



United Arab Emirates — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/08/1820 Start Autocratic Monarchy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: Today's territory of the United Arab Emirates became a British Protectorate in 1820 with the signing of the General Maritime Treaty on 01/08/1820.¹ Prior to 1971, the Trucial Sheikdoms of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharja, Ajman, Umm al-Qaiwain, Fujairah, and Ras al-Khaimah were separately under a British protectorate.² Neither LIED nor PCLI (V-Dem) does provide any data for this period.

12/02/1971 Continuation Autocratic Monarchy [as independent country]: On this date the protectorate of the United Kingdom ended. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) came into existence through the unification of multiple sheikdoms along the Gulf. The Supreme Council of the Union, comprising the hereditary rulers of the original six emirates (now expanded to seven), selects the president and vice president from among its members. It is the highest legislative authority in the country and receives guidance from the 40-member Federal National Council, which has the authority to assess proposed laws and interrogate government ministers. In the individual emirates, there are no elected legislative bodies.³ The chosen president assumes the roles of head of state, chair of the Supreme Council of the Union, and commander of the military (Hoogland/Toth 1993, Smythe 1993, Lansford 2012d, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 104).⁴ The president appoints a prime minister and a cabinet. The UAE is a federation consisting of seven emirates, with Abu Dhabi leading in practice due to its size and wealth from natural resources. Since 1971 the emirate of Abu Dhabi has maintained control over the presidency of the federation. Similarly, the emirate of Dubai holds authority over the position of prime minister. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum has been the ruler of Dubai and concurrently served as the prime minister and vice president of the UAE since 2006.⁵ The allocation of positions in the federal government reflects the varying levels of prestige and financial influence of each emirate.⁶ While there are limited elections for a federal advisory body, political parties are prohibited, and ultimate authority in executive, legislative, and judicial matters resides with the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. Both citizens and noncitizens, who constitute the majority of the population, face significant restrictions on their civil liberties. In 2023 around 90 percent of the UAE's population are noncitizens who do not have political rights or chances to vote, including many stateless individuals. Even though women make up about 50 percent of the electoral body of the Federal National Council and the authorities appointed 13 women in 2019 in accordance with a commitment to guarantee equal representation in the 40-member body, ordinary women have few chances to independently organize and promote their interests within the political system. Non-governmental organizations face numerous restrictions and are required to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs. International human rights organizations have been refused entry to the UAE and local human rights activists face significant threats of arrest and mistreatment while in custody. The judiciary lacks independence, as court decisions are subject to review by the political leadership.⁷ The UAE extensively uses advanced surveillance technologies to monitor public spaces, internet activities, and more, violating individual rights to privacy and freedom of expression.⁸ In 2006 a limited suffrage was introduced for both men and women. A hand-picked 12% of Emirati citizens have the right to vote for half the members of the Federal National Council, an advisory quasi-parliamentary body. The UAE is an authoritarian state.⁹ The Federal National Council comprised 40 members, with 20 elected and 20 appointed by the rulers of each Emirate. Since the size of the electorate is very small, half of the members of the Federal National Council are

appointed, and the parliament is no real counterweight to the ruling monarchs the United Arab Emirates are still classified as an autocratic monarchy. The political regime ensures that the hereditary rulers of the emirates hold a monopoly on power, effectively ruling out the possibility of a change in government through elections.¹⁰ According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period. Per FH, for 1972-1975, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. As classified by FH for 1976-1988, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. According to FH's classification for the rest of the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Political liberties have been absent since 1971 according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. Except between 2018 and 2020, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

Autocratic Monarchy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Herb 1999, Herb 2003, Herb 2004)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates#History

² <https://history.state.gov/countries/united-arab-emirates>

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2023>

⁴ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_Arab_Emirates_2009?lang=en

⁵ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2023>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_United_Arab_Emirates

⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2023>

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-arab-emirates/freedom-world/2023>

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