



Curaçao — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Curaçao, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

04/03/1816 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands]: Curaçao was originally inhabited by Arawak people who migrated from the South American mainland. European explorers first arrived on the island in 1499, and it was subsequently settled by the Spanish. On 07/29/1634, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) invaded the island, expelled the Spanish, and transformed Curaçao into a significant trading hub. Dutch control over the island remained unstable for nearly two centuries: Britain occupied the island twice, first from 09/13/1800 to 01/13/1803, and again from 01/01/1807 to 04/03/1816, each time displacing Dutch colonial administration. Stable Dutch colonial governance was only fully restored on 04/03/1816, when Britain formally returned the island to the Netherlands under the terms of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814 and the subsequent peace settlement following the Napoleonic Wars. From this date onwards, Curaçao remained continuously in Dutch hands. The colony was reorganized administratively in 1828, when it was merged with other Dutch West Indies colonies into a single colony governed from Paramaribo, Suriname, before being partially reverted in 1845, after which Curaçao became the administrative center of the Dutch West Indies.¹

03/27/1949 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the first elections under universal suffrage took place, marking a fundamental shift in the governance of Curaçao.² From this date, day-to-day governance was exercised by locally elected institutions: a locally elected parliament (Staten) from which a local Prime Minister and Council of Ministers were drawn, with the executive fully accountable to the elected legislature. The Netherlands retained jurisdiction over foreign policy, defense, and final judicial review, while internal affairs were managed entirely by local Curaçaoan institutions. Although the formal colonial relationship was not yet dissolved, the introduction of universal suffrage and full internal self-governance constitutes a de facto transition to semi-sovereignty in the sense of the Va-PoReg codebook, as effective political authority over internal affairs had passed to locally elected representatives. The formal legal confirmation of this status followed on 12/15/1954, when the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands established the Netherlands Antilles as an equal partner within the Kingdom, upon which the United Nations deemed decolonization complete and removed the territory from its list of non-self-governing territories. The Netherlands Antilles was governed as a parliamentary representative democracy, with a Prime Minister as head of government, a multi-party system, a unicameral parliament, and an independent judiciary.³ Although Curaçao was formally part of the Netherlands Antilles, it is coded here as a constituent unit in its own right rather than as Part of Other Country. The Netherlands Antilles constituted a loose federal arrangement in which each island territory retained substantial internal self-governance under the Island Regulation of the Netherlands Antilles (03/03/1951), with its own island council, executive council, and Lieutenant Governor. This loose federal structure means that the constituent islands, including Curaçao, are each coded individually rather than subsumed under a single Part of Other Country entry, in the same way that other loose federations are treated in the Va-PoReg dataset. Growing dissatisfaction with Curaçao's perceived subservient position within the Netherlands Antilles, persistent racial discrimination, and rising unemployment due to layoffs in the oil sector culminated in a series of riots in 1969.⁴ On 10/10/2010, the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved and Curaçao became a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands directly, alongside Aruba, Sint Maarten, and the European Netherlands.⁵ This did not constitute a

regime transition, as the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles as a federal intermediate layer did not substantively alter the political regime or the degree of sovereignty of Curaçao. Before and after 10/10/2010, the structure remained identical: the Dutch monarch serves as head of state represented by an appointed governor, the Prime Minister is head of government elected by a locally elected parliament, and the Netherlands retains responsibility for defense, foreign affairs, and final judicial review as Kingdom affairs.⁶ Free and fair multiparty elections continued to be held, with no irregularities reported. In the 2021 elections, the MFK party won a simple majority, with MFK leader Gilmar Pisas becoming Prime Minister in a coalition with the PNP party.⁷ On 10/10/2010, Curaçao gained autonomy like Aruba. Unlike the Netherlands, Curaçao is not in the EU, so it doesn't have to follow EU law or use the euro. However, as overseas territories (OCT or LGA in Dutch) linked to the Netherlands, these islands can access European funds. Also, residents in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands have Dutch and European citizenship.⁸ Curaçao, as a component of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, operates under a system of parliamentary representative democracy. The monarch of the Netherlands serves as the head of state, represented on the island by a governor, while the Prime Minister of Curaçao fulfills the role of the head of government. The government holds executive authority, and legislative power is shared between the government and the parliament. Curaçao enjoys substantial autonomy in most areas, with specific exceptions defined in the „Kingdom affairs“ section of the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands.⁹ In the 2021 election, the previously opposition MFK-party won a simple majority, taking first place from the previously governing PAR-party.¹⁰ In a coalition government with the PNP-party, MFK leader Gilmar Pisas was made prime minister of Curaçao. He had previously been interim prime minister for some months in 2017. No irregularities in the voting were reported.¹¹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not have Curacao in their dataset.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ <https://www.curacaohistory.com/1634-the-conquest-of-curacao>; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Curacao>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Curaçao_and_Dependencies

² <https://www.curacaohistory.com/1949-universal-suffrage>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cura%C3%A7ao#Dutch_colonial_rule

⁵ <https://www.curacaohistory.com/1949-universal-suffrage>

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curaçao#Government>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Curaçao; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilmar_Pisas

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Cura%C3%A7ao#Autonomous_status

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cura%C3%A7ao#Government>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Cura%C3%A7ao

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilmar_Pisas