

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Comoros

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| <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>9</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> | Score: | 2009 | 2010 | Change | Polity: | 9 | 9 | 0 | Democ: | 9 | 9 | 0 | Autoc: | 0 | 0 | 0 | Durable: | | 4 | | Tentative: | | No | | |
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| Tentative: | | No | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SCODE | COM | CCODE | 581 | Date of Report | 1 June 2011 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Polity IV Component Variables | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| XRREG | XRCOMP | XROPEN | XCONST | PARREG | PARCOMP | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| End Date | 14 August 2000 | | Begin Date | 26 May 2006 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Polity Fragmentation: No | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Constitution | 2001 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Executive(s) | President Ikilou Dhoinine; directly elected 7 November 2010 and 26 December 2010; 61.1% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Legislature | Unicameral: Assembly of the Union (33 seats); 18 directly elected, 15 representatives of regional parliaments; most recent elections, 6 and 20 November 2009 Pro-union coalition: 19 Autonomous coalition: 4 Non-partisans: 1 Representatives of regional parliaments: 9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Judiciary | Supreme Court | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

The Comoro Islands have a long history of political instability and military rule. Since gaining independence from France in 1975, this three island state (consisting of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Moheli) has experienced over 20 coups or coup attempts. Ahmed Abdallah, the country's first president and prime minister, was deposed by Ali Soilih after only one month in office. After numerous failed coup attempts, President Soilih was ousted in May 1978 by a group of 50 mercenaries under the command of French citizen, Colonel Bob Denard. With the support of Denard, Abdallah returned to power and established a one-party state. President Abdallah ruled the Comoros in an autocratic manner until November 1989 when he was killed by six members of his own military. This assassination was reportedly

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

carried out under the orders of Colonel Denard, who was subsequently deported to South Africa. In the wake of the assassination of President Abdallah, Said Djohar defeated Mohamed Taki in the March 1990 presidential elections. This transfer of power was a watershed event in that it marked the first democratically contested presidential ballot to be held in this country since independence.

Despite the establishment of electoral politics in 1990, democracy was far from institutionalized. After numerous coup attempts and serious government instability, in early 1992 President Djohar entered into a pact of reconciliation with his political opponents and established a government of national unity with himself as president and Mohamed Taki as head of government. The government of national unity quickly collapsed as Djohar desperately sought to hang on to power in the face of repeated coup attempts and chronic cabinet instability. In September 1995 the increasingly unpopular president was briefly overthrown by yet another coup led by Denard and his band of mercenaries. Within a week of the coup French troops had restored Djohar to power and established yet another government of national reconciliation.

Under internationally monitored elections held in March 1996, Mohamed Taki was elected president. In November 1998 President Taki died and was replaced by an interim government led by President Tajidine Ben Said Massoude. Mounting anger over the failure of President Massoude to schedule new presidential elections, along with the escalating demands for secession by the leaders of Anjouan and Moheli, led to the coup of 30 April 1999 by army chief of staff, Colonel Azzali Assoumani. Colonel Azzali promised to return power to a democratically elected civilian government within a year, however, he subsequently stated that the return to civilian rule was contingent on the return of Anjouan and Moheli to the republic.

On 26 December 2001 75% of the population of the Comoros voted in favor of a new constitution to reunite the three islands and end the secessionist crisis. The basis of this settlement was codified in the Fomboni Agreement, signed in February 2001. This accord outlined a plan for decentralizing political power in the Comoros. Under the new constitution, the federal presidency would rotate on a four-year basis between the three islands. The first president was to be elected from Grande Comoro. While each island would have its own president, the federal president would have overall authority.

As promised, President Azzali Assoumani stepped down from power in favor of a transitional government in January 2002. Hanada Madi Borelo led the interim government of the Comoros in its preparation of new elections which were held on 14 April 2002. Amidst violence and controversy, the elections were held in the spring of 2002. In the aftermath of the election, the Comoros Electoral Commission was dissolved after it could not reach a consensus on the outcome of the voting. Former President Azzali unilaterally declared himself the victor of the election. On 9 May 2002 a newly-appointed electoral body confirmed Azzali's victory claiming that he had won 75% of the popular vote.

