



Malta — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

07/23/1813 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: On 07/23/1813 Malta became a Crown Colony and the status was confirmed as part of the Treaty of Paris in 1814. Elections were already held before 1947, but the electorate was restricted to men with certain property qualifications.¹ According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held until 1929, in 1930 and 1931 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, from 1932 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. But according to LIED male suffrage was absent until 1947. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as present until 1938, as somewhat present from 1939 to 1945 and as present from 1946 onward. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive are robust, while V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as robust from 1922-1930, moderate in 1921 and otherwise indicates no value, as no parliament exists, and thus no legislative constraints on the executive are possible.

10/27/1947 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: The elections on 10/27/1947 were the first elections without property qualifications for voters, and women were also allowed to vote for the first time. The number of seats in the Parliament was increased from ten to forty. The Malta Labour Party (MLP) won before the Nationalist Party.² Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED confirms the presence of legislative and multiparty elections as well as universal suffrage since 1947. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive are robust, while V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as robust from 1947-1958 and in 1963, and otherwise indicates no value, as no parliament exists, and thus no legislative constraints on the executive are possible.

04/21/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this day, Prime Minister Dom Mintoff and all deputies from the MLP resigned in protest over the British Admiralty's decision to dismiss dockyard workers. Georgio Borg Olivier was offered by Governor Laycock to form a new government but refused. The islands were once again placed under direct colonial administration, which led to the MLP adopting a staunch pro-Independence stance.³ Political liberties were absent until 1958 and present from 1959 onward according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as present. The Malta (Constitution) Order in Council came into effect 04/15/1959, establishing a temporary constitutional arrangement which placed extensive legislative and executive power in the Governor.⁴ On 07/27/1960, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies declared that it was the wish of the British Government to reinstate a representative government in Malta and that it was time to work out a new constitution. A Constitutional Commission under Sir Hilary Blood, referred to as the Blood Commission, was appointed to devise a report on constitutional schemes after consultation with the Maltese people. The report was presented on 12/05/1960, published on 03/08/1961 and on the same day the Secretary of State declared that the Commissioner's recommendations were to be granted. The constitution was enclosed in the Malta Constitution Order in Council 1961 and granted internal self-government to Malta, with the responsibility for defense and external affairs remaining with the British Government. The section allowing for new elections came into effect on 11/01/1961.⁵ General elections took

place in the span of 02/17-02/19/1962. The Nationalist Party emerged as the largest party, winning 25 of the 50 seats.⁶

03/03/1962 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/ Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the 1961 constitution came into full effect upon the proclamation of the Order in Council by the Governor in the Malta Government Gazette.⁷ Following the success of his party in the February elections, Geroqe Borg Olivier was tasked with forming a Maltese Government and became Prime Minister. On 08/10/1962 he formally presented a request for Independence. The Malta Independence Conference started on 07/16/1963, a constitution for an independent Malta was approved in a public referendum in 02/1964.⁸ On 09/21/1964, independence started under a government democratically elected in the general elections of 02/17-19/1962. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED considers the elections competitive for the entire time. Moreover, V-Dem's CEI indicates somewhat clean election. Electoral freedom and fairness were provided for the whole time (V-Dem EF&FI). Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI affirm that political liberties were achieved ever since 1964. Malta usually was considered to be free by FH with the exception of a period in the 1980s. It was noted that the governing party has shown a growing tendency toward antidemocratic practices. On 12/12/1981, general elections were held, leading to a majority win for the oppositional Nationalist Party. Nonetheless, the electoral system in place resulted in the previously governing Labour Party securing a narrow majority of seats in parliament.⁹ During the subsequent legislative period, the opposition initially chose to boycott the parliament. Consequently, there was a noticeable surge in political violence, raising suspicions of collusion between the ruling government and organized crime groups targeting the opposition. Additionally, the government exercised control over the nation's radio and television stations, thereby restricting opposition access to these media platforms (Gastil 1984, Gastil 1986). However, the elections remained competitive according to LIED. Moreover, V-Dem's CEI remained at somewhat cleanliness score and V-Dem's EF&FI also still states free and fair election conditions. On 05/09/1987 again general elections were held. Despite the Nationalist Party securing the highest number of votes, the Malta Labour Party secured a parliamentary majority. However, in line with amendments made to the electoral system after a similar situation arose in the 1981 elections, the Nationalist Party was granted an additional four seats to ensure a parliamentary majority.¹⁰ A peaceful transition of power followed. Despite a general acceptance of the rule of law, there are still suspicions that the government is involved in inciting gang violence against its adversaries. Additionally, the government has consolidated a significant portion of the economy, diminishing freedom by limiting pluralism (Gastil 1984: 396-397). Malta is a unicameral parliamentary democracy. The president is elected by the parliament for a five-year term. The president carries out mainly ceremonial duties. Elections are regular, competitive, fair and free. Moreover, LIED affirms that the country has held competitive elections since 1987. V-Dem's CEI remained somewhat cleanliness until 1991. Since 1992, clean elections are given. Furthermore, according to V-Dem's EF&FI the overall election conditions remained constantly free and fair since 1987. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust until 2019 and comprehensive between 2020-2023, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate until 2019 and robust between 2020-2023. The ruling Labor Party won for a third consecutive term in 2022. Moreover, new constitutional changes were made to improve gender representation in parliament.¹¹ The judiciary is regarded as generally independent and civil liberties and political rights are upheld.¹²

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Bestler/Waschkuhn 2009)

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Colony_of_Malta; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1924_Maltese_general_election
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_Maltese_general_election
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_Colony_of_Malta
- ⁴ <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/13497>
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Malta#Past_constitutions, <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/13483>
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962_Maltese_general_election
- ⁷ https://www.archontology.org/nations/malta/01_polity_1962_64.php
- ⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Borg_Olivier#Prime_Minister_\(1962%E2%80%931971\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Borg_Olivier#Prime_Minister_(1962%E2%80%931971))
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_Maltese_general_election
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Maltese_general_election
- ¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/malta/freedom-world/2023>
- ¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/malta/freedom-world/2022>

References

- Bestler, Anita/Waschkuhn, Arno (2009): Das politische System Maltas, in: Ismayr, Wolfgang (Hrsg.), Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 869-900.
- Gastil, Raymond D. (Hrsg.) (1984): Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1983-1984. New York: Freedom House.
- Gastil, Raymond D. (Hrsg.) (1986): Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1985-1986. New York: Freedom House.