



Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

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

08/14/1816 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: In 1657, Oliver Cromwell granted the English East India Company a charter to administer Saint Helena, and the subsequent year, the Company chose to strengthen the island's defenses and establish a settlement with planters. Ascension Island, previously unoccupied, was strategically occupied by the Royal Navy on 10/22/1815. Similarly, Tristan da Cunha was annexed as a dependency of the Cape Colony (British South Africa) on 08/14/1816, as part of the resolution of the Napoleonic Wars, driven by similar strategic considerations.¹ On 08/28/1833 Saint Helena became a crown colony by the Government of India Act.² Ascension Island became a dependency of Saint Helena in September 1922, with Tristan da Cunha following suit in January 1938. These three islands were collectively governed under the flagship of „Saint Helena and Dependencies”.³ Saint Helena does not appear in LIED's data for this time.

01/01/1967 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: St. Helena gained a degree of self-rule with an Order in Council and Royal Instructions in 1966 (implemented in January 1967), establishing local executive and legislative councils.⁴ As this new order awarded universal suffrage to the residents of St. Helena but still gave most authority to the appointed executive council and governor, we classify it as a self-ruling colonial regime.⁵ LIED still does not provide any data.

01/01/1983 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Liberal Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: The British Nationality Act of 1981 reclassified Saint Helena and other crown colonies as British Dependent Territories. As a result, the residents lost their designation as 'Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies,' as outlined in the British Nationality Act of 1948, and were deprived of their right of abode in Britain. The implementation of the Saint Helena Constitution occurred in 1989, stipulating that the governance of the island would be overseen by a governor, a commander-in-chief, and both an elected executive and legislative council. The inception of the Commission on Citizenship in 1992 marked the reinstatement of the residents' privileges, encompassing the right of abode. Subsequently, in 2002, the restoration of the right to British citizenship was accomplished.⁶ The relationship with Great Britain evolved, leading to the approval of a new constitution by both parties in July 2009. This constitution, in effect from 09/01, included a bill of rights, curtailed some of the governor's powers, and granted more authority to elected council members.⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. V-Dem, LIED and FH do not list Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

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

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Helena,_Ascension_and_Tristan_da_Cunha#English_colonisation

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_of_India_Act_1833

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Saint_Helena,_Ascension_and_Tristan_da_Cunha#Formation_and_Constitution,_1922%E2%80%93present

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saint-Helena-island-South-Atlantic-Ocean/History>

⁵ <http://sainthelena.island.info/government.htm>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Helena#1981_to_present

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saint-Helena-island-South-Atlantic-Ocean/History>