The island of Anjouan held the right to the union presidency in the 2006 elections, and thirteen candidates participated in the election. In the island primary, on April 16, Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi won 26% of the vote, and he went on to win the union-wide election with 58% of the vote. Sambi was inaugurated on 26 May 2006 without incident, making the 2006 presidential election the first peaceful and transparent transition of executive power under the new constitution. Sambi, an Iranian-trained Muslim cleric, has been criticized for his desire to centralize political authority.

President Sambi's tenure in office was designated to come to an end on 26 May 2010 at which time executive authority of the Union was to pass to an elected representative from the island of Moheli. In an effort to extend his rule, President Sambi orchestrated a public referendum which sought to extend his rule by one year. In May 2010 voters approved an extension of Sambi's rule as Union president until 2011. The referendum was criticized by opposition parties and boycotted by the citizens of Moheli. As street protests in Moheli escalated and calls for secession became more intense, the African Union stepped in to broker a deal and save the Union from disintegration. In June 2010 President Sambi backed down and agreed to hand Union power over to an elected representative from Moheli by the end of January 2011. Elections for this position were scheduled to be held by the end of 2010. In the run-up to this election, a prominent opposition leader, Said Larifou, was arrested for publically criticizing the President. When the elections were finally conducted on 29 December, the ruling party's candidate, Ikilil Dhoinine, won the presidential poll with 61% of the vote. While the head of the national election monitoring group deemed the elections to be "generally free and transparent," the opposition, led by Mohamed Said Fazul, rejected the results as fraudulent and called for daily demonstrations by his supporters. Dhoinine had served as vice president to President Sambi. Dhoinine is the first president from the island of Moheli, which has

traditionally been seen as an opposition stronghold and has actively resisted efforts to centralize Union authority within the country.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

Upon seizing power in April 1999, Colonel Azzali Assoumani dissolved all democratic political institutions and suspended the constitution. While the new president invited a broad spectrum of political parties and interests to join him in the new government, real power remained tightly held by Azzali and his military supporters. In May 1999 Azzali decreed a constitution that gave him both extensive executive and legislative powers. In an effort to legitimize his rule, in August 2000 Azzali organized a National Congress to draft a new constitution. The National Congress, which was boycotted by all opposition parties, agreed on a new constitution in which Azzali Assoumani would remain head of state but daily government administration would be handled by a civilian prime minister to be selected by the president. Despite this cosmetic change in executive branch organization, President Azzali continued to be the primary source of political power in the Comoros. Neither the National Assembly, which had been dissolved since the 1999 coup, nor the judiciary served as effective counter-weights to presidential authority.

With the establishment of a federal system of governance in the spring of 2002, the power of President Azzali was significantly weakened. Under this new system, the federal president rotates on a four-year basis between the three islands. In addition to the creation of a federal presidency, each island would elect its own president. The first federal president under this new system was to be selected from the island of Grande Comore and, in controversial elections held in April 2002, Azzali Assoumani was elected to this post. While Azzali retained his position of ultimate political authority within the nation, his power was significantly diminished. The new federal system significantly undercut his ability to control the political environment in the Comoros. While his power never really extended far beyond the island of Grande Comore, the new constitution institutionalized his limited political writ.

While this new constitutional order represents a significant movement toward political liberalization in this country, nevertheless, the new federal system of governance has produced considerable confusion within the country as divisions of power have yet to be fully accepted by all political actors. For example, considerable tension exists on the island of Grand Comore itself as its president has repeatedly clashed with the country's federal president over control of the island's resources and the country's security forces. Although relations between the two newly elected leaders, federal President Sambu (May 2006) and President of Grande Comore Mohamed Abdoulwahab (July 2007), have yet to flesh out, their predecessors engaged in a power struggle that seriously threatened the fragile stability of the federal system. Whether this federal/provincial conflict will continue remains to be seen, but it certainly remains a threat to the stability of the political system.

Despite these significant political obstacles, Comoran leaders signed a breakthrough agreement in December 2003 that cleared the way for legislative elections on 20 April 2004. These polls, the last step in a process of regionally-mediated national reconciliation aimed at re-uniting the islands within a federal system, were a significant step towards political liberalization. President Azali Assoumani suffered a crushing defeat. Parties aligned to the three regional presidents garnered twelve out of the eighteen directly elected seats while supporters of the federal president (Azali) gained only six seats. Moreover, each of the three regional presidents, all of whom were strongly opposed to Azzali's ambitions to centralize political power, were each entitled to appoint five federal legislators to complete the thirty-three member federal parliament. The end result of this democratic process was that anti-Azzali forces controlled twenty-seven federal legislative seats against six for the president. Despite an attempt by President Azzali to forestall the opening of the Assembly, it was officially convened on 7 June 2004. The institutionalization of a federal political structure, along with the peaceful election and legislative dominance of anti-Azzali forces, placed significant constraints on the autonomous actions of the federal president.

