



## Virgin Islands, British — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1672 Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: The Dutch established a permanent settlement on the main island (Tortola) by 1648, and by 1672 it was captured by the English and annexed to the British-administered Leeward Islands. The planters were granted civil government in 1773, with an elected House of Assembly, a partly elected Legislative Council, and constitutional courts. The islands prosperity grew until the middle of the nineteenth century, when a combination of the abolition of slavery and agricultural demand in the British Empire changed. In 1867 the constitution was surrendered and a legislature was appointed, an arrangement that lasted until 1902, when sole legislative authority was vested in the governor-in-council. In 1950 a partly elected and partly nominated Legislative Council was reinstated. In 1960 the islands gained separate colony status as crown colony. In 1967 the islands became more autonomous and were given a ministerial form of government with H. Lavity Stoutt as first chief minister.

04/14/1967 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime/Start Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: On this date, the first general elections under a new constitution were held, marking a fundamental shift in governance. The 1967 constitution introduced a true ministerial form of government with a much greater transfer of powers to elected representatives.<sup>1</sup> H. Lavity Stoutt, whose United Party won the election, was appointed as the territory's first Chief Minister.<sup>2</sup> 1967 marked the introduction of true direct democratic rule in the British Virgin Islands, as the elected government gained effective control over internal affairs. The British Overseas Territory Act of 2002 changed the status of the colony to that of overseas territory and granted British citizenship to its people. A new constitution promulgated in 2007 brought greater self-government to the islands. The constitution provides for a unicameral House of Assembly (legislature) based upon representative democracy and a multi-party system. The head of state is the British monarch, who is represented in the territory by the governor. The politics of the British Virgin Islands takes place in the framework of a parliamentary representative democratic dependency with universal suffrage, whereby the Premier is the head of government, and of a multi-party system. FH, LIED and V-Dem do not list the British Virgin Islands. According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period. In 2022, an independent investigation into corruption revealed widespread issues within the territory's governance and recommended that London reestablish direct rule over the British Virgin Islands. Andrew Fahie, the Prime Minister and leader of the VIP party, was arrested, charged, and convicted of drug smuggling and money laundering. The UK government decided against this step and instead entrusted the new government with resolving the reported issues. This new government is a government of national unity, involving the two biggest parties VIP and PVIM. It came together following the 2023 general elections which the VIP won and wherein the PIVM came in second. The unity-government's progress in enacting crucial reforms to combat corruption has reportedly been mixed. Due to this, the governor of the BVI announced plans to seek more power over the territory to impose these reforms. This move was decried as an undemocratic power grab by BVI-politicians.

Electoral Democracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution\\_of\\_the\\_British\\_Virgin\\_Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_British_Virgin_Islands)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavity\\_Stoutt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavity_Stoutt)