



New Caledonia — Va-PoReg Country Report

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09/24/1853 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: In 1853, France assumed control over much of what is now New Caledonia during ceremonies at Balade and the Île des Pins, with the initial intention of potentially using the region as a location for a penal Colonial Regime.¹ Throughout the period of colonial settlement and persisting until as late as 1917, there were frequent uprisings by the Melanesian population, which were a source of ongoing concern for both the settlers and the authorities. By 1860, French control had been established over the southern portion of the mainland. Over the following decade, the French implemented policies related to the allocation of indigenous land, the reorganization of tribes, and the appointment of a system of tribal chiefs to represent the colonial administration. As the 19th century approached its end, substantial portions of Melanesian land had been taken over, and the residents were confined to designated reserves.² LIED does not list New Caledonia during its colonial era.

10/27/1946 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]/Start Part of Other Country [of France]: In 1946, New Caledonia attained the status of an overseas territory. On 12/22/1946 and 01/05/1947 legislative elections were held to elect the 19 members of the General Council.³ By 1953, French citizenship was extended to all residents of New Caledonia, irrespective of their ethnic background. Between 1976 and 1988, a series of conflicts between the French government and the independence movement of the indigenous Kanak population caused a period of violence and disorder. In 1983, a five-year transition period with a referendum in 1989 was proposed. In 01/1985, the French Government offered sovereignty and legal protection from settlers to the Kanaks. However, continued unrest and escalations in violence caused by independence efforts of the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) disrupted these plans, which ultimately did not come to pass. Beginning in 03/1986, redistributions of land by the French Government without the consultation of the native population further aggravated the tense relations, culminating in several pro-independence militant Kanaks taking 36 hostages between in 1988, in hopes of forcing negotiations with the French government.⁴ On 06/26/1988, the Matignon Agreements were signed between loyalists and separatists, setting up a ten-year period of development during which the New Caledonians agreed not to raise the issue of independence. The agreement also provided amnesty to those involved in the hostage taking. The agreement was approved by French and New Caledonian voters in a referendum on 11/06/1988, in which voters were asked whether they agreed to let New Caledonian residents vote for self-determination in 1998, which 80% of voters approved.⁵

11/08/1998 End Part of Other Country [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: Within the framework of the Nouméa Accord, New Caledonia's status changed from an overseas territory to a sui generis overseas collectivity.⁶ Through this Accord, New Caledonia was granted extensive autonomy rights. However, the region exercises this autonomy under the sovereignty of France. New Caledonia gained the right to vote for both legislative and executive powers and is represented in the French Senate and Assembly. However, a representative of the French state oversees these institutions and has the authority to intervene.⁷ Following the Nouméa Accord's timeline, which mandated a vote by the end of 2018, preparations for a referendum on full independence from France began. The vote took place on 11/04/2018, resulting in the rejection of independence. Another referendum occurred in October 2020, where voters once again opted to remain part of France. In the 2018

referendum, 56.7% of voters chose to remain, and in the 2020 referendum, 53.4% made the same choice. A third referendum took place on 12/12/2021. Pro-independence groups boycotted the referendum, citing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and requesting a postponement, which the French government declined. As a result, 96% of voters chose to maintain their association with France.⁸ In May 2024, weeks of civil unrest erupted following the enactment of a law granting French residents of the islands the right to vote in provincial elections, provided they have lived there for at least ten years. Thousands of protesters took to the streets in deadly riots, prompting the declaration of a state of emergency and the deployment of army personnel to the islands. The riots are believed to stem from the frustration of pro-independence parties, who had boycotted the 2021 referendum.⁹ The autonomy rights, representation in the French Parliament, and limited sovereignty make it difficult to categorize the regime. New Caledonia, like the other overseas collectivities, represents a special borderline case. However, it distinguishes itself from the others through its particularly strong independence movement and the resulting unique status. Nevertheless, this special position is not significant enough for New Caledonia to be regarded as independent. Due to its higher degree of autonomy compared to other French administrative zones, such as the départements et régions d'outre-mer, the region cannot be classified as an Indirect Rule Colonial Regime. Instead, it can be categorized as an electoral democracy with the additional designation as semi-sovereign. It is considered defective because, due to France's position, these territories do not possess full sovereignty. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not list New Caledonia in their database. Since 1986, New Caledonia has again been listed by the United Nations as a Non-Self-Governing Territory caused by an ongoing debate about the independence of the region.¹⁰

Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ <https://www.newcaledonia.travel/en/history-economy>

² <https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Caledonia-French-unique-collectivity-Pacific-Ocean/History>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1946%E2%80%939347_New_Caledonian_legislative_election

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Caledonia#The_Events

⁵ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matignon_Agreements_\(1988\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matignon_Agreements_(1988))

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noum%C3%A9a_Accord

⁷ <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000393606/>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Caledonia#History

⁹ <https://thediplotat.com/2024/05/whats-behind-the-deadly-riots-in-new-caledonia/>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt>