



Guam — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

12/23/1898 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA]: Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, serving the King of Spain, became the initial European to reach Guam on 03/06/1521, as part of his global circumnavigation expedition. Despite Magellan's exploration, it wasn't until 01/26/1565, that Guam was officially claimed by Spain. The onset of Spanish colonization occurred on 06/15/1668 marking the establishment of the inaugural Catholic church.¹ Following nearly four centuries under the rule of the Kingdom of Spain, Guam came under United States occupation in the aftermath of Spain's defeat in the 1898 Spanish American War, as stipulated in the Treaty of Paris of 1898. On 12/23/1898, Executive Order 108-A issued by the 25th President, William McKinley, transferred control of Guam to the United States Navy.²

12/08/1941 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: On this date, Japan initiated an attack and invasion of Guam concurrently with the assault on Pearl Harbor.³ Guam was renamed Ōmiya-jima (Great Shrine Island) by the Japanese during their occupation, which endured for approximately 31 months. Throughout this time, the native people of Guam experienced forced labor, separation of families, imprisonment, executions, concentration camps, and forced prostitution.⁴

08/10/1944 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: From 06/21 to 08/10, the United States reclaimed and engaged in the Battle of Guam in 1944, aiming to regain control of the island. Following World War II, the Guam Organic Act of 1950 officially designated Guam as an unincorporated organized territory of the United States. This act outlined the framework for the island's civilian government and conferred U.S. citizenship upon its residents.

09/01/1968 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: Initially, the Governor of Guam was federally appointed, a practice that continued until 1968 when the Guam Elective Governor Act introduced the popular election of the governorship.⁵ It is important to note that, since Guam is not a U.S. state, residents there who are U.S. citizens do not have the right to vote for the president, and their congressional representative holds a non-voting status.⁶ We therefore classify Guam as a de facto colony of the USA. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Guam.

Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guam#Spanish_era

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guam#American_era

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guam#World_War_II

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guam#World_War_II

⁵ <http://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/90/497.pdf>

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guam#History>