/21/1981 Continuation (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy [as independent country]: Price held the position of Belize's initial prime minister until his party faced defeat by the United Democratic Party (UDP), led by Manuel Esquivel, in December 1984. Belize gained official recognition as an independent sovereign nation from Guatemala in September 1991. Despite this acknowledgment, a lingering border dispute persisted and remained unresolved when Dean Barrow assumed the role of prime minister in February 2008 after the UDP secured a decisive victory. General elections took place in Belize on 11/11/2020, to elect the 31 members of

the House of Representatives. The People's United Party (PUP) won 26 seats, marking its first national election victory since 2003, while the incumbent United Democratic Party secured the remaining 5 seats, experiencing its worst result since 1998. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and a recent tropical storm, voter turnout in the 2020 general elections exceeded 81%, the highest since 1998. Notably, the election saw the participation of the first female party leader and Prime Ministerial candidate in Belizean general election history, Nancy Marin of the Belize People's Front.⁵ In the general election on 03/12/2025 the PUP secured its majority in the parliament (House of Representatives), allowing incumbent Prime Minister Johnny Briceño to remain in office.⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1964 the elections are considered as competitive according to LIED. In Belize regular shifts in power have occurred through competitive electoral processes. Belize adopted its constitution from Westminster. Now, the country is striving to shed this post-colonial legacy. In 2022, the Belizean parliament enacted the People's Constitution Commission Act, initiating a process aimed at creating a genuine constitution crafted by the citizens of Belize. The success of this endeavor hinges on the commission's capacity to sustain widespread, cross-party support and to present a fair and equitable draft constitution.⁷ Belize generally upholds civil liberties, although concerns linger regarding government corruption and a notable prevalence of violent crime. Addressing persistent issues such as police brutality and human trafficking within the country's borders has been a slow process for the authorities.⁸ Belize is listed for the whole regime period as free according to FH.⁹ As per FH's classification for this regime period since 1982, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. LIED classifies political liberties as present. V-Dem does not list the country in its dataset.

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Hillebrands/Ortiz Ortiz 2005)

Notes

¹ <https://www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/history-of-the-legislature-of-belize/>.

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nationalist_Movement_\(Belize\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nationalist_Movement_(Belize))

³ <https://countrystudies.us/belize/69.htm>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Belize.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Belizean_general_election

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Belizean_general_election

⁷ <https://constitutionnet.org/news/will-belize-get-peoples-constitution-prospects-and-challenges>

⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belize/freedom-world/2022>

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belize/freedom-world/2024>

References

Hillebrands, Bernd/Ortiz Ortiz, Richard (2005): Belize, in: Nohlen, Dieter (Hrsg.), Elections in the Americas: A Data Handbook. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 97–108.

Lansford, Tom (2021): Political Handbook of the World 2020-2021. Thousand Oaks: CQ Press.