With the election of Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambu in May 2006, the power of the Union president has increased. Sambu has been criticized for his authoritarian leadership style, which many observers have argued has placed the fragile 2001 inter-island power-sharing agreement at risk. In May 2009 the constitution was amended to increase the powers of the federal government. Under the terms of the amendment, passed by a public referendum, the presidents of each of the islands were demoted to the status of governors and were stripped of significant powers. In addition, the constitutional referendum extended the presidential term to five years, limited the size of cabinets, empowered the president to dissolve the federal parliament, and allowed the president to rule by decree with the parliament's approval. It also altered the composition of the federal parliament to include 24 directly elected seats and 9 seats

elected by the three island assemblies. Under the previous constitution, only 18 were directly elected and 15 were appointed. In the December 2009 legislative polls, the first to be conducted under the new rules, President Sambu's supporters won 19 of the 24 elected seats, giving Sambu significant powers to direct the policymaking process in the country.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)

The chronic instability that has come to define politics in the Comoros since independence is driven by deep personal, clan and inter-island rivalries. At the root of the most recent episode of political instability in the Comoros is the 1997 decision by the leaders of Anjouan and Moheli to declare their independence from the federal republic which, according to them, was dominated by the residents of Grande Comore. Motivated to military action by the decision of President Taki to increase the powers of the central government, national government troops were humiliated in 1997 as Anjouan secessionists easily defeated their effort to regain control of the island. Anjouan secessionists claimed that they did not receive fair compensation by the central government from the export of ylang-ylang flowers (which are used in the manufacturing of perfume). Anjouan resentment was also fueled by the relative prosperity of the island of Mayotte – which had opted in 1976 to remain part of France. Despite some effort by Anjouan leaders to rejoin France, the French made it clear that they did not want them back. Divisions within the Anjouan leadership over the island's relationship with France and the relative merits of secession versus regional autonomy within a confederated Comoros produced serious political instability and violence on the island.

A peace agreement was drafted by the OAU in early 1999 to bring an end to the conflict by establishing a confederated Comoros with strong island governments and a rotating federal presidency. Rejection of this compromise agreement by hard-line factions on both sides of the conflict sparked escalating violence on both Anjouan and Grande Comore. The violence on Grande Comore was targeted primarily against Anjouanese residents. The degenerating security situation on Grande Comore sparked the coup of April 1999 which brought President Azzali Assoumani to power. While President Azzali dissolved virtually all existing democratic institutions, nevertheless, he did not ban political party activity. Some twenty-one legal parties continued to operate and openly criticize the government with only limited harassment. Freedom of association has been expanded in recent years as political party activity has flourished. As a general rule, political parties are largely defined by their ideological position in regard to the division of power between the federal and local governments.

The Anjouan secession crisis cooled significantly with the signing of the Fomboni Declaration of National Unity by President Azzali Assoumani and separatist leader Lieutenant Colonel Said Abeid in August 2000. The Declaration provided for a loose confederation between the islands, giving each island the ability to maintain an army and conduct its own foreign affairs. Despite numerous attempts to derail the Fomboni process, on 26 December 2001 a new constitution was approved by popular referendum and, with the May 2006 peaceful transfer of authority to the Anjouan President, the secessionist crisis appeared to have receded. However, tensions increased once again in Anjouan in the run up to scheduled, island presidential elections, causing Federal President Sambu to attempt to postpone the election. The election was conducted in Anjouan on the scheduled date, June 10, despite the postponement and a boycott by four of the five candidates. The incumbent president, Col. Mohammed Bacar, was reelected with 73% of the vote but the outcome was rejected by both the Comoros federal government and the African Union, resulting in a political impasse. The AU consequently voted to impose sanctions on Anjouan. Bacar was ousted on 25 March 2008 by Comoran troops, with the assistance of AU forces; central authority was re-established on Anjouan within a matter of hours. Presidential elections were held on Anjouan in June 2008 to replace Bacar who had fled the island; the election was won by Moussa Toybou who enjoyed the support of the union president.