

Laos

Test Case (compiled from multiple narratives by coders)

As a consequence of the French defeat in the Indochina war and the subsequent Geneva peace conference, Laos gained its independence in October 1953 according to COW. The country started out as a parliamentary democracy and the first leader was PM Souvanna Phouma, the leader of the National Progressive Party (NPP), who had come to office in November 1951 and served until November 1954. Souvanna Phouma was a non-communist neutralist and his main competitor was his half-brother Souphanouvoing, a Communist from the Pathet Lao (van Dijk 2008, p.352). Souvanna Phouma was succeeded by Katay Don Sasorith, also a member of the National Progressive Party (NPP). This is not a SOLS change. In 1955, Laos held its first election and Souvanna Phouma became Laos' first elected PM. Since Souvanna Phouma was also a member of the NPP this is not SOLS change. In November 1957, the NPP formed a coalition agreement with the political arm of the communist Pathet Lao, called the Neo Lao Hak Xat (Lao Patriotic Front- LPF) (United States Library of Congress; Boettcher 2005, 114). "The National Assembly unanimously approved the coalition government. Souphanouvong [leader of the Pathet Lao] became minister of planning, reconstruction, and urbanism, and Phoumi Vongvichit became minister of culture and fine arts (United States Library of Congress). This is a minor SOLS change. (For lack of a better date we code the minor SOLS change November 18, 1957 when the Library of Congress says reconciliation between the NPP and the Pathet Lao occurred. Note though that van Dijk 2008, 352 refers to the coalition as being formed in October. Goldstein 1973 p.116, on the other hand, also suggests the coalition was formed in November.)

The 1958 elections were won by the LPF. "Souphanouvong garnered the most votes and became chairman of the National Assembly. The Progressive Party and the Independent Party tardily merged to become the Rally of the Lao People (Lao Rouam Lao) (United States Library of Congress)." As a result of the LPF's victory, the coalition fell apart and Souvanna Phouma was unable to form a new government. "Phoui Sananikone (RLP-- Rassemblement du Peuple Laotien/Lao Hom Lao) eventually succeeded and included four CDNI [Committee for the Defense of the National Interests] members and Phoumi Nosavan in a subcabinet post (United States Library of Congress). The RLP was formed by a merger of the NPP and the Independent Party (IP) (Worldstatesmen; Library of Congress; Goldstein 1973, 118). We code a minor SOLS change since like Souvanna Phouma, Phoui relied on the NPP, but he also relied on what used to be the Independent Party.¹

In December 1958 North Vietnam occupied a number of villages along the border and fighting broke out. The government had LPF representatives arrested and politics became very chaotic. Starting late 1959 and the year 1960 Laos saw numerous leader transitions. In 1960 we code Laos as a non-democracy.

"When Phoui's mandate ended in December 1959, Phoumi Nosavan² and his CDNI supporters began their move to force the king to grant them power by announcing that the supreme

¹ It seems that the RLP was formed in July, with initially Souvanna heading it until he was removed as candidate in July, before Sananikone formed a government in August (Laosnet). The RPL was "divided into pro-Souvanna and pro-Phoui factions (US Department of State, 2010).

² Cahoon (2010) lists Phoumi as Sounthone Pathammavong.

command of the armed forces was ‘handling current affairs’ (United States Library of Congress).” International pressure led the King to resist Phoumi Nosavan’s coup. According to Archigos, Phoumi Nosavan was only in power for one day (12/31/1959-1/1/1960). “An interim government headed by Kou Abhay was charged with preparing for new elections (United States Library of Congress).” It seems that Kou Abhay was a weak leader and Phoumi might still have played an important role in that government as defense minister (Kaiser 2000, 25). The Library of Congress, on the other hand, claims that Kou Abhay’s premiership was a rebuff for Phoumi who “bided his time.” Thus it’s not completely clear whether Kou Abhay should be considered an interim leader or whether Phoumi actually was in control. Geddes, Wrights, and Frantz’s coding suggests that Phoumi might have been de facto leader, because they code a personalist regime in place in 1960 and, based on their coding rules, the leader in power in charge on January 1st (the day of transition from Phoumi to Khou Abhay) determines regime type coding. Given this interpretation, we code a SOLS change with Phoumi’s assumption of power in December 1959, but not with Khou Abhay since he was part of the personalist regime.³

After the April election, “a new government was formed on June 3, ostensibly headed by Somsanith but in fact controlled by Phoumi acting as minister of defense under the aegis of his new political party, the Social Party (Paxa Sangkhom) (United States Library of Congress). Given that Phoumi still controls power this is not a SOLS change.

In early August Captain Kong Le the staged a coup and called for the reinstatement of Souvanna Phouma as PM. Kong Le was in power for one week and then Phouma then took power. This is a SOLS change. It is not a solschange30, because the combined period in office on Le Kong and Phouma exceeded 30 days. Phoumi’s personalist regime ends. This time Souvanna Phouma supported NLPK (Neo Lao Pen Kang: Lao Naturalist Front, neutralist). Souvanna Phouma’s concern that civil war between communist-leaning factions and Western-leaning faction might erupt, added Phoumi to his government as deputy PM and Minister of the Interior (Library of Congress). Kong Le initially resisted this move and Phoumi together with Boun Oum announced they would try to take power.

Following some months of struggle in which North Vietnam and the Soviet Union actively supported the Phouma government and the US and Thailand supported General Phoumi, the Phoumi camp retook control of the government with General Boum Oum as the leader on December 13. In December Souvanna Phouma’s government fell after Phoumi led the National Assembly in a vote of no confidence. The King then appointed “a provisional government formed by Prince Boun Oum, who acted as front man for Phoumi (United States Library of Congress).” This is a SOLS change as it marks the return of Phoumi’s personalist regime. GWF code a personalist regime in place from January 1, 1961 through 1962—a time period that corresponds to Boun Oum’s time in office.

Laos was effectively in a civil war situation, with two contending governments, of which Boum Oum’s government would remain in control until June 1962, when increased and broad international pressure led to a second Geneva conference. At the peace conference, neutralists, rightists, and communists negotiated an agreement for a new coalition government. The new

³ We would not code a SOLS change with Khou Abhay even if we treated him as interim, but we would have to code a solschange30 for Phoumi when he assumes power for one day.

government was headed by Souvannah Phouma (Library of Congress). This is a SOLS change since it represents the end of Phoumi's personalist regime. GWF code Laos as warlordism between 1963 and 1973. Fighting started again in 1964; a second meeting was called in 1964; this did little to stop the conflict. Phouma became discouraged and declared that he would resign. An immediate coup by the "Revolutionary Committee" headed by Kouprasith Aphai followed. The coup failed quickly as a result of international protest and power was restored to Phouma. We do not code this as a SOLS change under our rules for warlordism.

The civil war raged on until 1975, when the communists ultimately won and established in single-party regime, led by the newly renamed Lao People's Revolutionary Party (PPPL; formerly Pathet Lao). The PPPL's entry to power on December 2, 1975 is coded as a SOLS change. The first leader was Kaysone Phomvihane, who served until his death in 1992. In 1991, the title for the leading officer was changed to president. After Phomvihane's death in 1992, his number-two man Nouhak Phoumsavan took over and ruled until 1998. The next president was Khamtai Siphandon, who served until 2006, and was then replaced by Choummaly Sayasone (who is still in power). None of these changes are coded as SOLS changes, because all leaders were members of the Revolutionary People's Party of Laos.

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