



French Polynesia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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03/16/1888 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: In 1842, France established a protectorate over Tahiti and later engaged in a war with Tahiti from 1844 to 1847. Subsequently, in 1847, the British and French signed the Jarnac Convention, which stipulated that the kingdoms of Raiatea, Huahine, and Bora Bora were to remain independent from both powers. It also prohibited any single chief from ruling over the entire archipelago. However, France later violated this agreement, and in 1888, after a series of native resistances and conflicts known as the Leewards War lasting until 1897, the islands were annexed and became a French colony. French Governor Théodore Lacascade officially annexed all of the Leeward Islands on 03/16/1888 via proclamation. The “Proclamation de Gouverneur aux habitants des Îles sous le Vent à l’occasion de l’annexion de ces îles à la France” (Proclamation by the Governor to the inhabitants of the Leeward Islands on the occasion of the annexation of these islands to France) was done without documents of cession from the former sovereign government of the islands.¹ During the 1880s, France asserted its control over the Tuamotu Archipelago, previously under the Pōmare Dynasty, although it was not formally annexed. Furthermore, after declaring a protectorate over Tahuata in 1842, the French considered the entire Marquesas Islands as part of their territory.²

05/07/1946 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, French citizenship was extended to Polynesians. On 10/27/1946 the islands’ designation was altered to become an overseas territory. Additionally, a Representative Assembly was established following a decree dated 08/31/1945.³ French Polynesia was further allowed to elect one member each of the French National Assembly and the French Senate.⁴ The representative assembly consisted of 20 members, who were elected through an electoral college between 12/09/1945 and 01/06/1946. This assembly was tasked with managing local affairs and had the authority over budgetary matters of French Polynesia.⁵ In 1953, the Territorial Assembly replaced the Representative Assembly and elections to this new assembly were held on 01/18/1953.⁶ Subsequently, in 1957, the name of the islands was officially modified to Polynésie Française, which translates to French Polynesia. In 1977, a degree of internal autonomy was conferred upon French Polynesia, and this autonomy was expanded in 1984. On 02/27/2003 French Polynesia attained the status of a complete overseas collectivity within France.⁷ FH, LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for French Polynesia. French Polynesia possesses both legislative and executive powers and is represented in the French Senate and Assembly. However, a representative of the French state oversees these institutions and has the authority to postpone legislative decisions, dissolve the parliament or the executive, and establish an interim government. Important policy areas, such as foreign affairs and security policy, are determined by France. Its economy depends heavily on French subsidies, reinforcing structural dependency. Since 2013, French Polynesia has once again been listed by the United Nations as a Non-Self-Governing Territory caused by an ongoing debate about the independence of the region.⁸ French Polynesia represents a genuine borderline case between an Indirect Rule Colonial Regime and a highly autonomous, but still non-sovereign, subnational democracy. Nevertheless, following the Va-PoReg codebook criteria, the regime is classified as an Indirect Rule Colonial Regime. The decisive consideration is not the formal constitutional integration into the French state, but the persistent externalization of core sovereignty domains, including foreign affairs, security, constitutional oversight, and ultimate intervention

authority, which remain under metropolitan control. At the same time, locally elected institutions exercise meaningful but structurally limited authority over internal affairs, a configuration that corresponds closely to the logic of indirect rule as defined in the dataset. While French Polynesia displays competitive elections and substantial internal self-government that could support an alternative classification as an Electoral Democracy of a protectorate-type, this interpretation would shift the analytical emphasis from external domination to state integration and would therefore depart from the codebook's primary distinction between direct and indirect colonial rule. For reasons of conceptual consistency and cross-case comparability, the classification as an Indirect Rule Colonial Regime is retained, albeit explicitly flagged as a just-in-case coding reflecting the territory's unusually high degree of autonomy. Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation_of_the_Leeward_Islands_by_France

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Polynesia#History

³ <https://www.assemblee.pf/histoire>

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/French-Polynesia/History>

⁵ <https://www.assemblee.pf/histoire>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1953_French_Oceanian_legislative_election

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Polynesia#History

⁸ <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt>