Comoros
Vanderbilt

Comoros is coded as an authoritarian regime from independence in 1975 until 2004 and democratic thereafter. Regime type coding from Geddes (1999) is missing due to the country's population of fewer than one million.[1] Thus we assign our own regime coding based on Geddes' typology for those periods that are not characterized by instability and lack of clear institutional rules (i.e. 1995-1996, 1998-1999, and 2002).

Comoros's first President, Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane of the Union Démocratique des Comores (UDC), unilaterally declared independence from France in 1975. He was overthrown with French assistance and succeeded by Said Mohammed Jaffar of the Uni National Front (UNF) (Mukonoweshuro 1990, 560). Ali Soilih Mtsashiwa of the Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Comorien (RDPC) became the new leader according to Archigos. Since CoW codes December 31, 1975 to be Comoros' independence date, we consider Soilih as the first leader of Comoros and do not code a SOLS change for the transition from Abderemane to Soilih.

Soilih had been installed by French mercenaries under Bob Denard because he appeared to be pro-French. He ruled as a dictator, killing, torturing, and imprisoning his opponents (Mukonoweshuro 1990, 563). His regime might be considered single-party-personalist. Soilih's party, the RDPC, existed before Soilih's assumption of power and his regime was shaped by the socialist ideology of his party. According to Schlager and Weisblatt (2006: 298), "As president, Solih carried out a Chinese-style program designed to abolish feudalism. In 1977, he dismissed civil servants, dismantled the regular governmental machinery and vested the "people's power" in a National People's Committee at island, district, and local levels, despite numerous skirmishes between People's militia forces and Islamic traditionalists." Comoran citizens were mobilized to serve in revolutionary militia and army units in an attempt to create something resembling the Red Guards of China's Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s (Library of Congress, 1994).

As a result of an economic crisis and dissatisfaction with his policies and the loss of French support, Soilih was overthrown in a coup engineered by Denard in 1978. Denard seems to have been hired by Abdallah Abderemane, the former leader now in exile (Library of Congress, 1994). While Abdallah became President and a number of sources consider him to be the leader of Comoros, we follow Archigos, which considers Denard (SOLS unknown) the effective leader during this period.[2] We code the transition from Soilih to Denard as a SOLS change since Soilih had instituted a personalist-type regime and relied on his socialist party, while Denard was a mercenary of unknown SOLS, who seems to have put in place his own

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[1] The population was 643,571 in 2008 according to the World Bank.

[2] Note that some other sources, such as Worldstatesmen, Lenz (2000) and Muller et al (2011) do not consider Denard as the sole effective leader after Soilih, but consider Abdallah Abderemane and Mohamed Ahmed as "co- presidents". According to Muller et al (2011) "the successful coup resulted in the return of Abdhalla, who joined Mohamed Ahamed as co-presidents of a Political-Military Directionate that also included Denard." In 1982 the UCP was formed as a regime-supportive group by President Abdallah and became the sole legal party until 1989. Both Abdallah and Ahamed are considered members of UCP, the SOLS of Denard remains unknown during this period.

personalist regime. Denard had been previously been involved in rebellions elsewhere in Africa and Southern Arabia, but seemed to want to stay in Comoros, and he and the members of his force were given financially rewarding appointments with the new government (Library of Congress, 1994). Denard's ambition was to gain private benefits by owning private companies. Indeed, backed by his force and using his connections to the head of state, Denard became heavily involved in Comoran business activities. Denard owned the Comoros' largest import-export firm, whose primary owner was President Abdallah, as well as a highly profitable commercial shuttle between South Africa and Comoros and a private security firm.

Abdallah was formally the President of Comoros during the time Archigos coded Comoros as being led by Denard. Until 1978, Abdallah affiliated with the UDC, but in 1982 Abdallah created the Comoran Union for Progress (UCP), which was a republic's sole political party until 1989. The UCP should be considered as a regime-supportive group. It is dubious that the UCP functioned without power of Abdallah.

