



Northern Mariana Islands — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

02/12/1899 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany, as Part of German New Guinea]: The Jesuit priest Diego Luis de Sanvitores initiated the permanent colonization of the islands in 1668. Spanish reinforcements, led by José Quiroga, arrived in 1680, marking the beginning of European colonial rivalries in the Marianas by the 19th century. German and British soldiers encroached on Spanish claims in Micronesia, leading to potential conflict in 1886. Pope Leo XIII mediated, preventing war between Germany and Spain. However, Spain's weakening empire faced war with the United States in 1898. After the U.S. defeated the Spanish fleet in the Philippines and took Guam, Spain decided to withdraw from the Pacific in 1899. It sold its possessions, including all of the Marianas except Guam, which remained under American control, to Germany.¹ The German-Spanish Treaty was signed on 02/12/1899.² The islands were under German administration as a component of the German New Guinea colony.³

09/21/1914 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany, Constitutional Monarchy as Part of German New Guinea]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as League of Nation Mandate of Japan, Autocratic Monarchy]: At the onset of World War I, Japan declared war on Germany and occupied the Northern Marianas. Following the war's conclusion in 1919, the League of Nations (LoN) granted Japan a mandate over all of Germany's Pacific islands situated north of the Equator, which encompassed the Northern Marianas. Consequently, Japan administered the Northern Marianas as part of the South Seas Mandate under this mandate.⁴ On 12/08/1941, shortly after the assault on Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces from the Marianas initiated an invasion of Guam. Chamorros from the Northern Marianas, under Japanese rule for over two decades, were transported to Guam to support the Japanese administration.⁵

06/15/1944 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as League of Nation Mandate of Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the United States military initiated the invasion of the Mariana Islands, commencing the Battle of Saipan, which concluded on 07/09.⁶ After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Northern Marianas were placed under U.S. administration as part of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

09/28/1964 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: On this day the Congress of Micronesia, as the legislature of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, was created and was composed by a Senate and a House of Representatives with 21 members. The Mariana Islands voted 3 of the members. Elections were held every two years until 1976.⁷ Moreover, four referendums, held in 1958, 1961, 1963, and 1969, indicated majority support for integration with Guam, but Guam rejected this in 1969. In the 1975 referendum, nearly 80% voted for the Commonwealth of the United States, and in 1977, over 93% approved the CNMI constitution. Opting not for independence, the Northern Mariana Islands pursued closer ties with the U.S. Commonwealth negotiations began in 1972, leading to the approval of a covenant for political union in a 1975 referendum.⁸ LIED does not treat the colonial time in its data.

01/09/1978 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Liberal Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under USA, Liberal Democracy]: On this date the constitution became effective after it was drafted in 1976 and ratified by Northern Mariana Islands voters on 03/06/1977.⁹ The

Northern Mariana Islands came under U.S. sovereignty on 11/04/1986, and the residents gained U.S. citizenship.¹⁰ As per the 1978 constitution, the U.S. president serves as the head of state in the Northern Mariana Islands. The head of government is the governor, elected by residents to a four-year term, along with a lieutenant governor. The bicameral legislature comprises a nine-member Senate and an 18-member House of Representatives. Additionally, the commonwealth elects one representative to the U.S. House of Representatives.¹¹ The judiciary operates independently, and regular elections facilitate frequent changes in government.¹² Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Northern Mariana Islands.

Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Northern-Mariana-Islands/History>

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German%E2%80%93Spanish_Treaty_\(1899\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German%E2%80%93Spanish_Treaty_(1899))

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mariana_Islands#German_possession_and_Japanese_mandate

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mariana_Islands#German_possession_and_Japanese_mandate

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mariana_Islands#World_War_II

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mariana_Islands#World_War_II

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

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

⁹ <https://cnmilaw.org/cons.php#gsc.tab=0>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Mariana_Islands#History

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Northern-Mariana-Islands/Economy#ref54015>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_Northern_Mariana_Islands#;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elections_in_the_Northern_Mariana_Islands