



Iceland — Va-PoReg Country Report

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06/06/1523 Start Part of Other Country [of Denmark]: All of the Nordic states, including Iceland, were united in one alliance between 1397 and 1523 under the Kalmar Union, but on its dissolution on 06/06/1523¹, Iceland fell under Danish rule. In 1661 Frederick III introduced an absolute monarchy in Denmark and Norway, and in the following year his absolutism was acknowledged in Iceland.² In 1874, Iceland was granted a constitution and a form of limited self-governance by Denmark. This development marked a significant step in Iceland's journey towards greater autonomy.³ A small share of men was given the right to vote in the 1844 Althing elections. A small share of women was granted the right to vote in local elections in 1882. Women's suffrage was proposed in the Althing in 1911, ratified by the Althing in 1913, and enacted on 06/19/1915 by the Danish king but only granted the vote to women over 40, and did not grant the right to vote to servants. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were present in this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

12/01/1918 End Part of Other Country [of Denmark, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this date, through the Danish-Icelandic Act of Union Iceland became sovereign and independent from Denmark as the Kingdom of Iceland but retained a personal union with the King of Denmark. However, the monarch only had a ceremonial role. All voting restrictions were lifted in 1920 after Iceland became an independent state.⁴ During this time Iceland conducted multiple competitive elections under universal suffrage.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections during this period as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as free, fair and clean. Furthermore, LIED and V-Dem's PCLI score that political liberties were present. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

05/10/1940 End Liberal Democracy/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by Allied Powers]: Following unsuccessful attempts to convince the Icelandic government to align with the Allies, the British launched an invasion on the morning of 05/10/1940.⁶ The Allied powers occupied Denmark, whose monarch remained the Icelandic head of state. According to LIED, multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are present. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

07/07/1941 End Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by Allied Powers]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: Iceland extended an invitation for the US Military to come ashore because US troops were reluctant to invade a neutral country. The transition from British to US troops is regarded as crossing the line from an occupied country to, at the very least, a semi-sovereign country. On this date the defense of Iceland was transferred from Britain to the United States, which was still a neutral country until five months later.⁷

According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. The state of political liberties is indicated as present by both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

06/17/1944 Continuation Liberal Democracy (as a republic): On this date, the Kingdom of Iceland became a Republic, following a national referendum.⁸ Four to five parties are dominant in the political landscape, the Independence Party, the Liberal Party, the agrarian Progressive Party and the Social Democratic Alliance. Additionally, in 1999 the Left Movement – Green List was founded and since been represented in the Althing, the national parliament. Historically, party elites exercised considerable political influence, issues of patronage and clientelism were more pronounced than in other Scandinavian countries. However, since the end of World War II, Icelandic political society has become increasingly pluralistic. Voter turnout in national elections has remained consistently high, ranging from 84 to 92 percent (Rubart 2006: 269). A second all-day women's strike took place on 10/24/2023 to draw attention to persisting gender discrimination. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes these elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as free, fair and clean. Iceland has a parliamentary system of government with a unicameral parliament. The political landscape is characterized by a freely operating multi-party system. Adult Icelandic citizens have the right to vote. Elections are generally free and fair. The quality of liberal democratic freedoms is also substantial, as evidenced by the LDI. Both indexes score Iceland in the high very high range since its independence. Per FH, for this regime period, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Additionally, according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI constant political liberties were achieved ever since the end of Iceland's occupation. The judiciary operates generally independent.⁹ On 09/25/2021 parliamentary elections were held.¹⁰ Although the elections were generally considered free and fair, procedural irregularities occurred.¹¹ On 01/06/2024, Halla Tomasdóttir was elected as Iceland's new president with 34.3% of the vote, after incumbent Guðni Johannesson did not seek re-election; the OSCE found no irregularities (OSCE 2024).¹² The parliamentary snap elections, on 11/30/2024, resulted in a clear shift to the left, with the Social Democratic Alliance winning the most seats. The highly fragmented outcome saw several established parties suffer their worst historical results, leading to complex negotiations to form a new government under the Alliance leader, Krístrún Frostadóttir.¹³ From 1945 to 1986, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 1987-1988, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. From 1989 to 2008, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 2009 to 2020, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. Since 2021, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Qualitative Sources: (Jahn/Eythórsson 2009, Kristinsson 1999)

- ¹ <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2023/06/on-this-day-in-1523-gustav-vasa-elected-king-happy-500-sweden/>
- ² <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iceland/Iceland-under-foreign-rule>
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icelandic_independence_movement
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Iceland
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_elections_in_Iceland
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allied_occupation_of_Iceland;
<https://www.icelandicroots.com/post/2014/11/11/the-occupation-of-iceland-during-world-war-ii>
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iceland_in_World_War_II
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Iceland
- ⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iceland/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Icelandic_parliamentary_election
- ¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iceland/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹² <https://apnews.com/article/iceland-election-women-tomasdottir-d21ac1e08025de61c74ce16413b1224f>
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Icelandic_parliamentary_election

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