

Djibouti

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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 of the Rassemblement populaire pour le Progrès (RPP) ruled as president at independence. There is no SOLS change at independence. Aptidon was an Issa, one of the two main ethnic groups in the country along with the Afars. The French handed power over to Aptidon and his Issa clan in 1977 and he or his family has ruled ever since (Bollee 2003, 481). The RPP was the only legal party from 1981 until 1992 (Cahoon 2010).

In coding Djibouti's regime type, what we have to distinguish 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 independence. However, when the LPAI was replaced with the RPP, the hopes that Djibouti would remain a competitive democracy, under the expectation that the LPAI would continue to serve as a unifying force for all ethnic groups, 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.

Since Aptidon ruled for 22 years and seems to have hand-picked his successor personally (Freedom House, 2004), it appears that Aptidon “had consolidated control over policy and recruitment” as Geddes (2003) states is the key characteristic of a personalist regime. As such, the country is considered a personalist regime from independence through 2008.

In 1992, the country opened up to multiparty elections, but continued to hold fraudulent elections rigged in favor of the ruling party (Freedom House, 2004). The only leadership change during the period under review took place in 1999, when Aptidon’s nephew and the president’s “heir apparent” (Freedom House, 2004) Ismail Omar Guelleh won elections to replace him. This is not a SOLS change, as Omar Guelleh was the predesignated successor.

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