

Djibouti

Rice

Djibouti gained its independence from France in 1977 and is coded non-democratic throughout the period under observation. Geddes does not provide regime type coding, but according to our research, the country can be considered a personalist system under its two leaders Gouled Aptidon and Guelleh.

Hassan Gouled Aptidon, a member of the Popular Assembly for Progress Party (RPP) was elected first President. The RPP was an authoritarian party and the only legal party from 1981 until 1992. In coding Djibouti's regime type, what we have to consider is whether the regime was either a personalist regime or a single-party regime. Geddes (2003, 72) provides some criteria for distinguishing them. First, Geddes focuses on when a party was formed. Geddes gives more weight to the party than to the leader, "if the party existed prior to the leader's accession to power." The RPP (the Popular Assembly for Progress Party) was created by Gouled Aptidon on March 4, 1979, which is after his accession to power. According to Schlager and Weisblatt (2006: 365), at the time of independence, Gouled Aptidon was a leader of the African People's League for Independence (LPAI), which was an interethnic political movement that demanded for independence. However, when the LPAI was replaced with the RPP, the hopes that Djibouti would remain a competitive democracy as the LPAI would continue to serve as a unifying force for all ethnic group were dashed. After the creation of the RPP, most senior Afar ministers in a cabinet resigned within months. According to Worldstatesmen, the RPP was an authoritarian party and the only legal party from 1981 until 1992 when multiparty politics was introduced in the September 1992 referendum. Under the domination of the RPP, Gouled Aptidon was reelected in unopposed elections in 1981 and 1987, despite a constitutional limit of presidential tenure to two terms.

Second, Geddes focuses on the party membership. Geddes puts less weight on the party "if its membership was dominated by one region, tribe, clan or religion (in heterogeneous societies)." Based on this criterion, the regime under Gouled Aptidon can be considered personalist. Gouled Aptidon was a leader of the Issa clan and a leader of the RPP, which was supported by the Issa clan. The Issa clan was one of the two main ethnic groups in the country along with the Afars. The Issa clan, which is of Somalian origin, is the largest single population group (40%), while the Afar tribe, which is of Ethiopian origin, (35%) is the second largest.

Third, Geddes focuses on who controls policy and recruitment. Geddes puts less weight on the party than on the leader "if all members of the politburo and assembly were in effect selected by the leader". According to this criterion, Gouled Aptidon's regime can also be considered as personalist. According to Schlager and Weisblatt (2006: 365), when the struggle for succession among leading members of the government led to a split in the RPP in 1996, Gouled sacked some of the ambitious officials and announced that he intended to remain in office until 1999. In addition, in 1999, Gouled Aptidon chose his nephew, Ismail Omar Guelleh, as his successor.

It should be noted that a civil war between the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) and the Djiboutian government began in 1991, and did not officially end until 2001. However, various factions of FRUD allied themselves with the government throughout this ten-year period.

In 1999, Gouled Aptidon decided to retire and not seek reelection. The RPP candidate was his former chief-of-staff, nephew, and pre-designated successor Ismail Omar Guelleh. This is not a SOLS change. In 2005 Guelleh was reelected and remains in power in the present day.

Sources

Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Schlager, Neil and Jayne Weisblatt (2006) *World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties (Forth edition)*, Volume 3, New York: Facts on File.

United States Department of State. "Country Background Note: Djibouti". Last edited 14 June 2010.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5482.htm>

Coded by Meera Krishnan 9/1/2010

Revised by Michaela Mattes 02/04/2012

Edited by Andrew Wood (Rice) on 5/23/14