

Virgin Islands, U.S. — Va-PoReg Country Report

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05/25/1672 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark]: Denmark-Norway showed interest in the islands, and in 1672, the Danish West India Company established settlements on St. Thomas, followed by St. John in 1694. Subsequently, in 1733, they acquired St. Croix from France. These islands were officially designated as royal Danish colonies in 1754 and collectively named the Danish West Indian Islands. The United States developed an interest in the islands, and in 1867, there was an agreed treaty to sell St. Thomas and St. John to the U.S., although it was never implemented. The outbreak of World War I marked the end of the reform period and once more left the islands in isolation. Concerned about the possibility of the islands being seized by Germany as a submarine base during the submarine warfare phases of the war, the United States once again approached Denmark to discuss the potential purchase of the islands. On 08/04/1916, the Treaty of the Danish West Indies was signed, and a referendum on the sale took place in Denmark in December 1916, gaining approval from voters. The formalization of the agreement occurred on 01/17/1917, as the United States and Denmark exchanged their respective treaty ratifications.¹ LIED does not provide any data for this period.

03/31/1917 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Denmark, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: On this date, the United States assumed control of the islands, leading to the renaming of the territory as the Virgin Islands of the United States.²

02/25/1927 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Electoral Democracy]: In 1927, the Virgin Islands formally attained the status of an unincorporated U.S. territory.³ The U.S. Navy managed the islands until 1931, at which point control was transferred to the Department of the Interior. Subsequently, civilian governors, appointed by the president, oversaw the administration of the islands.⁴ Many residents of the islands were conferred U.S. citizenship in 1927 and 1932. The establishment of the local government was formalized through the 1936 Organic Act and the 1954 Revised Organic Act.⁵ In 1968 the Elective Governor Acts were enacted. These acts established the transition from the appointed selection to the popular election of the Governors of the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam, marking a departure from the previous appointment process.⁶ Residents of the Virgin Islands hold U.S. citizenship, yet the territory lacks electoral votes for the presidential or vice-presidential elections. Despite being unable to elect voting members of Congress, the U.S. House of Representatives includes a delegate representing them. While this delegate can vote in congressional committees, they do not have voting privileges in the House itself.⁷ We therefore classify the US Virgin Islands as a de facto colony of the democratic USA. FH, V-Dem and LIED do not list the US Virgin Islands in their datasets.

Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of USA, Liberal Democracy] as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Virgin_Islands#Danish_period

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Virgin_Islands#American_period

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States_Virgin_Islands#American_period,_1917%E2%80%93present;https://fam.state.gov/FAM/08FAM/08FAM030808.html

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States-Virgin-Islands/Government-and-society#ref7726>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Virgin_Islands#American_period

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elective_Governor_Acts_of_1968

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_the_United_States_Virgin_Islands