



Mauritania — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1854 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: In 1854, the French military seized large parts of today's Mauritania in a struggle against Arab tribes in the Emirate of Trarza (Handloff 1988). In 1899, the French government issued its decision to establish a French Mauritanian state, extending from the Senegal River region northward. In 1901, the French government implemented a strategy of „peaceful penetration“¹ to organize the administration of territories then under Maure suzerainty. This approach was devised by Xavier Coppolani, an Algerian-raised Corsican delegate sent by the French government to Mauritania. Coppolani's policy aimed not only to subdivide and pacify the Maures but also to safeguard their interests.² By forming strategic partnerships with Zawaya tribes and using military force against the Hassane warrior nomads, French authority was successfully expanded over the Mauritanian emirates. In 1903 and 1904, the French military occupied Trarza, Brakna, and Tagant. However, the northern emirate of Adrar resisted longer, supported by the anti-colonial uprising led by shaykh Maa al-Aynayn and insurgents from Tagant and other occupied areas.³ On 10/01/1904, Mauritania was declared a protectorate by France. It was administered under the delegate general in Dakar and was given the status of a „civil territory“ soon after. On 12/04/1920, Mauritania became part of France West Africa (AOF) which was organized under a centralized federal structure in Dakar. The governor general was directly appointed by the President of the French Republic. The centralized administrative bureaucracy was made up of a lieutenant governor, a commandant for each cercle and the chiefs of the subdivisions, cantons and villages. Only the chiefs were Africans. They exercised authority due to their position in the colonial administration. After France's fall in 1940, the Vichy Government gained control over the AOF and switched from an assimilation to a racial discrimination policy.⁴ On 01/30/1944 a conference was held to commemorate the members of the Free French Forces which at one point had consisted of over 50% African soldiers. In the Brazzaville Declaration, several changes to the colonial ruling system in the AOF were proposed. The declaration was, however, strongly opposed by Vichy.⁵ No legislative and multiparty elections took place during this time (LIED). Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as absent until 1944 and not really present from 1945 onward. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. On 10/27/1946 Mauretania became an overseas territory of France through the entry into force of the new constitution of the French Fourth Republic. The Colonial Ministry was still able to rule by decree but the indigénat and forced labor were abolished. Inhabitants willing to renounce their local rights could apply for French citizenship. While the 1946 constitution did introduce suffrage and representation, this amounted to very little. For example, the Mauritanian General Council consisted of 24 members, 8 of which were elected by Europeans and 6 were elected by Mauritians. Additionally, the franchise was heavily restricted. Consequently, fewer than 10 000 voters qualified in 1946. In 1956, universal suffrage was introduced.⁶ Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Universal suffrage remained absent until 1957. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to 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 moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

03/31/1957 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the first Territorial Assembly elections with universal suffrage took place in Mauritania.⁷ The Mauritanian Progressive Union, a party which had been formed as an opposition to the Mauritanian Agreement Party, won 33 of 34 seats.

11/28/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, Mauritania attained autonomy within the French Community (Lansford 2021: 1056). This was due to the new French constitution which had been adopted within the Fifth French Republic.⁸ It provided for the creation of a French Community whose member States would be autonomous republics. This constitution was also adopted by Mauritania in a referendum in 1958. It quickly lost its appeal though as Mauritania was striving for complete independence. After the proclamation of the Islamic Republic, the Territorial Assembly renamed itself as the Constituent Assembly and began working on a draft for a national constitution.⁹ Mokhtar Ould Daddah became head of Government in 1957, supported by his Mauritanian Regroupment Party (MRP), a merger of different political groups with a strong nationalistic stance (Wegemund 1999).¹⁰ The MRP emerged victorious in the pre-independence elections held in May 1959. However, prior to independence, Daddah had prohibited certain opposition parties and detained several opposition leaders (Moore 1965: 409, Warner 1990). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED indicates no electoral competitiveness during this regime period. Moreover, V-Dem's confirms not real cleanliness. Whereas V-Dem's EF&FI indicates somewhat free and fair election conditions. In addition, no political liberties were present (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI states ambiguous political liberties for this time. In 1960, according to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

