



Suriname — Va-PoReg Country Report

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

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

07/31/1667 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands]: In 1667, Suriname became a Dutch colony after being under British rule from 1650 to 1657. The Dutch fleet from Zealand commanded by Abraham Crynssen conquered Suriname and it passed into Dutch ownership under the Peace Treaty of Breda, signed on 07/31/1667.^{170F¹} In 1814, Suriname fell under the King's sovereignty and became the responsibility of the Minister of Colonies, who was responsible to the States General (Society of Surinam) (Van Lier 1971). Following the 1922 constitutional revision in the Netherlands, which replaced the term "colony" with "overseas territory," the government regulation of 1865 was replaced by the Basic Law of Suriname on 04/01/1937. This Basic Law changed the name of the Colonial Council to the Estates of Suriname and increased its membership from 13 to 15 (Muhlenfeld 1944).^{171F²} After the signing of the 1941 Atlantic Charter by the Netherlands on 01/01/1942, Queen Wilhelmina proposed a federal system within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but this was later deemed too heavy for the economies of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles.^{172F³} According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. No executive elections were present. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1949 (LIED). Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, 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.

03/14/1951 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: On this day the first free and fair general elections with male and female suffrage were held.^{173F⁴} LIED confirms that legislative multiparty elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to our classification of V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, 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.

12/15/1954 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Netherlands, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Netherlands, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: Suriname gained internal autonomy (as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands). In 1954, Suriname became an autonomous coequal member of the Kingdom of the Netherlands under the terms of the Statute of the Realm, with the exception of foreign affairs and defence Suriname.^{174F⁵} The Charter enacted in 1954 allowed Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles to have a Minister Plenipotentiary and participate in Dutch cabinet meetings, and to alter their "Basic Laws." Delegates from both countries could participate in the States-General, and an overseas member could be added to the Council of State. The Charter did not allow for the unilateral exit of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles from the Kingdom, but it could be dissolved through mutual consultation.^{175F⁶} From this point on we code Suriname as a semi-sovereign entity (Protectorate status). Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED considers the elections as competitive during this time. Additionally, V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI indicate free, fair and clean elections in this regime period. As per FH's classification for 1975, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4,

which we also interpret as free in our framework. For the relevant period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. This changes in 1975, for which our interpretation of the PCLI data indicates that political liberties were present. For the relevant period, 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.

11/25/1975 Continuation Electoral Democracy [as independent country]: On this date, Suriname gained its independence and the former governor Johan Ferrier was sworn in as president on the same day (Gallé 1993, Marshall 2018d).^{176F⁷} During this period regular elections were held with occasional changes in government.^{177F⁸} On 10/31/1977, Suriname held its first general elections after gaining independence. The result was a victory for the National Party Combination (an alliance of the National Party of Suriname, the Renewed Progressive Party, the Party for National Unity and Solidarity and the Suriname Progressive People's Party).^{178F⁹} According to Freedom House elections during this period were fair and free, civil liberties were upheld and the judiciary acted independently (Gastil 1980: 297). According to FH, for the assessed period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. The elections score competitiveness according to LIED's data. V-Dem's CEI also affirms cleanliness for the election process. In addition, the overall election conditions are classified as fully free and fair, by V-Dem's EF&FI. Since 1975, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. In the timeframe 1975-1979, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are present. In 1980 PCLI indicates a change to an ambiguous state of political liberties. From 1976 onwards, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive were robust.

02/25/1980 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: Dési Bourterse, a military officer, and his group of sergeants overthrew the government of Prime Minister Henck Arron from the National Party of Suriname.^{179F¹⁰} Bourterse established himself as the head of a military junta, the National Military Council of Suriname.^{180F¹¹} The civilian president resigned sometime later in protest. Bourterse moved to consolidate power over the country by removing members of his junta and the civilian president. He also dissolved the legislature and declared a state of emergency in an apparent self-coup. The regime ruthlessly quashed civic and political opposition, inaugurating a decade of military intervention in politics.^{181F¹²} On 07/22/1986 the Surinamese Interior War began in Stolkertsijver when twelve soldiers manning a checkpoint were captured. The conflict initially stemmed from a personal dispute between Bouterse and Brunswijk, who had previously served as Bouterse's bodyguard. However, it eventually took on political significance, as Brunswijk pushed for democratic reforms, civil rights, and economic development for Suriname's Maroon minority.^{182F¹³} According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to Polity5, in 1980 and 1981, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. From 1982 onward, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. As classified by FH for this regime period until 1986, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Per FH's scoring for 1987, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. For the period under consideration, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties. For the relevant period, 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.