The constitution of Comoros, which was approved by 99 percent of Comoran voters on October 1, 1978, reserved strong executive powers for the president, Abdallah. Making the most of Comoros' new presidential system, Abdallah induced the nation's National Assembly to enact a twelve-year ban on political parties, which guaranteed his reelection in 1984 (Library of Congress, 1994). His politics were characterized by frequent reshufflings of the cabinets to eliminate potential challengers. Abdallah also kept opponents from competing with him by reshuffling his government and amending the constitution. Following his reelection in 1984, Abdallah secured a number of constitutional amendments that abolished the positions of prime minister and reduced the powers of Federal Assembly (Schlager and Weisblatt, 2006: 298). In addition, to run a presidential election, Abdallah created a commission in 1988 to recommend changes to the constitution that would permit him to run again in 1990. The original constitution banned a third term.

In 1989, Denard assassinated Abdallah - the formal president - because he had become displeased with Abdallah's plans to integrate his force into the regular army. Denard and his mercenaries then seized power and made Djohar, the head of the Supreme Court, interim president. Because of domestic protests against Denard and the withdrawal of French support for him, Denard had to surrender later that year and leave Comoros. Djohar remained in place and became a regular leader later after an election. Although Denard installed Djohar in power, Denard intended Djohar to be an interim leader. The fact that Denard had to leave Comoros and Djohar stayed in power until Denard's coup attempt in 1995, leads us to code a SOLS change, because the pre-designated successor quickly broke with the prior leader after gaining power.

Djohar was a personalist leader that govened from 1989-1995 under different party affiliations. According to Muller et al (2011: 304), the UCP presented Djohar as its official candidate in the presidential balloting in March 1990. However, the UCP withdrew its support from Djohar in November 1991 and moved into the opposition, when Djohar made a major cabinet shakeup. It is not clear what was Djohar's SOLS after November 1991 until December 1993, when he began to receive support from the Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et le Renouveau (RDR), which was a party launched by his son-in-law. Although party affiliation is not very important in a personalist regime, we follow worldstatesmen.org- we list Djohar's SOLS as UCP initially, as unknown from 1991-1992, and RDR from 1993 onward.

Djohar spent much of the early 1990s playing a political shell game with the oppositions. He moved election dates backward and forward and sanctioned irregularities. Presidential elections were rescheduled for March 4, 1990 and Djohar was the official victor, claiming 55 percent of the votes. As it would be the case in other Comoran elections in the 1990s, the major issue appeared to be was the character and ability of the incumbent president rather than any matter of public policy or ideology (Library of Congress, 1994).

In 1995 Denard returned and led a coup against Djohar (BBC, 2010). Archigos codes Denard as effective ruler for a few days until El-Yachrouti (SOLS unknown) takes over. Denard is forced to surrender after the French listen to El-Yachrouti's pleas and intervene. Caabi El-Yachroutu Mohamed, RDR, then declares himself interim president in accordance to the Constitution. He had been Djohar's PM. During the coup, Djohar had been out of the country for medical treatment and came back to challenge Yachroutu. They agreed that Djohar would return as president in a ceremonial capacity, because he was too old to rule. In 1996, Djohar still belonging to the RDR party, took power temporarily.

We consider the years of 1995 and 1996 an ABC scenario. Djohar (A) loses power and Denard takes over for less than 30 days (B). Then el-Yachrouti, an interim leader takes power. Then Djohar comes back (also interim). Then a new leader, Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim of the Rassemblement National pour le Développement (RND), is elected president (C) although we do not code Comoros as democratic as the time. (Neither do Cheibub et al.) We code a solsschange30 for 1995 and a SOLS change for 1996 when Abdoulkarim takes over. We code a SOLS change here because Abdoulkarim was not affiliated with Denard (to our knowledge) and he was also not affiliated with Djohar. Djohar was from the RDR whereas Abdoulkarim was from the RND and had run against Djohar in a previous election.

