

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Mauritania

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-3</td> <td>4</td> <td>+7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>0</td> <td>4</td> <td>+4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> <td>-3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>0</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>Yes</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	-3	4	+7	Democ:	0	4	+4	Autoc:	3	0	-3	Durable:		0		Tentative:		Yes		
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SCODE	MAA	CCODE	435	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	5	2	0																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	3 August 2005		Begin Date	19 April 2007																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1991																								
Executive(s)	President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdellahi; directly elected, 11 and 25 March 2007, 24.8% and 52.9%; <i>Note: Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz led a coup that deposed the democratically elected president on 6 August 2008.</i>																								
Legislature	Bicameral: National Assembly (95 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 19 November and 3 December 2006) Al-Mithaq (coalition of independents and parties associated with the former regime including Alternative or El-Badil, PRDR, UDP, RDU): 51 Coalition for Forces for Democratic Change (CFCD Coalition): 41 Other parties: 3 Senate (56 seats; 53 elected by municipal councils, 3 elected by Mauritians abroad; most recent elections, 21 January and 4 February 2007) Al-Mithaq: 37 CFCD: 15 Representatives of the Diaspora: 3 Undecided: 1																								
Judiciary	Islamic Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

Despite the establishment of multiparty politics in Mauritania in 1991, executive recruitment remained highly authoritarian in nature. In the 1992 election, the first since independence, Colonel Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya, leader of the ruling military junta, maintained his hold on power. President Taya, who had originally gained power through military force in 1984, was re-elected in 1997 with over 90% of the popular vote. Both elections were deemed to be neither free nor fair by independent observers. The five-party Opposition Front coalition boycotted the 1997 election after President Taya failed to correct the electoral irregularities that produced a landslide victory for his party in the 1996 legislative elections.

Following the elections of 1996, politics in Mauritania became plagued by increasing levels of political repression and instability. In an effort to silence the mounting criticism of his rule, in early 2005 President Taya launched a new wave of arrests against his civilian political opponents. More than 30 opponents were detained in early 2005 accused of being Islamic radicals and terrorists. In addition to cracking down on his civilian opponents, Taya also had to confront a growing threat from within the military itself. Through his control of the court system, President Taya was able to prosecute a number of military officials on charges of conspiring to overthrow his regime in recent years. President Taya, however, ultimately was unable to secure his hold on political power through force. In August 2005, while the President was out of the country, the armed forces (led by head of the Presidential Guard, Colonel Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and head of National Security, Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall) seized control of the government in a bloodless coup. In the wake of the coup, the Military Council for Justice and Democracy was established to govern the country for a maximum of two years. The Military Council was mandated with the task of overseeing the country's transition to democracy. Colonel Ely Ould Mohammed Vall, once one of Taya's closet aids, was named leader of the Military Council.

Showing his commitment to the democratic process, in November 2005 Vall promised to hold presidential elections in March 2007. Vall also assured the political parties in Mauritania that none of the members of the Military Council would stand for election after the transition period. In 28 June 2006 a referendum on the new democratic constitution was passed with 97% of the vote.

In a run-off election on 25 March 2007, Sidiould Cheikh Abdalahi won almost 53% of the vote against long-time opposition leader Ahmed Ould Daddah. Abdalahi was described as the "consensus candidate," with support from both members of the opposition and supporters of former President Taya. Supported by Colonel Vall, many political observers saw Abdalahi as having the active support of the armed forces. This election was viewed as the first fair presidential election in 46 years of independence. Abdalahi assumed the office of president on 19 April 2007.

Note: Elected President Abdalahi attempted to dismiss senior military staff on 6 August 2008 and was consequently overthrown by the presidential guard. A military junta, the Higher State Council (HSC) was established to rule the country and was led by Gen. Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz.

Executive Constraints: Substantial Limitations (5)

Under President Taya, Mauritania was a highly authoritarian polity dominated by his Parti Republicain Democratique et Social (PRDS). Power, however, was not institutionalized in the party but was concentrated around the President himself and his small clique of military advisors. Although legislative elections were held under Taya's watch, widespread government fraud and opposition boycotts provided President Taya with a virtual monopoly on political power in the country. Moreover, the judicial branch was subject to excessive executive influence.

Following the removal of Taya from office in the bloodless coup of 3 August 2005, the country was ruled by the Military Council for Justice and Democracy. Under the leadership of Colonel Vall, in 2006 a democratic constitution was adopted, an independent electoral commission was founded and a more independent judiciary was established. Moreover, in November 2006 opposition parties made a strong showing in municipal and legislative elections. A coalition led by The Rally of Democratic Forces (RDF), which opposed the former military regime, gained 41 of 95 National Assembly seats. Independent

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.

candidates, including Islamists, tribal leaders and members of the former ruling party won the remainder of the seats.

Political Participation: Gradual Transition from Uninstitutionalized Competition (5)

Despite the legalization of opposition parties in 1991, under President Taya's watch political challenges to the ruling PRDS remained highly circumscribed. While opposition organization was tolerated (with over 20 parties actively competing in the political arena), harassment of opposition leaders and supporters, as well as the independent media, was commonplace. With the removal of Taya's regime in 2005, Mauritania experienced a gradual increase in political openness. There were 21 political parties at the time of the 2005 coup; since this time, additional political parties have emerged.

Despite these promising trends, political competition in Mauritania remains subject to significant cultural constraints. Contributing to the poor human rights record in Mauritania are the long-standing ethnic tensions between the Arab-speaking light-skinned Moors of Arab and Berber extraction (consisting of 30% of the total population) who dominate the upper echelons of government, the black Moors (40%) and the black Mauritians (30%) who are closer in culture and linguistic heritage to the peoples of neighboring Senegal and Mali. In general, ethnic, religious and caste membership continues to work against the consolidation of programmatic political parties in Mauritania. Politics continues to be monopolized by religious-warrior upper-caste clans and families and individuals are expected to vote for leaders that represent their ethnic group, clan, family and religion. Ideology and political programs have minimal relevance. Despite significant racial cleavages, politics does not seem to revolve strictly around racial issues and most citizens do not vote solely along racial lines. Black Moors, for example, have a particular affinity with white Moors, often intermarrying and grouping together in the same Arab-style tribes and clans. White and black Moors appear to vote along tribal lines and in accordance with the pronouncements of religious leaders. While an unprecedented number of black Moors and Africans were elected to office in the November 2006 municipal and legislative elections, most political power continues to be held by light-skinned Moors.

In 1989 about 70,000 black Mauritians, mainly from the Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof ethnic groups, were expelled from the country after a pogrom against light-skinned Mauritians in Senegal. While the level of ethno-religious violence has subsided since the early 1990s, nevertheless, religious and racial discrimination remains ingrained in the culture of this society. While slavery has been officially banned in Mauritania since 1980, it is commonly believed that some 100,000 black Mauritians are living in conditions of servitude throughout the country.