



Guyana — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

07/21/1831 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The Dutch were the first Europeans to settle on the territory starting in the early 17th century, when they founded the colonies of Essequibo and Berbice, adding Demerara in the mid-18th century. In 1796, Great Britain took over these three colonies during hostilities with the French, who had occupied the Netherlands. Britain returned control to the Batavian Republic in 1802 but captured the colonies a year later during the Napoleonic Wars. The colonies were officially ceded to the United Kingdom in 1815 and consolidated into a single colony on 07/21/1831.¹ Even though multiparty legislative elections were present according to LIED, universal suffrage was absent until 1953.² In 1957, when the UK introduced elected members, the legislature advocated for a more representative government. This led to a constitutional conference convened by the UK in 1960, resulting in a new constitution that granted full internal self-government.³ According to LIED only multiparty legislative election were held until 1953, from 1954 to 1956 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held and from 1957 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. According to LIED political liberties were absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous until 1957 and as somewhat present from 1958. Until 1957, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. From 1958 to 1961, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

08/21/1961 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the new constitution which installed internal self-government came into force. The UK still had power over defense and external affairs. A bicameral legislative system was established by the constitution. While the British governor remained the official head of State, the prime minister held the most executive power.⁴ In the elections held on 08/21/1961 the PPP again gained the majority. Even though the People's Progressive Party (PPP) had secured only 1.6% more of the vote than the new People's National Congress, it managed to win nearly double the number of seats. This discrepancy led to widespread protests led by the PNC, a general strike, and intense inter-racial violence.⁵ The governor declared a state of emergency and the UK sent troops. The UK held further constitutional conferences in 1962 and 1963, to settle terms for independence, but ethnic divisions prevented the leaders of Guyana's three political parties from being able to reach consensus among themselves on the terms of a constitution; they then asked the UK to settle the matter.⁶ The proposal of the British colonial secretary to create a unicameral assembly with proportional representation was adopted in 1964. Cheddi Jagan, the then Premier of British Guiana had expressed support and encouragement for the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, he was believed to be a communist, especially by the USA. Amongst other measures, the CIA helped fund an 80-day strike which was later held against Jagan's ability to govern British Guiana.⁷ On 12/07/1964, the first elections under the new constitution took place. A new coalition government headed by the People's National Congress (PNC) won the election. Cheddi Jagan was removed from office by the governor after refusing to step down.⁸ Forbes Burnham became Prime Minister on 12/14/1964. He severed diplomatic ties with Cuba. During the first year of his rule, the situation in

British Guiana stabilized.⁹ However, after assuming power, he consolidated the PNC's control by taking charge of the electoral system. The PNC-dominated national assembly shifted the elections commission's authority to a government department headed by a deputy loyal to the PNC, ultimately placing it under Burnham's power (Trefs 2005: 355). At a constitutional conference in London, the date for independence was set for 05/26/1966. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. LIED categorizes elections during this period as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score electoral freedom, fairness and cleanliness as ambiguous. Moreover, political liberties were coded as absent (LIED). Whereas V-Dem's PCLI scores them as somewhat present. For most of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1966, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

05/26/1966 Continuation (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime [as independent country]: On 05/26/1966, Guyana became fully independent (Marshall 2018g). After its success in the elections on 12/16/1968, the PNC was able to rule without a coalition.¹⁰ However, Burnham is said to have committed large scale election fraud.¹¹ According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

02/23/1970 Continuation Electoral Hybrid Regime (as a republic): Guyana became a republic; however, it remained a cooperative republic within the Commonwealth.¹² In the 1970s, authoritarianism of Burnham's government increased. Election fraud became more obvious. In 1974, Burnham declared that all "organs of the State would be considered agencies of the ruling PNC and subject to its control". Nevertheless, oppositional groups were tolerated within certain limits.¹³ On 07/10/1978, a constitutional referendum was held which suspended the elections and kept the current parliament in power.¹⁴ The Jonestown Massacre on 11/19/1978 brought the government of Guyana to international attention which began to weaken it.¹⁵ After a year filled with political violence in 1979, a new constitution was established in 1980.¹⁶ The elections held on 12/15/1980, which yielded a victorious PNC, were once again claimed to have been fraudulent. Burnham died unexpectedly on 08/06/1985. Power transition to the vice-president Desmond Hoyte went smoothly.¹⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this period, LIED categorizes elections as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores them as not really free or fair while their CEI scores them as not clean. As per FH's classification for 1972, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. In 1973 a score of 6 to 7 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. In 1974, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Between 1975 and 1977 Guyana is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. From 1978 to 1979 the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. For the remaining period a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. In addition to that political liberties remain absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores the political liberties as somewhat present from 1966 to 1976 and since 1987. For the remaining years ambiguous outcomes were stated. In 1966 and 1967, 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 1968 to 1977, based on Polity5's evaluation, during this period, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. In 1978 and 1979, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks. Since 1980, according to Polity5, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For almost the entire regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that

legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1992, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

10/05/1992 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, after a period of political and economic liberalization, the ruling party's leaders conducted competitive elections. These elections saw the end of the twenty-eight-year reign of the People's National Congress (PNC) and marked a victory for the Progressive People's Party (PPP), predominantly supported by the East Indian (Indo-Guyanese) majority (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 31). Since the transfer of power was constitutional and non-violent we code this regime change event as a voluntary exit. These elections were the first since 1964 to be internationally recognized as free and fair.¹⁸ Guyana operates as a parliamentary democracy with a vibrant press and a resilient civil society. Nevertheless, the elections conducted in 2020 were tainted by attempted fraud perpetrated by the then-incumbent government.¹⁹ In November 2022, the National Assembly passed a Bill for a constitutional reform commission, with the purpose of boosting minority rights and improving the electoral framework.²⁰ Elections are competitive and multi-party. The judiciary is independent from executive and legislative branches of government.²¹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1992 LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as somewhat free, fair and clean. As classified by FH for 1992, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. Between 1993 and 2004 the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. In 2005 a score of 6 to 7 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. From 2006 onward Guyana receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. In 2024 the score improved to 4, which we categorize as free. Furthermore, according to LIED, political liberties have been present since 2013. V-Dem's PCLI classified them as somewhat present until 2002 and fully present from 2003 onwards. Until 2014, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks. Since then, based on Polity5's evaluation, the executive's power was limited to a degree between substantial constraints and parity with other institutions, fitting Intermediate Category 3. For the years 2016 and 2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

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

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

³ http://www.caribbeanelections.com/education/independence/gy_independence.asp

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Guyana

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1961_British_Guiana_general_election

⁶ http://www.caribbeanelections.com/education/independence/gy_independence.asp

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheddi_Jagan

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_British_Guiana_general_election

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guyana#Independence_and_the_Burnham_era

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Guyanese_general_election

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Guyanese_general_election

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guyana/Independence>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guyana#Independence_and_the_Burnham_era

- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1978_Guyanese_constitutional_referendum
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guyana#The_Jonestown_massacre
- ¹⁶ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Guyana_2016?lang=en
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guyana#Burnham's_last_years
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Guyana#Hoyte_to_present
- ¹⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/guyana/freedom-world/2022>
- ²⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/guyana/freedom-world/2023>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Guyana

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