

The Netherlands Antilles is largely autonomous, with only defense and foreign affairs being the responsibility of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The form of government is a parliamentary democracy, and the formal head of state is the Queen of the Netherlands.

The Netherlands Antilles has two levels of government: the central government of the Netherlands Antilles, which is based in Curacao, and a local government on each island. The central government, which handles state affairs, is comprised of three bodies: the Governor-General, who is appointed by the Queen, a 22-member Parliament, which is elected every four years, and the Council of Ministers, which is appointed by the Parliament. On the central level, St. Maarten has three representatives in the Parliament of the Netherlands Antilles. The local governments, which are responsible for the affairs of each respective island, are each composed of three bodies: the Lieutenant Governor, who is appointed by the Queen; an Island Council, which is elected every four years; and an Executive Council, which is appointed by the Island Council.

The Netherlands Antilles legal system is modeled after the Dutch system, which is based on civil or Roman law. Judges are appointed for life by the Queen to serve on the Court of First Instance and the Joint High Court of Appeals of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Legal disputes can ultimately be appealed to the Supreme Court of the Netherlands in The Hague.