11/25/1987 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date a general election took place. The result was a victory for the Front for Democracy and Development (an alliance of the National Party of Suriname, the Progressive Reform Party and the Party for National Unity and Solidarity).^{183F¹⁴} The National Democratic Party (NDP), organized by the military, won just three out of 51 seats.^{184F¹⁵} Based on our observations, multiparty, executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with

the observations of LIED. Between 1988 and 1989 LIED indicates competitiveness for the country's elections. Furthermore, since 1988 Suriname's elections were clean the following three years according to V-Dem's CEI and fully free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. Throughout this period, the judiciary maintained a strong sense of independence, and civil liberties were generally upheld. Per FH's scoring for 1987, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. As per FH's classification for 1988, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. As classified by FH for 1989, the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. According to FH, for 1990 a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. Our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI confirms the presence of somewhat political liberties in 1988 and full liberties in 1989, however, LIED still indicates their absence. In 1988 and 1989, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints. In 1990, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive's power was noticeably limited but not substantial, fitting Intermediate Category 2. However, anti-guerrilla operations in rural areas resulted in civilian casualties, and the government struggled to maintain control over the military (Gastil 1989: 461). In 1987 and 1989, 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 comprehensive. In 1988, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

12/24/1990 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: Bouterse disapproved of the new civilian president's policies, especially those concerning the jungle tribes. He threatened a coup by telephone, forcing Ramsewak Shankar to flee and Iwan Granoogst to take over as acting president (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 61). However, Bouterse was the de facto ruler of the country.^{185F¹⁶} Per FH's scoring for 1991, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. 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. For the relevant period, 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 moderate.

05/25/1991 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Democracy: The military junta agreed to hold new elections in May 1991 (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 61). The elections also score a constant presence of competitiveness ever since the democratic transition (LIED). Since 1990 the elections are classified constantly as clean by V-Dem's CEI. Furthermore, V-Dem's EF&FI confirms fully free and fair conditions since 1990. The president acts as both the head of state and head of government. As per the 1987 constitution, the National Assembly is a unicameral body with 51 seats. Representatives are elected through proportional representation, serving five-year terms.^{186F¹⁷} Generally, the judicial system is mostly independent from other branches of government, however clientelism and corruption remain issues that threaten democratic integrity. In 2022 major protests against corruption and nepotism erupted in July. In July, a Surinamese court commenced the hearing of an appeal filed by former president Désiré "Dési" Bouterse. In 2019, he was found guilty of the abduction and murder of political adversaries in 1982, during his tenure as Suriname's military leader.^{187F¹⁸} In December 2023 he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for the murder of 15 political opponents during his reign.^{188F¹⁹} In the general election on 05/25/2025, the National Democratic Party (NDP) won the most seats (18), narrowly surpassing the incumbent Progressive Reform Party (VHP), which won 17 seats. Since no party won a majority, NDP leader Jennifer Geerlings-Simons successfully negotiated a coalition with five smaller parties, securing the required two-thirds majority in parliament. This led to her election as the country's first female president in July.²⁰ Per FH's scoring for 1991, the country is classified as partly free with a score of 8, which we categorize as rather not free. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 for the period 1992-1999 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. As per FH's classification for 2000-2014, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. According to FH, for 2015 and 2016, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we

interpret as rather free in our framework. As per FH's classification for 2017, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. Per FH's scoring for 2018 and 2019, 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 rest of the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Anyhow, since 1991 both LIED and our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI confirm that political liberties are present. Since 1991, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. Multiparty general elections were last held in 2020, which were generally considered fair and free. V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. Except from 2018 to 2019 and in 2023, 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. In 2021, 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 comprehensive.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Stöver 2005)

Swaziland see Eswatini

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Breda_\(1667\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Breda_(1667))

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surinam_\(Dutch_colony\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surinam_(Dutch_colony))

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_\(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands)). See also LIED.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1951_Surinamese_general_election

⁵ https://1997-2001.state.gov/background_notes/suriname_0398_bgn.html

⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_\(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands))

⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_\(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname_(Kingdom_of_the_Netherlands))

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_Surinamese_general_election

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1977_Surinamese_general_election

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henck_Arron

¹¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Military_Council_\(Suriname\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Military_Council_(Suriname))

¹² <https://www.refworld.org/docid/473c55fb53.html>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surinamese_Interior_War

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Surinamese_general_election;
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Surinam_1992?lang=en

¹⁵ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/473c55fb53.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/473c55fb53.html>

¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/suriname/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/suriname/freedom-world/2023>

¹⁹ <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-12-20/surinames-ex-dictator-sentenced-to-20-years-in-prison-for-the-1982-killings-of-political-opponents.html#>

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Surinamese_general_election

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