

Syria

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Syria is coded as an oligarchy in 1946, its year of independence, with Shukri al-Kuwatli of the al-Kutla al-Wataniya party (KW), as president. There is no SOLS change at independence. From 1947 until 1951 it is considered authoritarian, but is missing Geddes coding on regime type. In 1947, Kuwatli's SOLS changes from KW to SNP (Syrian National Party; also National Party - Hizb al-Watani).¹

In 1949, Husni az-Zaim, Mil/SSNP (Syrian Socialist National Party), who was the chief of the army, staged a coup and took power. This is a SOLS change since Husni az-Zaim was not al-Kuwatli's pre-designated successor. Az-Zaim was deemed legitimate by international governments and, according to the U.S. Library of Congress (1987), "was elected president of Syria after abolishing political parties and proposing himself as the only candidate." Less than five months later he was deposed in a countercoup by Muhammad Sami Hilmi al-Hinnawi, Mil, and was executed. This is a SOLS change. The U.S. Departments of State (2010) writes that "A series of military coups, begun in 1949, undermined civilian rule and led to army colonel Adib Shishakli's seizure of power in 1951." Geddes also codes a military regime starting in 1952 through 1954. However, Archigos codes Shishakli to be the leader starting in 1949.² Shishakli (Mil) had in fact seized power from al-Hinnawi in 1949 and accused him of working with foreign powers (US Library of Congress 1987). "On December 19, 1949, army leadership changed hands when Colonel Adib Shishakli arrested Hinnawi and accused him of conspiring with a foreign power--Iraq--against Syrian interests. (US Library of Congress 1987)." This is a tricky case to code because Shishakli and al-Hinnawi were both military but Shishakli was clearly not al-Hinnawi's pre-designated successor, which is the rule used for autocratic country-years without Geddes coding. Thus, we code a SOLS change here. Note that, formally, starting in 1949 there was a provisional president, Hashim Khalid al-Atassi, a member of the KW party and a former president. Though the government was seemingly civilian, the military continued to influence political appointments (GWF code the country as an indirect military regime from 1950 to 1951). And in 1951, after a clash with the government over a particular appointment, Shishakli removed al-Atassi and formally took power. Shishakli ruled as dictator, abolishing all political parties but his own, the Arab Liberation Movement (ALM). In 1954, opponents of Shishakli in the army staged another coup and restored the previous civilian government with al-Atassi, KW, again assuming office as president. This is a SOLS change since it ends the military regime of Shishakli and the al-Atassi's regime – though interim - lasted for longer than 18 months.

¹ Ismael (1970, 216): "In the spring of 1947 the ruling wing of the Bloc formed into the National party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*) under the leadership of Shukri al-Kuwatli." According to Reich (1990, 438) Kuwatli changed the name of the National Bloc into the National Party (*Hizb al-Watani*) in 1943. Other sources are unclear about the date (Keinle 1995, 58) or simply refer consistently to Kuwatli's National Bloc (Kaylani 1972).

² Other sources also state that Shishakli had power during 1949-1954 (Pipes 1988; 311, Rabinovich 1972; 5)

Contrary to the coding in Cheibub et al. (2010); from 1954 until 1958 Syria is considered a parliamentary democracy (Garnham & Tessler 1995; Zisser 2001). In 1955 Kuwatli, SNP, becomes president again and rules until 1958. This is a SOLS change since he has a different party affiliation. (Interestingly, these years are not coded as democratic by Cheibub et al. and Geddes (2009) codes a single-party authoritarian regime in 1957. This is likely due to the elimination of opposition parties during this year as described by the U.S. Library of Congress (1987). The Library of Congress (1987) also reports that by 1955 power had shifted from the Conservatives to leftwing groups like the Baath and the Communist Party, and by 1957 Conservatives were not anymore a significant force in Syrian politics. Baath and the Communists then struggled for power and the Baath got increasingly worried about a Communist take-over and turned to Nasser for help.

From 1958 until 1961 the country is unified with Egypt as part of the United Arab Republic (UAR) and is no longer independent. Gamal Abdel Nasser of the National Union (NU) ruled as president of the UAR. The UAR was completely run by Nasser and Syrians became increasingly dissatisfied with the union. In 1961 a military coup reestablished Syria as an independent republic. Al-Kuzbari, Non-Party, becomes interim president until elections can be held later in the year (Cahoon 2010; Sicker 2001, 211). This is not a SOLS change because he heads an interim government. In December 1961 Nazim al-Kudsi, of the Hizb ash-Sha'b party (HS), is “elected” president. Syria is not considered a democracy by us at the time. “In December 1961, all political groups, except the Communists and pro-Nasser factions, participated in a general election for a constituent assembly. Although party labels were not used, only a few known Baathists were elected to an assembly dominated by moderates and conservatives. (Library of Congress 1987).” We code this is a SOLS change because al-Kudsi belonged to a different party than the last regular leader (al-Kuwatli: SNP) and thus is unlikely to be the pre-designated successor. The rulers prior to the union were Baathists and to some extent Communists, while al-Kudsi seems to have been more of a Conservative since he appointed a conservative PM (Library of Congress 1987).

Al-Kudsi’s government lasted until March of 1962, when a military coup occurred under the leadership of Colonel Abd al-Karim al-Nehlawi. Army General Abdel Karim Zahreddin set up the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces to act as government. GWF code the date that Zahreddin comes to power as the beginning of an indirect military regime. This is a SOLS change. Domestic opposition to the coup forced the military to reinstate al-Kudsi less than a month later. The indirect military regime continues according to GWF, but since al-Kudsi is not a pre-designated successor of Zahreddin, we code a minor SOLS change.

Another military coup brought Louai al-Atassi, Mil/Baath, to power in 1963. This is a minor SOLS change by our rules since the country goes from a military regime to a military-single-party-personalist hybrid, which remains in power through 2008. Nasserites (conservatives) battled Baathists (leftists) for control of the country. Ultimately, Amin al-Hafiz, Mil/Baath, took power as head of the armed forces. This is not a SOLS change. Ongoing conflict between centrists and the extreme leftists of the Baath Party contributed to instability within the country. “Between May 1964 and February 1966, there were frequent changes of government reflecting the contest for power between the centrist and leftist wings of the Baath Party. (Library of Congress, 1987). In 1966 a coup put the extremists in power under Nureddin al-Atassi,

Mil/Baath. This is not a SOLS change because he was a high-ranking Baath party member. In 1970 the Baath party replaced al-Atassi with Sayyid Ahmed al-Hasan al-Khatib. This is not a SOLS change. In 1971 Hafez Ali Sulayman al-Assad of the Baath party was elected president. This is not a SOLS change. According to the U.S. Library of Congress (1987), the election of Assad “was widely regarded as a conservative and moderating movement away from Communist radicalism.” In 1972 al-Assad’s SOLS changed from Baath to National Progressive Front (NPF), a Baath-led coalition. In 2000 Hafez al-Assad died after 30 years in power. The constitution was amended to lower the minimum age of the president so that al-Assad’s son would be eligible to run for office (U.S. Department of State 2010). Bashar al-Assad, NPF, was “elected” president in 2000 and ruled through 2008. This is not a SOLS change as the single-part-military-personalist regime continued.

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Coded by Anna Carella July 27, 2010

Checked by Michaela Mattes 08/17/2010

Revised by Eelco van der Maat 26/10/2011

Revised by Michaela Mattes 12/17/2011

Updated by Naoko Matsumura 06/14/2012

Revised by Bryan Rooney 10/17/2012

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