



Vanuatu — Va-PoReg Country Report

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10/16/1887 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [as joint Protectorate of United Kingdom and France]: Vanuatu was ruled by a joined Anglo-French naval commission since 10/16/1887.¹ In 1878, a 'mutual exclusiveness' policy led to an 1887 British-French naval commission. The 1906 Convention introduced the Condominium ('The Pandemonium'), revised in 1914, granting equal residency, protection, and trade rights to British and French nationals until independence (Corrin 1985). In 1975 Universal suffrage was introduced.² LIED confirms that before 1975 no multiparty and legislative elections as well as no universal suffrage were present. According to LIED political liberties were absent. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present until 1905, ambiguous from 1906 to 1969 and as somewhat present from 1970 onward. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are comprehensive. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. LIED only starts to provide data for Vanuatu in 1906.

11/05/1974 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy and France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy and France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, an agreement between France and Great Britain was reached on the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. We therefore code this event as a voluntary exit. The Advisory Council was to be replaced by a representative assembly that was to be elected by universal suffrage.³ On 11/10/1975 general elections were held in which 29 of the 41 members were directly elected. The New Hebrides National Party won the elections with 54% of the votes.⁴ LIED confirms that since 1975 multiparty legislative elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and somewhat present according to 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 comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

07/30/1980 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy and France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Democracy [as independent country]: On this date Vanuatu achieved its planned independence, under the leadership of Prime Minister Walter Lini.⁵ As part of the transition, the Resident Commissioners were replaced by a ceremonial President. Following the withdrawal of Anglo-French forces in August, Lini requested assistance from troops in Papua New Guinea to address the Vemarana separatists led by Jimmy Stevens, which led to a brief conflict known as the 'Coconut War.' The Papua New Guinea forces swiftly suppressed the Vemarana uprising, and Stevens surrendered on 09/01, resulting in his subsequent imprisonment. Lini continued to serve as Prime Minister until 1991, leading a government predominantly composed of English-speaking individuals and winning both the 1983 and 1987 elections.⁶ Between 1983 and 1984 there were significant restrictions to the freedom of press, with most of the media being state owned and critical newspaper being shut down (Gastil 1984: 448, Gastil 1989: 478). In the first general elections on 11/02/1983 the Vanua'aku Pati, which was the ruling party, secured 24 seats, while the Union of Moderate Parties won 12 seats. Walter Lini, who belonged to the Vanua'aku Pati, retained his position as Prime Minister.⁷ Vanuatuan politics have experienced instability since the general election in 1991, characterized by a succession of divisive coalition governments and the frequent use of no confidence votes leading to frequent shifts in prime ministers. Nonetheless, Vanuatu has managed to uphold its democratic system.⁸ Vanuatu holds

democratic elections but grapples with recurring unstable coalition governments. The 2025 snap general election was triggered by the dissolution of Parliament amid political instability and was later complicated by a severe earthquake. No single party secured a majority in the 52-seat parliament, which led to Jotham Napat of the Leaders Party of Vanuatu being elected Prime Minister after forming a multi-party coalition government.⁹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. However, the elections are classified as competitive by LIED. V-Dem's CEI declares the election as somewhat clean from 1980 to 1991. Between 1992 and 2008 ambiguous cleanliness is scored. 2009 to 2015 marks the return to somewhat cleanliness outcomes. Since 2016 the elections score cleanliness. Furthermore, between 1983 and 2007 the overall conditions scored somewhat freedom and fairness. Since 2008 the country's elections are free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. Despite significant political corruption, the mostly independent judiciary has effectively held elected officials accountable in notable cases.¹⁰ In 2023, the country saw three government transitions. As a result, the country reverted to a pattern of governmental instability. Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau was removed from office following a no-confidence vote. Sato Kilman was elected as the new prime minister but was soon replaced by Charlot Salwai after another no-confidence vote.¹¹ Per FH's scoring for 1980, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. While there is no FH data for 1981, 1982 is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Per FH, for 1983 to 1988, the country scores between 6 and 7, categorized as partly free, which we interpret as rather free. As per FH's classification for the years 1989 to 1992, the country receives a score of 5 as free, which we categorize as rather free. 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. Moreover, Vanuatu guarantees full political liberties to its citizens since its independence (LIED, V-Dem's PCLI). For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

Electoral Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Stöver 2001)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Vanuatu

³ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1974-11-12/debates/60b41a92-a997-4a5f-816f-241e7b36a0fd/NewHebrides>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_New_Hebridean_general_election

⁵ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Vanuatu_2013?lang=en

⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu#Independent_Vanuatu_\(1980%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu#Independent_Vanuatu_(1980%E2%80%93present))

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1983_Vanuatu_general_election

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu#Independent_Vanuatu_\(1980%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu#Independent_Vanuatu_(1980%E2%80%93present))

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Vanuatu_general_election

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vanuatu/freedom-world/2022>

¹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vanuatu/freedom-world/2024>

References

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- Gastil, Raymond D. (Hrsg.) (1984): Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1983-1984. New York: Freedom House.
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- Stöver, Philip (2001): Vanuatu, in: Grotz, Florian, Nohlen, Dieter & Hartmann, Christof (Hrsg.), Elections in Asia and the Pacific: A Data Handbook. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 833-848.