



New Zealand — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/06/1840 Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: On 02/06/1840, New Zealand became a British colony by the Treaty of Waitangi.¹ When the British Parliament passed the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1852, New Zealand embarked on a journey of independence from Britain in exercising sovereignty, legislative, judicial, and executive authority, over its domestic affairs. However, ‘imperial interests’, (including foreign relations, external trade, the constitution and ‘native affairs’), were beyond the powers of the New Zealand Parliament. New Zealand did not obtain ‘Dominion status’ until 1907, yet this did not signify absolute sovereign independence, as the position of the dominions in international affairs may not necessarily align with dominion status.² From 01/17/1853 it was de facto self-governing. With the extension of voting rights to women in 1893, the self-governing British colony became one of the first permanently constituted jurisdictions in the world to grant universal adult suffrage, suffrage previously having been universal for Māori men over 21 from 1867, and for white men from 1879. Plural voting (impacting men) was abolished in 1889. Some prison inmates were denied the right to vote.³ According to our observations and LIED, during this time multiparty legislative and executive elections were held and universal suffrage was guaranteed. Both LIED and V-Dem’s PCLI classify political liberties as present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination.

09/26/1907 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, New Zealand was granted nominal independence by becoming a dominion. However, it did not achieve full independence, meaning complete autonomy and sovereign authority over its own constitutional matters and foreign affairs, until 11/25/1947. On 11/25/1947, the Statute of Westminster was adopted, and Britain lost the power to legislate for New Zealand.⁴ As of 2023 New Zealand is still formally a monarchy with King Charles III. as Sovereign. However, the King acts entirely on the advice of New Zealand Government Ministers. The monarch is represented in New Zealand by a governor-general.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For over one hundred years as an independent country, the elections were always competitive following LIED. In addition, constant cleanliness was scored (V-Dem CEI). The overall election conditions were continuously free and fair, except between 1951 and 1953 when somewhat freedom and fairness is scored (V-Dem EF&FI). According to all classifications of political regimes New Zealand is a democracy. In RoW which distinguishes between electoral and liberal democracies it is classified as a liberal democracy since 1913 and by LIED as a polyarchy (largely equivalent to the meaning of liberal democracy). Regarding FH the country achieved, for instance in 2022, a value of 99 from 100, including a perfect score on the political rights scale, as one of the freest countries in the world.⁶ According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Therefore, for over one hundred years New Zealand achieved full political liberties (LIED, V-Dem PCLI). Since 1908, based on Polity5’s assessment, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the years 1900 to 2023, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Bassett 1982, Brooking 2004, Lipson 1948, Roberts 2004, Kaiser 2002)

Notes

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

² https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLLawRP07041/new-zealand-sovereignty-1857-1907-1947-or-1987#footnote_3

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

⁴ https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/research-papers/document/00PLLawRP07041/new-zealand-sovereignty-1857-1907-1947-or-1987#footnote_3

⁵ <https://www.parliament.nz/mi/get-involved/features/the-sovereign-s-role-in-new-zealand/>

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

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