



## Solomon Islands — Va-PoReg Country Report

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03/15/1893 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The process of colonial annexation began in 1893 when the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was declared over the southern islands. Over the subsequent decade, additional islands were incorporated, including the northern islands transferred from Germany to Britain in 1899. Arbitrary borders were established, and a centralized colonial administration was implemented, without adequate regard for their compatibility with existing local governance structures (Dinnen 2008). According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present. Hence, it seems LIED misclassifies the scores for legislative and multiparty elections as present in this period. Suffrage was not given (LIED). The British takeover of the Solomon Islands in 1893 did not have the goal of safeguarding or advancing the welfare of the indigenous population. The incident in 1927, where an official group was massacred while collecting head taxes from tribesmen on Malaita, underscored the deep-seated local grievances towards the colonial authorities. (Premdas/Steeves 1985). Therefore, the Solomon Islands Protectorate, previously identified as 'belonging to Germany,' was transferred to Great Britain without local consent through a Treaty in 1899 (Crawford 2006). Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

01/22/1942 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: The Japanese occupied these islands and began the construction of several naval and air bases with the goals of protecting the flank of the Japanese offensive in New Guinea (Gegeo 1991).<sup>26F<sup>1</sup></sup> According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present. LIED lists male suffrage as absent during this period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were not really present. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

09/08/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date the Japanese occupation ended as result of the developments of the Second World War.<sup>27F<sup>2</sup></sup> A consensus regarding the formal governmental structure had gradually developed since the late 1960s, coinciding with the establishment of parliamentary committees aimed at gathering public input on political and constitutional reforms.<sup>37</sup> According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem's PCLI (until 1959). V-Dem's PCLI for 1960 indicates in our interpretation an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

10/18/1960 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this day, a country-wide nominated Legislative Council was established. This was followed in 1964 with the introduction of universal adult suffrage under which a minority segment of the Council was elected by the people. Through a systematic approach by which nominated members were replaced by elected legislators, combined simultaneously by a gradual approach of transferring executive powers to the elected members, over a period of 10 years from 1964 to 1974, a fully elective parliament with a cabinet-style executive was put in place as the preferred Solomon Islands form of government. Male suffrage was introduced in 1964 (LIED). Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which contradicts the observations of LIED. LIED confirms that multiparty legislative elections were held since 1964. On 05/22 & 06/12/1973 general elections were held in the Solomon Islands. The following year, Solomon Mamaloni of the People's Progressive Party became the first Chief Minister. Female suffrage was also introduced in 1974.<sup>28F<sup>3</sup></sup> In the timeframe 1960-1969, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI indicates in our interpretation an ambiguous state regarding political liberties. For 1970 to 1976, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties were somewhat present. From 1960 to 1969, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1970 afterwards, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

02/01/1976 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: Internal self-governance, with the Governor retaining authority over defense, foreign affairs, internal security, policing, and public services was introduced (Premdas/Steeves 1985). The British blueprint of a gradual approach of transferring legislative and executive powers to an indigenous leadership was applied to the Solomon Islands in its quest for self-determination. On 06/22/1976 the first general elections were held, three political parties participated, but the largest group in the newly elected parliament consisted of independents.<sup>29F<sup>4</sup></sup> Petir Kenilorea became Chief Minister, led the Solomon Island to independence and became 1978 the first prime minister. According to FH, for 1978, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. From 1976 to 1977, according to LIED, the elections were categorized as non-competitive. The overall election conditions are acknowledged as somewhat free and fair by V-Dem's EF&FI. During this time V-Dem's CEI classifies the cleanliness of the elections as ambiguous, expressing irregularities in the election process. In the specified timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as suggesting that political liberties were somewhat present. On 07/07/1978 the Solomon Islands gained independence from Great Britain but stayed part of the commonwealth with the British Crown as ceremonial head of state. Modern state institutions only began to replace colonial structures in the two decades before the Islands' independence and, as a result, had shallow foundations and legitimacy in the local environment (Dinnen 2008).<sup>30F<sup>5</sup></sup> According to FH, for the years 1978 to 1983, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Per FH's scoring for 1984 and 1985, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. According to FH, for the years 1986 to 1999, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1978, the elections are classified as competitive by LIED. After independence, V-Dem's CEI continues to indicate an ambiguous level of election integrity, while V-Dem's EF&FI remains at the somewhat labelled level until 1988 and are classified by us as indicating an ambiguous state afterwards. For the specified period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political

