



Newfoundland — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Newfoundland, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

08/01/1610 Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: English colonists began establishing settlements in Newfoundland in August 1610, guided by proprietary governors as part of England's efforts to gain a foothold in North America.¹ The competition between England and France in Europe extended to conflicts in North America, particularly in Newfoundland, where English settlements were near French claims in Southern Newfoundland. In 1825, it officially became a Crown colony, with Thomas John Cochrane appointed as its first governor. Representative government was established in 1832, with a colonial assembly sharing power with an appointed Legislative Council.² Newfoundland achieved responsible government in 1854, gaining self-governing status. Philip Francis Little served as the first Premier from 1855 to 1858. Despite considerations from 1864 to 1869, the colony rejected confederation with Canada.³ Newfoundland retained its status as a colony until the 1907 Imperial Conference, which decided to grant dominion status to all self-governing colonies in attendance.⁴ In April 1925, women aged 25 and above were given the right to vote. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

06/02/1928 End Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy]: On this date, for the first time women took part in the parliamentary elections. 90 percent of eligible women exercised their voting privilege.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Newfoundland.

02/16/1934 End Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: Newfoundland's self-governing status was revoked by the Dominion, leading to the assumption of control by the Commission of Government in response to the economic collapse during the Great Depression. Despite retaining the title of a dominion, Newfoundland effectively functioned in name only. During this period, a governor oversaw Newfoundland, reporting to the Colonial Secretary in London, and the legislature was suspended (Overton 1990).⁶

12/11/1945 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: On this date it was announced by the British Government that a national convention should be elected by the local population to decide for Newfoundland's future. The election took place on 06/21/1946 and on 09/11/1946 the new National Convention started its work.⁷ The British government included confederation as an option in a referendum held on 06/03/1948, which yielded inconclusive results. A subsequent referendum on 07/22/1948 saw a majority of 52.3 percent in favor of confederation.⁸

03/31/1949 End Newfoundland [Indirect Rule Colonial Regime]: On this date, Newfoundland became part of Canada, as the province of Newfoundland.⁹ With the end date, Newfoundland is no longer in Va-PoReg, since the decision to join Canada was completely free and the return to an independent status is extremely unlikely. V-Dem do not list Newfoundland in their database.

For the time after 03/31/1949, see Canada.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_Colony; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuper%27s_Cove

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Newfoundland_and_Labrador#Colonization

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

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion_of_Newfoundland#Political_origins

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1928_Newfoundland_general_election

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion_of_Newfoundland#End_of_responsible_government

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

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Newfoundland-and-Labrador/British-fishery-to-colony>

⁹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_\(island\)#Union_with_Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_(island)#Union_with_Canada)

References

Overton, James (1990): Economic Crisis and the End of Democracy: Politics in Newfoundland During the Great Depression, in: Labour/Le Travailleur 26, 85-124.