Abdoulkarim had been a member of the National Union for Democracy in the Comoros (UNDC) before being elected as President (Schlager and Weisblatt, 2006: 299). However, he created the RND as a pro-presidential party at the time of election. Abdoulkarim formally proposed the establishment of a single "presidential" party: the National Rally for Development (RND), with opposition forces grouped into two parties. On October 20, 1996, 85 percent of voting in a national referendum approved a new constitution that increased presidential powers and restricted political party formation. Consequently, in balloting on December, the RND candidates faced little competition, capturing an overwhelming majority of the assembly. In addition, following violent antigovernment rioting by civil servants in May 1998, Abdoulkarim dismissed the government and he named a cabinet that did not include a prime minister. These episodes illustrate a personalist politics.

In 1998, Abdoulkarim died of a heart attack (BBC, 2010) and was replaced by an interim president, Tadjidine Ben Said Massounde, President of High Council of the Republic (the country's constitutional court), non-party (BBC, 2010; Cahoon, 2010; Muller et al. 2011: 300). This is not a SOLS change. In 1999 Massounde is ousted in a military coup headed by Azali Assoumani, (Mil). This is a SOLS change.

There was significant unrest and fluidity in Comoros at the time. Two of the islands that made up Comoros declared independence in 1997 and there was an effort to bring about the Fomboni Accord, a power-sharing accord (that provided for the election of three separate president, one for each island) in 1999. The parties struggled until the early 2000s to get the

agreement signed and set up new institutions that would allow more autonomy to those islands (Murrison 2002, 231). A new constitution was also drawn up, elections held, the country's name changed, and the presidency was supposed to rotate among presidents of the three islands. In February 2002, Assoumani briefly stepped down from office pending new elections. He was replaced during this time by interim President Hamada Madi Bolero, a member of the Republican Party of the Comoros (PRC). This is not a SOLS change. In April 2002, Assoumani, now a member of the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC) became President once again. On May 26, Assoumani was sworn in as president and announced his cabinet, which comprised his two vice presidents and only three other members (Schlager and Weisblatt, 2006: 300). This is not a SOLS change since he is the same leader as prior to the interim leader. We code Assoumani as a personalist leader. He took power in a military coup, resigned from the military two years later, and "ran" for the presidency as a civilian. (He installed an interim leader briefly while he was running for election.)

In 2006, following free and fair elections, Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi, a Muslim cleric and an independent (though worldstatesmen lists him as a member of "FNS", it does not provide a name for this party, and other sources label him as an independent candidate), won the Presidency, resulting in a SOLS change. This marked the first democratic transition of power in Comoran history. Comoros became a democracy with a presidency that rotates every five years between candidates from the three major islands.

In 2011, Ikililou Dhoinine won the presidential election. He had been a vice president in the past administration and shared a party affiliation with the last president. This is not a SOLS change. In 2016, Azali Assoumani was elected and soon began to consolidate power. Notably, although the constitutional rotation agreement required that the presidency rotate among islands, several candidates representing different parties ran against one another in each election. Thus, since Assoumani represents a different political party than Dhoinine, we code a SOLS change. This is not a rotating presidency in the sense that the same government remains in charge with a different government member at its head. While there is regional rotation, this is not a power sharing agreement in the same way that the presidential rotation in Switzerland is, for example. In 2018, President Azali Assoumani won a referendum that extended presidential term limits, ended the rotating presidency, enshrined Sunni Islam as the national religion, and abolished the Constitutional Court and created a new constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court (Ahmed 2018, Freedom House 2019). The opposition denounced the referendum as illegal and claimed it was a power grab by President Assoumani. President Assoumani banned protests in May before the referendum, though anti-governmental demonstrations have occurred in the country before and after the referendum. These demonstrations have often been met with violence by security forces (Freedom House 2019). Furthermore, many of the opposition leaders that opposed the referendum have been arrested and convicted. Additionally, former president Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi and political opponent of President Assoumani was arrested and jailed on corruption charges (Freedom House 2019).

These events of 2018 led to Comoros as being classified as a nondemocracy in 2018 after having been classified as a democracy for many years. The events of 2018 indicate that President Assoumani autocratized Comoros. Comoros should not be coded as military, indirect military, monarchy, single party, warlord, oligarchy, or hybrid. The decision is between coding Comoros

as a personalistic regime or as other. We recommend coding Comoros as other because the regime is not consolidated around President Assoumani at this point.

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