liberties are present until 1998 and somewhat present in 1999. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. On 08/08/1980, the first general elections after independence were held. The Solomon Islands United Party led by Peter Kenilorea as first prime minister won the party.<sup>31F<sup>6</sup></sup> FH categorized the regime as free (Gastil 1980). Therefore, they cannot be seen as fully free and fair. In 1998 ethnic tensions and violence emerged. Insurgents on Guadalcanal were engaged in a conflict aimed at overthrowing the island's predominant Malaitan minority.<sup>32F<sup>7</sup></sup> This period is known as 'the Tensions'.<sup>33F<sup>8</sup></sup> Despite ongoing ethnic tensions during this period, civil liberties were upheld. However, The judiciary operated independently, and the media effectively acted as an outlet for oppositional critique (Karatnycky 1999: 420). As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. For the given timeframe, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

06/17/1999 End (Monarchical) Electoral Democracy/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, a four-month lasting state of emergency was declared because the violence between armed political groups escalated, and ethnic violence started to arise. During this period, the Ulufa'alu administration restricted press coverage and freedom of association, while also granting expanded authority to the police force.<sup>34F<sup>9</sup></sup> Per FH's scoring for 2000, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. However, our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI indicates political liberties being somewhat present. V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive in 1999 and are interpreted as robust by JCE and as moderate by LCE in 2000. On 06/05/2000 Prime minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu was kidnapped by members of the Malaita Eagle Force, a militia formed in response to the ethnic conflicts in domestic politics. In exchange for his own release, Ulufa'alu resigned from the presidency.<sup>35F<sup>10</sup></sup> In this brief period there were no elections. However, multiparty executive and legislative elections still have to be coded as present, which aligns with the observations of LIED. To argue with V-Dem's CEI or EF&FI would be meaningless regarding this short period. Despite the extraordinary nature of the events in June 2000—including the abduction and forced resignation of Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu by the Malaita Eagle Force militia—there was no fundamental transformation of the political regime. Although the executive transition was clearly illegitimate and coercive, the core institutional framework of the regime remained intact. Parliament continued to function, and the subsequent appointment of Manasseh Sogavare as prime minister on 06/30/2000 occurred through formal parliamentary procedures, albeit under contested and highly irregular conditions. Regular multiparty elections remained in place, and the monarchy continued to serve as the constitutional anchor of the system. The political opposition was weakened but not eliminated, and no authoritarian consolidation occurred. While the rule of law significantly deteriorated, and the state's monopoly on violence was partially undermined by militias, these developments did not result in a shift to full-scale electoral autocracy. The system remained a hybrid regime characterized by formal electoral competition combined with severe functional deficits and episodic violence, but without the institutional closure or systematic repression required to justify coding a transition to electoral autocracy. On 06/30/2000 Manasseh Sogavare was elected as prime minister by 23–21 over Leslie Boseto. Sogavare's election was immediately surrounded by controversy due to the absence of six members of parliament (believed to be Boseto supporters) who were unable to attend the crucial vote.<sup>36F<sup>11</sup></sup> New elections in December 2001 saw Allan Kemakeza become prime minister. As the conflict evolved, law and order continued to worsen. Violence persisted on the Weathercoast, while militants in Honiara increasingly engaged in criminal activities and extortion. Instances occurred where armed individuals surrounded the Department of Finance during fund disbursements. In December 2002, Finance Minister Laurie Chan resigned after being coerced at gunpoint to sign a cheque payable to certain militants.<sup>37F<sup>12</sup></sup> The Australian government, with support of other Pacific Island nations and under the authorization of the Pacific Island Forum, led a multinational intervention force against 'the Tensions' called 'Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands' (RAMSI). RAMSI was deployed to restore law and order,

