



Nauru — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/02/1888 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany]: In 1886, Germany was granted control over the island of Nauru through the Anglo-German Declaration. On 10/02/1888, Nauru was forcefully integrated into the German Protectorate of the Marshall Islands, ostensibly to quell a civil war.¹ Then, in April 1906, the Marshall Islands Protectorate was incorporated into German New Guinea, leading to Nauru's transition from a protectorate to an official colony by 1907 (Reilly/Gratschew 2001, Storr). Nauru, as part of the German colonial system, did not have a local parliament or any form of representative assembly. The island was administered by officials appointed by the German government, who reported to the colonial authorities in German New Guinea and, ultimately, to the German Imperial government. The governance of Nauru was centralized, with the German colonial administration making decisions regarding the island's affairs. The local population had no political power or formal means of participation in governance. LIED confirms that legislative multiparty elections were absent. LIED classifies political liberties as absent.

09/14/1914 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Australia, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the Acting Governor of German New Guinea surrendered to Australian troops. From that point until 1919, Britain held control of the island. The Australian occupation was declared successful on 11/06/1914 (Storr 2020). No elections were held during this period (LIED). For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent.

10/28/1919 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Australia, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy]: In 1920, Nauru was formally designated as a British League of Nations mandate, although the practical implementation of administrative authority on the island was dictated by the 1919 Nauru Island Agreement", adopted on 10/28/1919. This agreement established an Australian-appointed administrator and formed the British Phosphate Commission (BPC) to control phosphate mining (Storr 2020: 161, Lansford 2021). During this period, Nauru did not have a local parliament or representative body. The island was administered by an Australian-appointed administrator who acted on behalf of the three mandatory powers (the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand). The political authority on the island was concentrated in the hands of the Australian administrator, who was responsible for implementing the policies of the mandatory powers. The local population had no formal political representation or say in the governance of the island. The British Phosphate Commission (BPC) was established to manage the lucrative phosphate mining operations on Nauru. This body, controlled by the mandatory powers, further underscored the economic exploitation of Nauru without the involvement or consent of the indigenous Nauruans. LIED still considers multiparty executive and legislative elections as absent. Political liberties were absent according to LIED.

08/26/1942 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as International Mandate]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: During the Second World War, Nauru was occupied by Japanese forces who deported around 1200 Nauruan people to the Truk Islands (now Chuuk State within the Federated States of Micronesia) (Morris 2022, Lansford 2021). The Japanese also took control of the phosphate operations on the island. In 1945, the United States of America bombarded the Japanese military base in Nauru and Truk but focused on occupying Truk and the rest of the

Pacific Islands Mandate, leaving Nauru under Japanese control (Storr 2020). No elections were held during this period (LIED). In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent.

09/13/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy, later Australia]: On this date, Japanese troops surrendered to Australian forces. On 01/01/1946, the Nauruan people who survived Japanese captivity on Truk Islands were repatriated to Nauru and the BPC maintained its operations (Storr 2020).² On 11/01/1947, Nauru was designated a UN Trust Territory, jointly administered by the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, with Australia once again acting as the de facto administering authority (Lansford 2021: 1160).³ Universal suffrage was introduced in 1951. According to LIED multiparty and legislative elections were held since 1951. According to our observations, this is a false coding. Nauru's electoral laws originated in 1965 when an electoral ordinance based on Australian legislation was implemented (Reilly/Gratschew 2001). According to LIED political liberties were absent.

01/22/1966 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate of Australia]: Formally, already on 01/01/1966 Nauru became a self-governing territory. On 01/22/1966 elections were held for members of a Legislative Council, that held jurisdiction over all matters except defense, external affairs, and the phosphate industry (Lansford 2021: 1160). The newly formed body consisted of fifteen members, including nine elected members, one ex officio member (the Administrator), and five „official members“ appointed by the Governor-General of Australia upon the nomination of the Administrator. Since six members of the assembly were de facto not elected, the period cannot be called a democratic period.⁴ There were no parties, all candidates ran as independent contestants. DeRoburt insisted that 'self-government' meant being recognized as a sovereign state on the international stage. However, the Australian government was only willing to grant them the status of a municipal council within Queensland (Storr 2020). A Constitutional Convention was elected in 1967. It produced a new constitution in preparation for independence, which provided for an 18-member Legislative Assembly with a three-year term. The assembly would then appoint a five-member Council of State to exercise executive power.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this time the elections were competitive following LIED. According to LIED political liberties were present.

01/31/1968 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [as International Mandate of Australia]/Start Liberal Democracy: Following the adoption of the Nauru Independence Act on 11/10/1967 in the Australian federal parliament, Australian authorities drafted a new constitution for Nauru, providing for a Westminster-style parliamentary system. On 01/26/1968, elections were held for the 18-member new legislative assembly, with two positions for each of the nine constituencies. On 01/29/1968, the constitution was unanimously adopted, and Nauru became a sovereign state on 01/31/1968 (Storr 2020). On 05/18/1968 Hammer DeRoburt, who had served as head chief of Nauru since 1956, was appointed as the first president of the new republic through legislative designation (Lansford 2021: 1160). On 12/18/1976, Bernard Dowiyogo was elected president, challenging DeRoburt's leadership. The parliamentary elections of 1976 saw the emergence of the Nauru Party, which won most seats, but the party disappeared after DeRoburt's re-election as president. Although Nauru does not have political parties, they are permitted, but candidates generally run as independents. Alliances in the parliament are loose and mainly based on personal and family relationships. Throughout the years, the government has witnessed numerous changes due to successful votes of no confidence, resulting in 16 government changes between 1968 and 2000. Nauru operates under a unicameral parliamentary system with a president who serves as head of government and head of state. Suffrage is granted to Nauruan citizens over 20 (Reilly/Gratschew 2001). The parliamentary elections on 08/24/2019 were monitored by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Incumbent President Baron Waqa had previously been accused of electoral fraud by granting citizenship to foreigners. However, the elections were generally considered free and fair, Waqa lost re-election, and Lionel Aingimea was chosen president. Despite universal suffrage, only three women have been elected to Nauru's legislative assembly since independence. Based on our observations, multiparty

executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED affirms that the elections were constantly competitive ever since the country's independence. According to FH, from 1972 to 2018, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. From 2019 onward, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. Besides, the country guaranteed political liberties ever since its independence in 1968 (LIED). Moreover, the Australian government yields considerable political influence in Nauru due to an immigration detention center for asylum seekers on the island. On 09/24/2021, Nauru signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Australian government to maintain the operation of the immigration detention center indefinitely.⁶ V-Dem does not list the country in its data.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

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

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_Nauru

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Nauru

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Administrators_of_Nauru

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1967_Nauruan_Constitutional_Convention_election

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nauru/freedom-world/2022>

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