



Netherlands Antilles — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1845 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands]: The territory, which would later become known as the Netherlands Antilles, was administered under the name „Colony of Curaçao and Dependencies. This administrative unit grouped together the six Dutch island territories in the Caribbean, the „Leeward Islands“ (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao) off the coast of Venezuela and the „Windward Islands“ (Saba, Sint Eustatius, and the southern part of Sint Maarten).¹ Curaçao, the largest island, was originally inhabited by Arawak people before being settled by the Spanish in 1499 and subsequently seized by the Dutch West India Company in 1634.² Aruba followed a similar trajectory, with Spanish colonization in 1499 and Dutch control established in 1636.³ Sint Maarten was divided between France and the Netherlands via the Treaty of Concordia in 1648.⁴ Governance was centralized in Willemstad, Curaçao, under a Dutch governor with comprehensive executive authority.⁵ Until 1936 the colonial structure allowed for no genuine representation of the indigenous population with the Colonial Council only as a purely advisory body appointed by the colonial authorities. In 1936, a new constitution was enacted, reorganizing the colonial administration. This reform replaced the Colonial Council with a representative body known as the Estates of Curaçao, which convened for the first time in April 1938. The first elections for this body were held on 20 December 1937. However, the parliament consisted of only 15 members, of whom 5 were appointed by the Governor and 10 were elected. Suffrage was extremely restricted based on income and education (census suffrage), allowing only about 5% of the male population to vote. Despite the existence of this parliament, the Governor retained dominant executive power and legislative vetoes, maintaining the character of direct colonial rule during this period.⁶ On 05/21/1948 a new constitution for the territory entered into force. Crucially, this revision introduced universal suffrage for men and women and formally renamed the territory „Netherlands Antilles“.⁷

03/17/1949 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, following the new legal foundation from May 1948, the first general elections for the Estates of the Netherlands Antilles took place.⁸ The newly elected parliament possessed genuine legislative authority, marking a substantial transfer of power to a locally elected body.⁹ Furthermore, on 03/03/1951, the „Islands Regulation of the Netherlands Antilles“ was enacted by royal decree. This regulation granted substantial autonomy to the individual island territories (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, and the Windward Islands), establishing Island Councils and decentralizing significant administrative powers.¹⁰

12/15/1954 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Netherlands, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands was signed, ending the colonial status of the islands. The Netherlands Antilles became an autonomous country within the Kingdom, equal to the Netherlands and Suriname. The Charter granted the Netherlands Antilles full autonomy over internal affairs, with a parliamentary democratic system, while the Kingdom retained responsibility for defense, foreign affairs, and the Supreme Court.¹¹ Growing dissatisfaction with Curaçao's perceived subservient position in its relationship with the Netherlands, persistent racial discrimination, and an increase in joblessness due to layoffs in the oil sector, culminated in a series of riots in 1969.¹² On 01/01/1986 Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles to become a separate constituent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This secession was the culmination of a

long-standing political struggle driven by Aruban dissatisfaction with the administrative dominance of Curaçao within the Antillean federation. Under the leadership of Betico Croes and his Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP), the call for a „Status Aparte“ gained momentum in the 1970s.¹³ This mandate was formally secured in the referendum on 03/25/1977, where an overwhelming majority voted in favor of complete independence, forcing the Kingdom to open negotiations. In March 1983, Aruba secured a formal arrangement with the Kingdom for its eventual independence, with a progression of steps granting greater autonomy as approved by the Crown. In August 1985, Aruba formulated a constitution that received unanimous approval. Aruba conducted general elections on 11/22/1985 to choose the members of the Island Council. These elections took place shortly before Aruba’s separation from the Netherlands Antilles and its establishment as a ‘land’ (country) within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Therefore, based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were present during this period. The Netherlands Antilles continued to exist as a political entity comprising the remaining five islands (Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba).¹⁴ In 1989, the political leadership of Sint Maarten expressed their intention to attain complete independence at the earliest opportunity. However, ultimately, Sint Maarten opted to maintain its association with the Netherlands, granting it a higher level of self-governance. Following the results of referendums held on each island between 2000 and 2005, the constitutional structure of the Dutch Caribbean was reorganized.¹⁵ In 2006, the people of Sint Maarten, in conjunction with the other islands and the Dutch government, reached an agreement to dissolve the Netherlands Antilles.¹⁶

10/10/2010 End Netherlands Antilles [Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the Netherlands Antilles were dissolved as a political entity. Curaçao and Sint Maarten became autonomous constituent countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands (comparable to the status Aruba achieved in 1986). The smaller islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba (collectively known as the BES islands or Caribbean Netherlands) became special municipalities of the Netherlands proper, thereby integrating directly into the Dutch political system.¹⁷

For the time after 01/01/1986 (Aruba) and 10/10/2010 (Curaçao, Sint Maarten), see the respective Country Reports.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colony_of_Cura%C3%A7ao_and_Dependencies

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Cura%C3%A7ao

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aruba#History>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sint_Maarten#History

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands_Antilles, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governor_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

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

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949_Netherlands_Antilles_general_election

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islands_Regulation_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_for_the_Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cura%C3%A7ao#Dutch_colonial_rule

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1977_Aruban_independence_referendum

¹⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aruba#History>

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Netherlands_Antilles

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saint-Martin-island-West-Indies>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_Caribbean