disarm the militants, and support the Solomon Island government. As per FH, for 2000 and 2001, the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. Per FH, for 2002 to 2015, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. For the years 2016 and 2017 the country receives a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. According to FH, from 2018 to 2021, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. From 2022 on, the country receives a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this entire time the elections were competitive according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI indicates no cleanliness between 2000 and 2001. From 2000 to 2018 the cleanliness for the elections is ambiguous, except in 2007 they were not really clean. Since 2019 the elections are declared as somewhat clean. Regarding V-Dem's EF&FI the overall election conditions are also ambiguous between 2000 and 2006, and are somewhat free and fair ever since 2007. LIED still considers the absence of political liberties until 2017. LIED identifies them as present since 2018. However, our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI still indicates somewhat political liberties until 2003. For the remaining years political liberties were constantly present, according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI. Since 2004, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. In 2001, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 2002 to 2004 and from 2010 to 2019, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. On 04/05/2006 general elections were held, which were regarded as peaceful and free by international observers.<sup>38F<sup>13</sup></sup> As no party won the majority, the new Chamber chose Snyder Rini as prime minister. His naming led to two days of protests, as he was regarded as corrupt. Instead, the parliament elected a new prime minister in May, Manasseh Sogavare.<sup>39F<sup>14</sup></sup> Sogavare was removed from office in 2007, when he lost a confidence vote. His successor lost the elections in 2010 to Danny Philip, who also lost the confidence vote shortly after and was replaced. The elections 2010 were overseen by international election observers, who voiced their concern about "serious flaws in voter register", but otherwise the elections were described as peaceful and orderly.<sup>40F<sup>15</sup></sup> In the elections 2014, Sogavare came back into power.<sup>41F<sup>16</sup></sup> Observers generally regarded the 2014 parliamentary election as free and fair, despite occasional reports of vote buying. Following the election, Parliament re-elected Manasseh Sogavare as prime minister, leading to the formation of a coalition government. In November 2017, after a vote of no confidence against Sogavare, parliament elected Ricky Houenipwela as prime minister, and he subsequently formed a new coalition government.<sup>42F<sup>17</sup></sup> The elections 2019 were regarded as peaceful, however irregularities with the electoral lists were seen.<sup>43F<sup>18</sup></sup> The next years saw rioting and unrest, the last took place in early 2023.<sup>44F<sup>19</sup></sup> Solomon Islands are a parliamentary democracy with a prime minister as head of government. A governor general is selected by the National Parliament to represent the British Monarch as head of state. Power often transitions between competing groups and opposition parties have the freedom to campaign unrestrictedly. Civil liberties and political rights are generally upheld. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. However, corruption and discrimination persist as ongoing concerns.<sup>4</sup> Although FH has consistently rated the Solomon Islands as "Free" since the mid-2000s—assigning scores in the range of 72 to 75 out of 100—this assessment does not correspond to a regime upgrade in our classification scheme. In our typology, the designation electoral hybrid regime is retained. This classification reflects persistent structural features of the political system that are incompatible with the threshold for electoral democracy. Specifically, the Solomon Islands have continued to exhibit high levels of executive instability, weak institutionalization of political parties, and fragile horizontal accountability. Frequent no-confidence motions, clientelist coalition dynamics, and the near absence of programmatic competition indicate that electoral processes, while formally competitive, remain

embedded in a system lacking effective democratic consolidation. These characteristics are consistent with the logic of hybrid regimes, where elections coexist with serious deficiencies in rule of law, effective governance, and institutional checks and balances. Moreover, episodes such as the violent unrest in Honiara in 2021, the government's increasing reliance on external security forces, and the politically motivated postponement of general elections in 2023 further underscore the fragility of democratic institutions. These developments reinforce our assessment that the Solomon Islands did not cross the threshold into electoral democracy by 2018, and have not done so thereafter either, despite relatively high Freedom House scores.<sup>20</sup>

(Monarchical) Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Premdas 1983, Steeves 2001)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_occupation\\_of\\_the\\_Solomon\\_Islands#References](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_the_Solomon_Islands#References)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_occupation\\_of\\_the\\_Solomon\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_occupation_of_the_Solomon_Islands)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_Solomon_Islands_general_election)[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_suffrage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976_Solomon_Islands_general_election)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Solomon\\_Islands\\_2018?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Solomon_Islands_2018?lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1980\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1980_Solomon_Islands_general_election)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Solomon-Islands/History>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Solomon-Islands/History>

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_coup\\_d%27%C3%A9tat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_Solomon_Islands_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat)

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartholomew\\_Ulufa%27alu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartholomew_Ulufa%27alu)

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartholomew\\_Ulufa%27alu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartholomew_Ulufa%27alu)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ramsi.org/the-tensions/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Solomon_Islands_general_election)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/487ca25b82.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20101003031217/http://www.thecommonwealth.org/news/228195/060810solomonislandsinterim.htm>

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Islands)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/solomon-islands/>

<sup>18</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019\\_Solomon\\_Islands\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Solomon_Islands_general_election)

<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Islands)

<sup>20</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/solomon-islands/freedom-world/2023>

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