11/28/1960 End Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date, Mauritania declared its independence. Under Ould Daddah's leadership and the control of the Mauritanian Regroupment Party (MRP), the country gained independence. (Moore 1965: 409, Warner 1990). Shortly after Mauritania's independence from France in November 1960 he merged his Mauritanian Regroupment Party with opposition parties. In 1964, Ould Daddah officially proclaimed a one-party-state at the extraordinary congress of the Mauritanian People's Party. In 1965 a constitutional amendment was passed by the National assembly defining the Mauritanian People's Party (PPM) as the single legal party in Mauritania.¹¹ Elections in the First Mauritanian Republic existed. However, the presidential and parliamentary elections were non-competitive (Wegemund 1999). According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held during this period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is categorized by us as ambiguous regarding the state of political liberties, indicating an intermediate state between present and absent. In 1961, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. Since 1962, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

07/10/1978 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: A coup of junior officers led by Colonel Mohamed Salek ousted the Ould Daddah regime during an economic crisis and trouble containing an insurgency. Salek took power as chairman of the Military Committee for National Recovery (CMRN) of 20 officers (Warner 1990, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 78). The coup led to a 14 year long military rule (Wegemund 1999). On 04/06/1979 prime minister and junta member Bouceif reduced Salek to a ceremonial

position while taking the chair for himself. The reason was that Salek isolated himself in the junta. On 01/04/1980 Haidalla ousted Louly as head of the junta. Taya became chief of staff of the army under the leadership of Haidalla in January 1981. On 12/12/1984 Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, one of the most important members of the regime, overthrew Haidalla while he was out of the country after he removed Taya from the premier post. Taya assumed the chair of the National Recovery junta.¹² Under Taya's leadership, ethnic tensions in Mauritania escalated, with preferential treatment of Arabs leading to violence and economic decline. Opposition demanded democratic reforms, prompting Taya to introduce a multi-party system and adopt a new constitution in 1991 (Wegemund 1999). Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent until 1986 and are not really present from 1987 onwards. Based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power during this period. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

01/24/1992 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the first presidential election since independence took place. Ould Taya faced his main rival, Ahmed Ould Daddah, who led the opposition coalition. The opposition boycotted the parliamentary elections in March (03/06/1992), claiming manipulation. As a result, the National Assembly was mostly filled with members from Taya's PRDS party. These elections hinted at a lack of progress toward democratization. Subsequent years saw intense confrontation between the President and his main rival, Ould Daddah. The 1996/97 elections failed to alter the fundamental aspects of political dynamics. In October 1996, parliamentary elections reaffirmed the ruling party's dominant position in the National Assembly. The opposition ran independently, leading to the PRDS securing a resounding 7/8 victory. Despite an absence of direct interference on voting day, the elections encountered significant structural barriers, such as the absence of population registers and administration controlled by the PRDS, severely limiting competitiveness. The united opposition boycotted the presidential election in December 1997, leading to President Ould Taya's reelection (Pazzanita 1999, Wegemund 1999).¹³ Mauritania conducted presidential elections on November 7, 2003. Predictably, the sitting President Ould Taya secured a comfortable reelection victory against feeble opposition. Allegations of election fraud arose from the opposition. Moreover, Ould Taya's primary challenger, former military leader Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla, was arrested both before and after the vote.¹⁴ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. In addition, LIED classifies the elections as not competitive for the entire regime period. According to V-Dem's CEI, no clean elections were held and the overall elections conditions were not really free and fair (V-Dem EF&FI). Besides, political liberties remained absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies their presence as ambiguous until 1999 and as somewhat present since 2000. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited between 1996-2004 and otherwise absent.

08/03/2005 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: While Taya was out of the country, Ely Mohamed seized control of government buildings and media and declared the end of the Taya's repressive rule. He seated himself at the head of a junta with the goal of bringing democracy to the nation. A coup led by members of the presidential guard and the military removed the Taya government from power (N'Diaye 2006: 421, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 78).¹⁵ On 08/03/2005, during Taya's absence in Saudi Arabia for King Fahd's funeral, a bloodless coup unfolded. Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, along with a group of security and army officers, assumed control and formed the ruling Military Council for Justice and Democracy (MCJD), with Vall appointed as the head of state. On 08/05, the parliament was dissolved (Lansford 2021: 1057). Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this

period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. In addition to that, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present in 2005 and are present afterwards. Based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power during this period. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

03/25/2007 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: A competitive presidential election, deemed free and fair, resulted in the peaceful transfer of power to civilian authorities (Ojeda 2009: 2-3, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 78). The election took place under universal suffrage.¹⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The election scored no competitiveness according to LIED. Moreover, V-Dem's CEI and V-Dem's EF&FI indicate both ambiguous cleanliness and ambiguous overall election conditions. In addition to that, political liberties were absent according to LIED, whereas V-Dem's PCLI declares full political liberties. In 2007, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate in 2007 and limited in 2008.

