



# Referendum in New Caledonia

## Why in News

The French territory of New Caledonia **voted against independence from France** in a referendum held recently.

- The referendum was a part of a decolonisation plan agreed in 1998, known as the **Noumea Accord**.



## Key Points //

- **About:** New Caledonia is an archipelago and special collectivity of France located in the southwest Pacific Ocean.
- **Population:** The **indigenous Kanaks** represent around 39% of the population, while **European settlers** (known as **Caldoches**) make up about 27%.
  - Most of the remainder are from other Pacific islands, which are of mixed heritage, called Caledonians.
- **History:**
  - New Caledonia was **discovered in 1774** by the British navigator **James Cook**.
  - It was **annexed by France in 1853**.
  - In 1946, New Caledonia became an overseas territory.
  - By 1953, French citizenship had been granted to all New Caledonians, regardless of ethnicity.
- **Economy:** Besides having one of the region's highest average incomes per capita, New Caledonia is rich in resources and accounts for around **10% of the world's nickel reserve**.
- **Political Status:** New Caledonia is a **territory sui generis** i.e. territory of its own kind.
  - It is a **French overseas collectivity** i.e. they are first-order administrative divisions of France but have a semi-autonomous status.
  - It is one of the [United Nations 17 Non-Self-Governing territories](#) - where the process of decolonisation has not been completed.

- Non-Self-Governing Territories are defined as "territories whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government". It includes the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Western Sahara, etc.
  - They vote in French elections and have French nationality.
  - New Caledonia has a **power-sharing executive** elected by the territory's Congress, which ensures that all parties on it are represented in proportion to their number of seats in Congress.
  - It depends on France for matters like defence and education.
- **Conflict Over Independence:** The country has had conflicts over the issue of autonomy and independence from France for a long time.
  - New Caledonia has **deep divisions between its indigenous Kanak population and Europeans**, with indigenous Kanaks favouring independence and Europeans being against it.
  - In the 1980s, the country had violent conflicts between the opponents and supporters of independence which culminated into **Matignon Accords** in 1988.
    - The Accords specified a 10-year transitory status, after which a self-determination referendum would be held.
  - The **Noumea Accord**, which was concluded in 1998, provided for a practically sovereign status. Under this agreement, New Caledonia is allowed up to **three referendums on independence**, the latest one being the last of them.
- **Significance:**
  - At a time where Chinese influence on the island, and in the whole **South Pacific region** is growing, it is very significant for France to be able to retain control over the island.
    - A significant portion of New Caledonia's exports goes to China, much of which is nickel.
  - Though India has no official position of the referendum, the results of this referendum are particularly important for India in the double context of growing **India-France relations** and Indo-China conflicts. France is urging Australia and India to form a new **"strategic axis"** in the Indo-Pacific with it and New Caledonia to counter China's rise.

**Source: TH**

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