



Saint Vincent and the Grenadines — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/10/1763 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: From 02/10/1763, Saint Vincent passed through various stages of colonial status under the British administration. A representative assembly was authorized in 1776, the Crown Colony government was installed in 1877, and a legislative council created in 1925, but franchise was limited, and most descendants of slaves were disenfranchised. For this period LIED does not treat Saint Vincent's colonial time.

01/01/1951 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: The 1951 constitutional reform introduced universal adult suffrage and direct election of the majority of the legislative council members.¹ (Lansford 2021: 1408). Therefore, in line with the typical constitutional evolution of the British West Indies after World War II, Great Britain permitted the gradual formation of an autonomous local government in the colony (Hillebrands/Trefs 2005: 595). LIED confirms that legislative and multiparty elections were held since 1951, and that universal suffrage was present. LIED identifies political liberties as absent in this timeframe.

01/03/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as part of the Windward Islands]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy [as associated state of United Kingdom]: On this date, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines joined the West Indies Federation, founded by ten British insular colonies, to form a territorial union that was economically and politically independent from Great Britain. The federation was dissolved in 1962. On 10/27/1969, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were granted associated statehood status as an internally self-governing territory as part of the collective West Indies Associated States (Lansford 2021: 1408). From 1974 onwards, elections have been held regularly.

10/27/1979 Continuation (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy [as independent country]: On this date, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines gained full independence following a referendum.² After gaining special membership in the Commonwealth in 1979, Sir Sydney Gun-Munro, the former governor, assumed the honorary position of governor-general while the British Crown remained ceremonial head of state. Concurrently, Premier Robert Milton Cato became the prime minister. Cato retained his position following the 05/12/1979 election, where his St. Vincent Labour Party (SVLP) won 11 out of 13 elective parliamentary seats (Lansford 2021: 1408). During Cato's tenure, the government faced growing opposition from the population due to perceived ineffective social and economic policies. The repression of trade unions and opposition groups led to the formation of the National Committee in Defense of Democracy in 1981. Following the 1984 parliamentary elections, the New Democratic Party (NDP) led by James F. Mitchell came to power, ending the ten-year rule of the Saint Vincent Labor Party (SNLP) under Milton Cato. The SVLP's electoral defeat was attributed to corruption scandals and a deteriorating national economy (Hillebrands/Trefs 2005: 595). St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a parliamentary democracy with unicameral system. The constitution mandates the direct election of 15 representatives to the unicameral House of Assembly, while the governor general appoints six senators to the chamber. Regular elections occur, facilitating numerous transitions of power between various parties. Although civil liberties are typically respected, journalists may encounter the threat of criminal defamation charges, and same-sex relationships are prohibited by law.

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. In addition to that LIED scores the constant presence of political liberties since 1969. Violent crime remains a significant concern within the country.³ The Unity Labor Party won the elections and Ralph Gonsalves remained prime minister. The 2020 elections were deemed free and fair.⁴ St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a parliamentary democracy with unicameral system. The constitution mandates the direct election of 15 representatives to the unicameral House of Assembly, while the governor general appoints six senators to the chamber. Regular elections occur, facilitating numerous transitions of power between various parties. Although civil liberties are typically respected, journalists may encounter the threat of criminal defamation charges, and same-sex relationships are prohibited by law. Violent crime remains a significant concern within the country.⁵ The Unity Labor Party won the elections and Ralph Gonsalves remained prime minister. The 2020 elections were deemed free and fair.⁶ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED, the elections were constantly competitive since 1979. Since 1979, FH has constantly classified the country as free, V-Dem does not list it. (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/saintvincentandgrenadines/11730.htm>

² https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/St_Vincent_and_the_Grenadines_1979?lang=en

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/st-vincent-and-grenadines/freedom-world/2023>

⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/st-vincent-and-grenadines/freedom-world/2023>

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/st-vincent-and-grenadines/freedom-world/2023>

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/st-vincent-and-grenadines/freedom-world/2023>

References

- Hillebrands, Bernd/Trefs, Matthias (2005): Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in: Nohlen, Dieter (Hrsg.), Elections in the Americas: A Data Handbook. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 595–606.
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