08/06/2008 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, Abdelaziz staged a coup supported by active-duty officers and senior officers who had been dismissed recently from the President's Security Battalion. Abdallahi, el-Waghf who had been the interior minister was arrested. An all-military High Council of States replaced the elected government, and all public media was shut down. Abdelaziz promised to hold elections but did not mention a specific date. The African Union (AU) as well as the EU, UN and USA clearly communicated their objection to the coup and demanded to adhere the constitution. (Lansford 2012: 919, Lansford 2021: 1058, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 78).¹⁷ According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. For that period, LIED identifies the state of political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 1, between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

07/18/2009 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date presidential elections were held. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who led the 2008 coup d'état, won a narrow first-round majority in the election, according to official results.¹⁸ The presidential elections in 2019 led to the first peaceful transfer of power since independence. Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, the former minister of defense received over 50% in the first round on 06/22/2019. The opposition did not recognize the results and accused the military of interfering in the political sphere again.¹⁹ Human Rights Watch reported that Mauritanian authorities detained at least three prominent pro-opposition figures for a week without charge. This action appeared to be aimed at suppressing dissent following the June 22 presidential election. Additionally, the authorities shut down the Internet and arrested numerous opposition activists.²⁰ On 06/09/2024 presidential election were held, and incumbent president Mohamed Ould Ghazouani was re-elected. Clashes between security forces and protesters disputing the election outcome in Kaédi on 07/02 resulted in three deaths, after which authorities imposed a nationwide mobile internet blackout.²¹ According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were present until 2010, in 2011 and 2012 only multiparty legislative elections were held from 2013 onward multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. These elections were not competitive since 2009 (LIED). The 2009 elections scored no cleanliness, and not real cleanliness was given the following two years. Since 2012 the country indicates an ambiguous state regarding the cleanliness of elections. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates that, overall, the elections were somewhat free and fair until 2012. Since 2013, EF&FI indicates an ambiguous

state. Regarding political liberties, LIED considers them as absent. On the other hand, V-Dem's PCLI confirms the presence of political liberties until 2011. Since 2012 the country scores somewhat political liberties expect for 2017 and 2018 when their presence is considered as ambiguous. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 1, between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent in 2022 and otherwise limited, and V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited from 2009-2012 and in 2021 and 2023, absent from 2013-2019, and moderate in 2020 and 2022. Per FH's scoring for 2010 to 2018, the country is classified as not free with a score of 11, which falls into our interpretation of the not free category. From 2019 onwards, the FH score improved to 10 and is therefore interpreted as partly free, which corresponds to our interpretation of our framework as rather not free. Mauritania is a borderline case between an electoral hybrid regime and an electoral autocracy.

Electoral Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Handloff 1988)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_Mauritania
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_Mauritania
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritania#Colonial_history
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_Mauritania
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazzaville_Conference
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_Mauritania#Postwar_reforms
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1957_Mauritanian_Territorial_Assembly_election
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Community#1958
- ⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mauritania_\(1960%E2%80%931978\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mauritania_(1960%E2%80%931978))
- ¹⁰ <https://countrystudies.us/mauritania/15.htm>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritanian_Regroupment_Party
- ¹¹ <https://countrystudies.us/mauritania/16.htm>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mauritania_\(1960%E2%80%931978\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mauritania_(1960%E2%80%931978))
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maaouya_Ould_Sid%27Ahmed_Taya
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Mauritanian_parliamentary_election;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Mauritanian_presidential_election
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Mauritanian_presidential_election
- ¹⁵ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5467.html>
- ¹⁶ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mauritania_2012
- ¹⁷ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7545934.stm>; <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/mauritania/171660.htm>
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_Mauritanian_presidential_election
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Mauritanian_presidential_election
- ²⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/23/mauritania-widespread-arrests-blunt-backlash-over-election>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Mauritanian_presidential_election

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