

In September 2014, President Ikililou Dhoinine abruptly postponed the scheduled November parliamentary elections until late December due to government unpreparedness. No elections had taken place at year's end.

Various international bodies and donors have pursued strategies to assist Comoros with its struggling economy and lacking infrastructure in recent years. In February 2014, the Saudi Fund for Development pledged \$40 million toward Comoran infrastructure and health services.

Large numbers of Comorans illegally immigrate to the French-administered island of Mayotte to settle or to seek entry into metropolitan France, and the Comoran economy depends heavily on remittances and foreign aid. Tensions remain with France regarding the restrictions on movement between Comoros and Mayotte, which Moroni claims as part of its territory.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 25 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Since 1990, Comorans have voted in several parliamentary and presidential elections, though a pattern of military coups persisted for many years, with the first peaceful transfer of power through elections occurring only in 2006. The unicameral Assembly of the Union consists of 33 members, with 9 selected by the assemblies of the three islands and 24 by direct popular vote; all members serve five-year terms. Each of the three islands is semi-autonomous, with directly elected assemblies and governors. A 2009 referendum approved constitutional reforms increasing the powers of the federal government at the expense of the individual island governments. The reforms instituted a rotation of the federal presidency among the islands every five years.

Dhoinine won the presidential elections in 2010 with the support of then president Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi, becoming the first president from the island of Mohéli. The constitutional court upheld the election results despite irregularities reported on the island of Anjouan. In the 2009 legislative elections, the president's supporters won 19 of the 24 directly elected seats. In 2013, the constitutional court ruled that the end of the mandate for the president and governors must be respected.

In September 2014, President Dhoinine postponed parliamentary and municipal elections that had been scheduled for November until late December due to delays in meeting electoral code provisions. Despite general agreement among political parties that the postponement was necessary, a coalition of opposition parties denounced the delay and called for the creation of a government of national unity. No elections had taken place by year's end.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

Political parties operate freely. They are mainly defined by their positions regarding the division of power between the federal and local governments, and are generally formed in support of particular leaders. The

main political groups are the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC) and the Camp of the Autonomous Islands, an alliance of several parties. In February 2014, former president Sambi officially announced his intention to run for president in 2016 as a candidate for his new political party, Juwa.

The government regularly disrupts opposition parties' activities by denying them meeting and assembly space.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

There are reports of corruption at all levels, including in the judiciary, civil service, and security forces. In 2011, the opposition CRC, led by former president Azali Assoumani, filed a complaint in a Moroni court against Sambi for alleged misuse of public funds while in office. The allegations concern the sale of Comoran nationality to stateless individuals residing in Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, a practice used by Gulf regimes to avoid giving their stateless residents citizenship. Approximately \$200 million in revenue from this scheme was not accounted for during financial reconciliations by Comoran authorities. The case was ongoing at the end of 2014. Comoros was ranked 142 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 30 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

The constitution and laws provide for freedoms of speech and the press, though self-censorship is reportedly widespread. In 2013, two journalists from the newspaper *L'Observateur des Comores* were arrested for contempt of court after publishing a speech by a public prosecutor denouncing evidence of judicial corruption. Also in 2013, radio personality Abdallah Agwa of La Baraka FM was arrested for inciting hatred after approaching the corruption issue on air. No similar arrests were reported in 2014. The internet is available and unrestricted by the government.

Islam is the state religion, and 98 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Tensions have occasionally arisen between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and non-Sunni Muslims are reportedly subject to discrimination, detentions, and harassment. Nineteen Shiites were arrested for practicing and propagating Shia doctrine in 2013. Conversion from Islam and non-Muslim proselytizing are illegal.

Academic freedom is generally respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected in the constitution, but the government restricts these rights in practice. Student protests were violently dispersed by police in early 2014, and a ban was issued in April on political demonstrations at the Grand Comore Island Assembly.

A few human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the country. In 2013, the human rights NGO Lawyers Without Borders established a branch in Moroni. Workers have the right to bargain collectively and to strike, but collective bargaining is rare. In September 2014, the

Confederation of Comoran Workers organized a two-day civil service work stoppage and rally to protest against deteriorating economic conditions and to demand payment of overdue wages.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

The judicial system is based on both Sharia (Islamic law) and the French legal code, and is subject to influence by the executive branch and other elites. Minor disputes are often settled informally by village elders. Harsh prison conditions include severe overcrowding and inadequate sanitation, medical care, and nutrition.

In 2013, the government arrested 15 alleged coup plotters, including Mahamoud Ahmed Abdallah, the son of former president Ahmed Abdallah. Seven of those arrested were foreigners. The plotters were awaiting trial at year's end.

Same-sex sexual activity is punishable by imprisonment and fines.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

In June 2014, Comoros passed a law guaranteeing the freedom of movement for people living with HIV.

The law prohibits discrimination based on gender, and the government has taken steps to improve the political participation of women. However, in practice, women are still underrepresented at the political level; only one parliamentarian is female. Economic inequality also remains a key challenge, as women have far fewer opportunities for education and salaried employment than men, especially in rural areas. In accordance with modern law and some customary laws, women have equal rights in inheritance matters. However, this is complicated by the concurrent application of Islamic law limiting gender equality. In addition, a poor system of land registration and women's difficulties in securing loans often negate the benefits of land ownership in practice. Sexual violence is believed to be widespread, but is rarely reported to authorities.

The unemployment rate hovers around 15 percent, and unemployment among young adults is around 45 percent. With 70 percent of its population undernourished, Comoros ranks second among the world's hungriest nations on the Global Hunger Index.

In 2012, the National Assembly passed a new labor code criminalizing the trafficking of children, who are often victims of forced labor within the country.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology