



Cayman Islands — Va-PoReg Country Report

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06/22/1863 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom as a dependency of Jamaica]: The Cayman Islands were first sighted by Christopher Columbus in 1503 and came under formal British sovereignty under the Treaty of Madrid on 07/28/1670, which ceded Jamaica and the Cayman Islands to England. The first recorded settlements on Little Cayman and Cayman Brac in 1661 to 1671 were abandoned following attacks by Spanish privateers, and permanent settlement of Grand Cayman began only in the 1730s with the first royal land grant issued by the Governor of Jamaica in 1734. In the absence of formal colonial administration, Caymanians developed a tradition of self-governance: in 1831, a locally convened meeting at Pedro St. James Castle established an elected Assembly of Justices and Vestry, which passed its first legislation on 12/31/1831. The constitutional relationship between the Cayman Islands and Jamaica remained ambiguous until the Act for the Cayman Islands Government, passed by the imperial Parliament in London on 06/22/1863, formally declared and administered the Cayman Islands as a dependency of Jamaica, extending Jamaican laws and judicial authority to the territory.¹ Under this arrangement the islands resembled a parish of Jamaica, with nominated justices of the peace and elected vestrymen in their legislature, and a Chief Magistrate appointed by the Jamaican governor as the administering official from 1750 onwards; from 1898, the Governor of Jamaica began appointing a Commissioner for the Islands instead.²

01/03/1958 Continuation Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: The dependency status officially ended in 1959 with the formation of the Federation of the West Indies, although the Governor of Jamaica retained authority over the Cayman Islands. From 1959, the day-to-day affairs were overseen by the Administrator, serving on behalf of the Governor.³ On 08/12/1958 women's suffrage was introduced.⁴

08/06/1962 Continuation Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, Jamaica achieved independence from the United Kingdom. After Jamaica gained independence in 1962, the Cayman Islands remained under direct British rule.⁵

08/08/1972 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: In 1972, a significant level of internal autonomy was conferred through the adoption of a new constitution.⁶ The constitution provided autonomy on most domestic issues.⁷ In 1994, the constitution underwent revision, incorporating a bill of rights and introducing amendments to the regulations governing the Legislative Assembly, among various other modifications.⁸ Additional modifications were added in 2001 and 2009, officially incorporating various elements of human rights legislation.⁹ The UN Special Committee designates the Cayman Islands as one of the 16 non-self-governing territories. The existing Constitution of 2009 established a 19-seat parliament, elected every four years by the people who oversees domestic affairs. Seven elected Members of Parliament become government Ministers in a Cabinet led by the Governor, while the Premier is appointed by the Governor. The Governor, appointed by the King of the United Kingdom on the advice of the British Government, represents the monarch and holds extensive legislative and executive powers as outlined in the constitution.¹⁰ The 2017 election was marked by uncertainty, following the collapse of the Cayman Democratic Party. Many of its former MPs ran as independents and were subsequently elected.

The only party to secure seats in parliament was the People's Progressive Movement, but they won only seven out of the 19 seats.¹¹ In a complex process, the members of parliament agreed upon forming a government of national unity out of the PPM and independents that had previously been MPs for the CDM and some that had not been.¹² This shows that Cayman democracy is complicated yet resilient as the complex situation was resolved by ingenuity and compromise. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not list the Cayman Islands.

Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://www.constitutionalcommission.ky/upimages/commonfiles/CC-OurConstitutionalHistoryTimeline_140121FINAL_1612466298.pdf

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Cayman_Islands

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Cayman_Islands#Dependency_of_Jamaica

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_the_Cayman_Islands

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands#History

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands#History

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cayman-Islands/Government-and-society#ref54767>

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cayman-Islands/Government-and-society#ref54767>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands#History

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cayman_Islands#Government

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Caymanian_general_election?

¹² <https://www.gov.ky/ourgovernment>