Comoros
Rice

On 6 July 1975, the Comoros declared independence from France. Based on our coding rules, Comoros is an authoritarian regime from its independence until 2004 and democratic thereafter. Geddes does not provide regime type coding for Comoros. Thus, we assign our own regime type 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).

Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane, a member of the Comoros Democratic Union (UDC), became President upon independence. However, less than one month later, on August 3,1975, Abdallah was deposed in a coup led by a French mercenary named Bob Denard (SOLS unknown). Ali Soilih, a member of the socialist Democratic Assembly of the Comoran People (RDPC) and pro-French, was named head of state. 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. Ali Soilih's regime might be coded as a single party-personalist regime. 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).

In 1978, mercenaries (again led by Denard), killed Soilih and reinstalled Abdallah as the President (SOLS change). Abdallah, with Denard's backing, was in power until 1989. We follow Archigos, which considers Denard the effective leader during this period.[1] Assuming that Denard is correctly coded as effective ruler, Denard's regime is probably most accurately described as a personalist regime. Denard was a French mercenary who had been previously involved in rebellions elsewhere in Africa and Southern Arabia. Denard seems to have been interested in remaining 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 integrate his force into the Comoros' regular army and 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

[1] 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

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). His politics was 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, Abdallah attempted to reduce Denard's power and that of the Presidential Guard. In November of 1989, Abdallah was assassinated by a member of the Presidential Guard, supposedly under the orders of Denard (BBC News, 2010). Denard then staged a coup and installed Said Mohamed Djohar, a member of the UCP and head of the Supreme Court, as President. Denard left the islands at French urging, but Djohar continued in power. 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 governed from 1989-1995. 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).

Djohar's party affiliations shifted during his time in office. 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 Nov. 1991 and moved into the opposition, when Djohar made a major cabinet shakeup. It is not clear what was the 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 and list Djohar as UCP initially, as unknown from 1991-1992, and then RDR in 1993.

Djohar remained in power until 1995, when he was also ousted in a coup attempt led by Denard. French troops again intervened, and Denard surrendered. We follow Archigos and have Bob Denard as the effective leader from September 29 to October 5. The entrance of Denard (or his affiliates) to power is coded as SOLSchange30. Caabi El-Yachroutu Mohamed, a member of RDR, took over as interim President from 5 October until 26 January 1996. This is not coded as a SOLS change. On 26 January, Djohar resumed office as a second interim president (no SOLS change) and presidential elections were held shortly thereafter. Elections were won by Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim. This is a SOLS change.

Abdoulkarim was a member of the National Union for Democracy in the Comoros (UNDC) before being elected as President (Schlager and Weisblatt, 2006: 299). Abdoulkarim formally proposed the establishment of a single "presidential" party: the National Rally for Development (NRD), 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.

Abdoulkarim remained in office until his death in November 1998. He was replaced by the non- partisan president of High Council of the Republic (the country's constitutional court) Tadjidine Ben Said Massounde, who served in the capacity of interim president until elections could be held (no SOLS change - BBC 2010; Cahoon 2010; Muller et al. 2011: 300). However, before elections could be held, Massounde was ousted in a military coup in April 1999. The coup's leader, Colonel Aziz Assoumani (Mil.), became the leader of the government. 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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