



Greenland — Va-PoReg Country Report

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05/16/1774 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark]: In the 18th century Denmark slowly began to recolonize Greenland in hopes of relocating the lost Norse settlement on the Greenlandic West Coast. From 1734 to 1774, several settlements were created by the General Trade Company (GTC) along the West Coast of Greenland. On 05/16/1774, the GTC was replaced with the Royal Greenland Trade Department (KGH), a Danish State enterprise which had been given authority by the crown to administer Greenlandic trade and settlements.¹ Due to Denmark's intervention in the Napoleonic Wars on France's behalf, Denmark-Norway was split up in accordance with the Treaty of Kiel of 1814.² Greenland remained under Danish control. In 1857, the KGH set up local councils (parsissaet). They were democratically elected but could only decide on minor local issues. All other matters remained under the jurisdiction of the KGH.³ These local councils were dissolved in 1911 when the Danish Ministry of the Interior took over colonial administration of Greenland from the KGH.⁴ Norway regained independence in 1905 and claimed Greenland as Erik the Red's territory as it had been in its possession prior to 1815. A Norwegian meteorologist occupied Eastern Greenland in 1931 which was then supported by the Norwegian Government. In 1933, the International Court of Justice ruled in favor of Denmark.⁵

04/09/1940 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark, Liberal Democracy]/Start Democratizing Regime: On this date, Nazi-Germany invaded Denmark. Denmark was subjected to German control and Greenland was left to fend for itself. According to a 1920 declaration, the United States was not willing to accept third party sovereignty in Greenland. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom and Canada were seeking control over the territory. On 05/03/1940, the Danish Ambassador to the United States of America, Henrik Kauffmann, consulted with the Greenlandic local advisory parliament (landsraed). He declared that there was no other option than to act as a sovereign nation. On 04/13/1940, he had taken counsel with the Greenlandic Sheriffs who had declared a self-governing State. They agreed to keep him as their representative in the United States. While the Danish Government continued to send orders to Greenland, these were largely ignored.⁶

05/20/1940 Continuation as Democratizing Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United States, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the USCGC Comanche coast guard vessel arrived in Ivigtut after the new government had asked for protection from the United States under threat from Canada and Norwegian forces present in Canada. The vessel had been sent alongside the USCGC Campbell with supplies and a consular team to establish diplomatic relations. All parties concerned were mainly interested in the cryolite which was being mined in Ivigtut and was a major component of aluminum production. The United States established a provisional consulate in Godthaab. As the United States could not officially send US soldiers to protect the mines, they supplied weapons and training to Greenlanders instead. The United Kingdom and Canada still pressed for the establishment of an airfield at Cape Farewell. Therefore, the US and the Greenland Government agreed to formalize the United States protectorate of Greenland. Two air- and one naval base were set up. On 04/09/1941, Kauffmann signed an agreement with the US secretary of State Cordell Hull, formally allowing the United States to station armed forces in Greenland and declaring a formal protectorate status.⁷ He did this against the will of the Danish government. 1942 marked the beginning of the North Atlantic Weather War. Germany and the Allies were in a constant struggle for the monopoly on weather data

as this was important for military strategizing.⁸ Formally Greenland was directed by governors of North and South Greenland. These administrations were elected indirectly from local councils, which had little to say.⁹ Women suffrage was only introduced in 1948.¹⁰

05/05/1945 End Democratizing Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under the United States, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, Denmark was liberated from German occupation. Eske Brun and the Greenland administration surrendered their powers back to the Danish Crown.¹¹ Nevertheless, American military presence remained. In the 1951 agreement, the Thule-Airbase was made permanent.¹²

05/25/1953 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark, Liberal Democracy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Denmark, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the new Danish constitution was ratified, which incorporated Greenland into Denmark as a Danish province with the name of County of Greenland.¹³

05/01/1979 End Part of Other Country [of Denmark, Liberal Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Denmark, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, Greenlandic home-rule came into effect¹⁴, after a referendum on the autonomy of Greenland from Denmark was held in January of the same year.¹⁵ Consequently, the Greenlandic Parliament was established. Multiparty elections were held on 04/04/1979. Due to the first-past-the-post system in many constituencies, the seat turnout was especially high for the leftwing separatist Siumut. Consequently, Jonathan Motzfeldt of the Siumut became the first head of the autonomous government.¹⁶ Greenland was granted sovereignty in matters such as education, health, fisheries and environment. However, as Greenland was considered an autonomous constituent country of the Kingdom of Denmark, Denmark still held control over several policy areas such as foreign relations.¹⁷ On 02/23/1982, a majority of Greenlanders voted to leave the EEC which it had entered as a county of Denmark in 1973. The Greenland Treaty was signed in 1985 which gave Greenland the status of Overseas Country and Territory of the European Union.¹⁸ The main reason for Greenlanders wanting to remain outside of the European Union was disagreement over the Common Fisheries Policy. Nevertheless, due to the special relationship with Denmark and the European Union, Greenlandic nationals are EU citizens and can thus move freely within the European Union.¹⁹ The political system functions as a parliamentary representative multi-party democracy with a certain degree of dependency of the Kingdom of Denmark. While the powers of the Danish monarch have, for the most part, become purely ceremonial and representative,²⁰ it does hold power over policies and decisions affecting the region.²¹ The prime minister is the head of government which exercises both executive and legislative power. The parliament (Inatsisartut) also yields legislative power. Greenlandic judiciary is independent of the other branches.²² Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Greenland in their data.

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

Notes

¹ <https://pilersuisoq.gl/da/voreshistorie/>; <https://www.worldstatesmen.org/Greenland.html>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greenland#Danish_recolonization

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsissaet>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parsissaet#Parsissaet_dissolved

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greenland#Strategic_importance

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland_in_World_War_II#Neutrality

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland_in_World_War_II#Neutrality

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic_weather_war

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Greenland; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Greenland;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Administrative_divisions_of_Greenland#History

- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland_in_World_War_II#Aftermath
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greenland#Cold_War
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Denmark; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenlandic_independence
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenlandic_independence
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Greenlandic_home_rule_referendum
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Greenlandic_general_election
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Greenlandic_home_rule_referendum
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greenland#Home_rule
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland_and_the_European_Union
- ²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenland#Politics>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Greenland
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Greenland