



Croatia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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11/17/1868 Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Hungary]: The Duchy of Croatia was formed in 626 and transformed in 925 into the Kingdom of Croatia under King Tomislav. On 01/01/1527 Croatia became part of the Austrian-Hungarian Habsburg Monarchy. The Croatian–Hungarian Settlement (Nagodba) of 1868, ratified by the Croatian Sabor on this date and sanctioned by Emperor Franz Joseph I on 11/17/1868, formally created the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia as a nominally autonomous kingdom within the Hungarian half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Nagodba granted Croatia-Slavonia autonomy over internal administration, education, religion, judiciary, and the use of the Croatian language, while subordinating defense, foreign affairs, finance, and trade to Hungarian authority. The Ban (governor), who served simultaneously as head of the executive and representative of royal authority, was nominated by the Hungarian prime minister and appointed by the king, not chosen by Croatian institutions. The Sabor retained legislative powers over local affairs but was subject to Hungarian veto on broader constitutional matters, and Croatia sent only 29 deputies to the Hungarian Diet, which controlled military, financial, and commercial legislation. In practice, 55 percent of tax revenues were transferred to Budapest, leaving Croatian institutions chronically underfunded. The Sabor that ratified the Nagodba had been elected under conditions widely criticized as irregular, favoring pro-Hungarian unionists, and subsequent election laws entrenched pro-Hungarian landowners and officials as a Sabor majority. Hungarian domination of Croatian political life was most starkly embodied in the tenure of Ban Károly Khuen-Héderváry (1883–1903), a Hungarian magnate who systematically promoted Magyarization, exploited Croatian-Serbian ethnic rivalries, and ignored even the limited autonomy provisions of the Nagodba. In 1903 Hungary rejected Croatian demands for financial independence and suppressed demonstrations and the Croatian press. The Kingdom of Dalmatia, though formally claimed by Croatia as part of the Triune Kingdom, remained a crown land in the Austrian half of the Empire throughout this period and was never incorporated. The Nagodba remained in force until 10/29/1918, when the Croatian Sabor declared the dissolution of all state and legal ties with Austria-Hungary.¹

10/29/1918 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Hungary, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date Croatia seceded from the Austrian-Hungarian Habsburg Monarchy and became part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.² It was the first incarnation of a Yugoslav state founded on the Pan-Slavic ideology.³ Already on 10/5-8 a non-elected People's Council was formed with a Central Committee and Presidency which governed the country. This regime change event is coded as a voluntary exit because the Austro-Hungarian imperial authorities, facing collapse, effectively ceded control, allowing the Croatian Sabor to proclaim independence.⁴ The direction is coded as a liberalization because the new transitional government, led by the National Council, immediately sought international recognition and was explicitly aimed at establishing a sovereign and democratic state, representing a fundamental move toward self-determination despite its non-electoral formation.⁵

12/01/1918 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Part of Other Country [of Yugoslavia, Constitutional Monarchy]: The state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs joined the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro to form together the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. We code this regime change event as a negotiated transition, because it was followed by negotiations between the representatives of the new government and regent Alexander Karađorđević.⁶ On 10/03/1929 the name of the country was

changed by King Alexander I to Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

04/10/1941 End Part of Other Country [of Yugoslavia, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy: On this date, following the invasion of the Axis powers and when the German army took control in Zagreb, the formally independent State of Croatia emerged. During its entire existence, the country was governed as a fascist one-party state by the Ustaša. It was a puppet regime of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy with limited sovereignty.⁷ Hence, this was a borderline case between an occupation regime and a sovereign regime. The case is somehow similar to the satellite states of the USSR after World War II, which are usually classified as independent in comparative research. For most of the relevant period (except 1942), V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1942, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

03/07/1945 End Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy/Start Part of Other Country [of Yugoslavia, Communist Ideocracy]: On this date, the Provisional Government of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia formed through the merger of the Yugoslav government-in-exile and the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (Petrovich 1947: 508-9, Van Dyke 1947: 375). Before the temporary government was formed, there were several meetings between Tito and Ivan Šubašić, the pre-war prime minister of Yugoslavia in London. On 11/11/1945, the first Yugoslav elections after World War II took place and the winner was Josip Broz Tito with the People's Front. On 11/29/1945 the Federal Peoples Republic of Yugoslavia (later Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), with Croatia being one of the six constituent republics was proclaimed.⁸ In 1990 universal suffrage was introduced (LIED). Both LIED and V-Dem only start to provide data for Croatia since 1991.

05/19/1991 End Part of Other Country [of Yugoslavia, Communist Ideocracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, the people of Croatia voted for independence.⁹ Franjo Tuđman became Croatia's first president. On 06/25/1991 the parliament declared Croatia's independence from Yugoslavia. In 1991 the Croatian war of independence started. After the Declaration of Independence tensions between Croatian forces loyal to the government and the Serbian-controlled Yugoslav People's Army, supported by local Serb forces in Croatia escalated. The war cost the lives of over 20.000 people and ended 1995 in Croatian victory (Marshall 2018i).¹⁰ On 06/15/1997 the second presidential elections were held since independence. Franjo Tuđman was reelected to a second five-year term.¹¹ The election were considered deeply flawed. The free and fair participation of opposition parties was restricted under Tuđman and the Croatian Democratic Union.¹² The media was also restricted.¹³ Classification of the electoral regime is mixed. RoW and HTW classify it as an electoral autocracy/multiparty autocracy, BMR as a non-democracy, AF as a personalist regime, PRC as a semidemocracy, CGC, GWF and MCM as a democracy. Va-PoReg classifies this an electoral democracy, because elections were held and results respected, nonetheless the opposition could not participate under fair conditions. Therefore, in combination with the media restriction, deficits in the electoral process and deficits in political and civil liberties, justify the classification. When Tudjman became ill in November 1999, the Supreme Court appointed an interim president to preside over the government until multiparty elections could be held in February 2000. On this date, Franjo Tuđman's death was officially declared.¹⁴ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. From 1991 to 1996, LIED classifies elections as competitive. V-Dem's CEI and EF&FI score them as being of ambiguous electoral cleanliness as well as freedom and fairness. As classified by FH for 1991, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. For the rest of the period, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. According to LIED political liberties were absent for this period. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous from 1991 to 1995 and as somewhat present from 1996 to 1999. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by

other institutions. From 1992 to 1995, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. For the years 1996-1999, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. The following year, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

01/03/2000 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, parliamentary elections led to the defeat of Tudman's HDZ and the formation of a government under Ivica Račan, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (former League of Communist of Croatia).¹⁵ Presidential elections completed in February (first round on 01/24, a second round on 02/07 February) also resulted in the victory of opposition leader, Stjepan Mesic. Although Mesic was a protégée of Tudman, he followed a much different, less authoritarian, policy. He reduced the power of the presidency significantly.¹⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED classifies elections as competitive while V-Dems EF&FI and CEI score them as free, fair and clean. General elections are routinely held for various government levels (national, county, municipality/city, European). Universal suffrage is ensured, and the voting process is both free and confidential. Numerous parties and independent lists compete for public office, and election results are uncontested by parties.¹⁷ In 2003, parliamentary elections were held and Ivo Sanader of the HDZ became prime minister on 12/23/2003. He was reelected in 2007, holding the office until 07/06/2009, ending his second term early with a resignation. He named Jadranka Kosor to succeed him and she was Prime Minister until 12/23/2011. In the presidential elections of 2010, Ivo Josipovic secured a decisive victory, serving as prime minister from 02/19/2010 to 02/18/2015. Parliament elections were held on 12/04/2011, with the Kukuriku coalition (today: Rijeke pravde) securing a majority. Following the elections, Zoran Milanovic became the Prime Minister on 12/23/2011. Former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader was sentenced to ten years in prison in 11/2012 for taking bribes during his time in office. On 02/19/2015 Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic became the first female president of Croatia. Parliamentary elections on 11/08/2015 saw the Patriotic Coalition win a majority and subsequently form a government with the Bridge of Independent Lists. Tihomir Oreskovic became Prime Minister on 01/22/2016. This coalition failed a vote of no confidence on 06/16/2016, prompting new parliamentary elections on 09/11/2016. Following these elections, Andrej Plenkovic became Prime Minister on 10/19/2016. In 01/2020, former Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic won the presidential election.¹⁸ Parliamentary elections in 2024 were won by the HDZ, which formed a coalition with the Homeland Movement (DP), marking the first far-right participation in the Croatian government since the country's independence.¹⁹ Croatia is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral system. Although civil liberties and political rights are guaranteed, corruption remains an issue. The head of state is the president, while the prime minister is head of government. In parliament eight seats are set for ethnic minorities, for example ethnic Serbs, in addition three parliamentary seats are reserved for citizens in the diaspora. Diverse representation in this way is supposed to be guaranteed, yet ethnic minorities in Croatia experience discrimination. Media operates generally free but declining freedom of the press due to threats against journalists remains a problem.²⁰ Per FH's scoring for 2000, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. From 2001 onward, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as present for this period. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. From 2001 to 2009, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. Since 2010, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Kasapović 2010b, Osterberg-Kaufmann 2011, Zadošek/Maršić 2010)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Croatia-Slavonia;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian%E2%80%93Hungarian_Settlement; <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nagodba>
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Slovenes,_Croats_and_Serbs
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Slovenes,_Croats_and_Serbs
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_Slovenes,_Croats_and_Serbs#Establishment
- ⁵ [https://www.parlament.ba/Content/Read/180?title=Politi%C4%8DkopredstavljanjeBiHuKraljeviniSrba,HrvataiSlovenaca/KraljeviniJugoslaviji\(1918.%E2%80%931941.\)&lang=en](https://www.parlament.ba/Content/Read/180?title=Politi%C4%8DkopredstavljanjeBiHuKraljeviniSrba,HrvataiSlovenaca/KraljeviniJugoslaviji(1918.%E2%80%931941.)&lang=en)
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Yugoslavia
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Independent_State_of_Croatia
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Federal_Republic_of_Yugoslavia
- ⁹ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/HRV?cHash=17c2f8e8c5e9727cbe44e703cc448a30>
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croatian_War_of_Independence
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Croatian_presidential_election
- ¹² <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/1999/323.htm>
- ¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tu%C4%91manism#Domestic>
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franjo_Tuđman
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Croatian_parliamentary_election
- ¹⁶ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Croatia_R: 1
- ¹⁷ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/HRV?cHash=17c2f8e8c5e9727cbe44e703cc448a30>
- ¹⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Croatia#Republic_of_Croatia_\(1991%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Croatia#Republic_of_Croatia_(1991%E2%80%93present))
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_Croatia#Current_cabinet
- ²⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/croatia/freedom-world/2023>

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