



Saint Barthélemy — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

03/16/1878 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: By 1648, the French settled on the island, initially with about 50 to 60 settlers, supported by Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy, the lieutenant-governor of the French West India Company. However, the island faced economic difficulties and was frequently targeted by pirates and the British, who attacked it in 1744. Consequently, King Louis XVI considered it of little value and traded the island to Sweden in 1784 in exchange for trade privileges in Gothenburg. Slavery was practiced on the island under the 1787 Ordinance concerning the Police of Slaves and free Colored People. The last legally owned slaves in the Swedish colony were granted freedom by the state on 10/09/1847. In 1852, a devastating hurricane struck the island, followed by a fire, which severely impacted the economy. In response to these challenges, Sweden sought to relinquish control of the island. After a referendum in 1877, Sweden sold the island back to France in 1878, and it was subsequently administered as part of Guadeloupe.¹ LIED does not take Saint Barthélemy in consideration for its colonial time.

03/19/1946 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy as Part of Guadeloupe)]/Start Part of Other Country [of as Part of Guadeloupe, France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the inhabitants of the island were granted full French citizenship with all associated rights and privileges. Saint Barthélemy was a French municipality within Guadeloupe, an overseas region and department of France, for an extended period. In 2003, following a referendum, the island's inhabitants expressed their desire to break away from Guadeloupe's administrative control.²

07/15/2007 End Part of Other Country [of France, Liberal Democracy as Part of Guadeloupe)]/Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: Saint Barthélemy split off from Guadeloupe and transformed into an Overseas Collectivity (COM). Saint Barthélemy 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 postpone legislative decisions, dissolve the parliament or the executive, and establish an interim government. Important policy areas, such as foreign affairs and security policy, are determined by France. On 01/01/2012, Saint Barthélemy stopped being an outermost region of the European Union (EU) and instead became an Overseas Country or Territory (OCT).³ The island is governed by a president elected every five years, a unicameral Territorial Council comprising nineteen members elected by the public for five-year terms, and an executive council consisting of seven members. The first elections for these councils took place on 07/01/2007, with the most recent election occurring in 2022.⁴ FH, LIED and V-Dem do not treat Saint Barthélemy in their data. The autonomy rights, representation in the French Parliament, and limited sovereignty make it difficult to categorize the regime. Saint Barthélemy, as well as the other overseas collectivities, represents a special case. 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 of a protectorate-type. It is considered defective because, due to France's position, these territories do not possess full sovereignty.

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

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barth%C3%A9lemy#History

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barth%C3%A9lemy#History

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barth%C3%A9lemy#History

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barth%C3%A9lemy#Politics_and_government