

Polity IV Country Report 2006: Laos					
Score:	2005	2006	Change		
Polity:	-7	-7	0		
Democ:	0	0	0		
Autoc:	7	7	0		
Durable:		31			
Tentative:		No			
SCODE	LAO	CCODE	812	Date of Report	17 November 2007
Polity IV Component Variables					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP
2	1	4	3	4	1
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)					
End Date	1 January 1960		Begin Date	3 December 1975	
Polity Fragmentation: No					
Constitution	1991				
Executive(s)	President Lt. Gen. Saignason Choummali (LPRP); elected by the National Assembly for five-year term, 8 June 2006				
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (115 seats, note – increased from 109 for the 2006 elections; Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) candidates won 113 seats, only two (approved) non-partisan candidates won seats; most recent elections, 30 April 2006)				
Judiciary	People's Supreme Court				

Narrative Description:

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

Laos is a communist, one-party state ruled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The head of the LPRP is confirmed by the National Assembly as the country's president. In 1998, when 81-year-old Nouhak Phoumsavan resigned from the party leader's post and the presidency, the LPRP Politburo elevated Gen. Khamtay Siphandon from prime minister to president, whereupon the decision was confirmed by the LPRP-controlled legislature. Siphandon was reelected by the National Assembly on 24 February 2002. In March 2006 Khamtay Siphandone stepped down from his position as leader of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and was replaced by the vice president of the party, Choummaly Sayasone. Sayasone was subsequently elevated to the position of President of Laos in June 2006. The new leadership is not expected to usher in any significant reforms to the political process.

Executive Constraints: Slight to Moderate Limitations (3)

The Laotian constitution adopted in 1991 bestows a leading role on the LPRP and broadens the powers of the president. Although the Constitution outlines a system composed of executive, legislative, and judicial branches, in practice the LPRP continues to influence governance and the choice of leaders through its

“leading role” at all levels. An 11-member politburo within the LPRP Central Committee determines policy for both the party and the government, making it the most powerful body in the state and the only body that sets certain constraints on the chief executive. For example, it was reported that appointments of the cabinet ministers in 2000 were made as a last-minute compromise between the civilian and military factions in the LPRP leadership. The legislature’s membership is entirely controlled by the party bureaucracy. Members of the LPRP won 113 out of 115 seats in the May 2006 legislative elections (with the other two seats being captured by “independents”). However, over one-half of the seats were filled by political newcomers. The legislature only convenes twice a year, while the rest of the time its work is performed by the Standing Committee composed of high-ranking LPRP functionaries. The judiciary is subject to executive influence and suffers from corruption.

Political Participation: Repressed Competition (1)

LPRP leadership has favored the Chinese model of absolute one-party rule combined with conditional economic liberalism. All organized opposition groups are banned and the hegemonic regime demonstrates its capacity and willingness to effectively exclude opponents from the political arena. Military force is used against anti-government insurgents. In 2000, there were clashes with insurgents in the north of the country, in which government troops were reported to abuse and kill noncombatant civilians suspected to be insurgents. Political violence was also manifested in several bomb explosions that took place in the country’s capital in June and September; the explosions are attributed either to dissidents or to a conflict between pro-China and pro-Vietnam factions of the LPRP.