The democratizing effect of non-violent resistance

How nonviolent resistance featured democratic consolidation in Benin

Markus Bayer
Abstract

Nonviolent resistance against autocratic regimes tends to have a democratic dividend. Resulting democracies have proven more inclusive and stable than their competitors coming about by violent means or by top-down liberalization. However, to date, we know little about the mechanisms that seem to link both phenomena, nonviolent resistance and democratic consolidation. Using explorative process tracing, the paper analyzes the case of the lesser known, so-called ‘Renouveau Démocratique’, the peaceful transition in Benin in 1989. The results show that the nonviolent resistance in Benin led to the establishment of an inclusive national conference, which became the founding narrative for the new democracy and stabilizes the democratic institutions.

The founding narrative also led to an active civil society that till today takes its role as watchdog seriously whenever the political elites tend to deviate from the democratic path. However, the example of Benin also shows that democratization without economic development has some severe limitations. The democratic quality suffers from the persistent culture of patronage and corruption, endangering the democratic spirit and preventing the institutionalization of civic democratic institutions.
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**List of Acronyms**

**ABT**
Alliance pour un Bénin Triumphant / Alliance for a Triumphant Benin

**ALCRER**
Association de Lutte contre le Racisme et le Regionalisme / Association for the Fight against Racism and Regionalism

**ANC**
African National Congress

**BTI**
Bertelsmann Transformation Index

**CPO**
Causal-Process Observations

**CS**
Civil Society

**FES**
Friedrich-Ebert Foundation

**FONAC**
Front des Organisations Nationales Contre la Corruption / Front of the National Organizations against Corruption

**NC**
Conference Nationale des forces vives / National Conference of the driving / active forces

**NGO**
Non-Governmental Organization

**NVR**
Nonviolent Resistance

**PCB**
Parti Communiste du Bénin / Communist Party of Benin

**PRPB**
Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin / People's Revolution Party of Benin

**PT**
Process Tracing

**SNES**
Syndicat National des Enseignants du Supérieur / National Union of Higher Education Employees

**UN**
Union Fait la Nation/ Unity makes the Nation

**UPO**
Union Progressiste Dahoméenne / Progressive union of Dahome

**UGEED**
Union Générale des Etudiants et Élèves du Dahomey / General Union of Students and Pupils of Dohomey

**UNSTB**
Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Benin / National Union of the Beninese Workers

**UPMB**
Union des Professionnels des Médias du Bénin / Union of Media Practitioners of Benin

**WANEOP**
West African Network for Peacebuilding

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**1 Introduction**

Nearly three decades ago, the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991) swept across the African continent. On February 11th, 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison on Robben Island, heralding the end of Apartheid and the mostly nonviolent struggle of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. One week later, on February 18th, the Sovereign National Conference (NC) of Benin began its work to mold the transition to democracy after major nonviolent protests had put an end to the rule of Mathieu Kérékou, which had lasted for 29 years.1 In the following year, large parts of Francophone Africa, inspired by Benin's successful transition, introduced NCs in order to pursue successful transitions to democracy.2

However, not every democratization leads to consolidation. Today, a quarter of a century after the second liberation (Osaghae 2005), the record of democratic consolidation can at best be described as mixed. The bulk of African states never really transcended the transition period. These "defective democracies” (Merkel 2004) are caught somewhere between democracy and autocracy. Today, only a handful of African states are classified as advanced or at least limited democracies. Along with Ghana, Mauritius, South Africa, and Namibia (BTI 2017), Benin is considered as one of Africa's most advanced and consolidated democracies.

Hitherto, differing trajectories of democratizing countries are commonly explained by the modes of transition, or by economic development and public education. Recent studies from the field of nonviolent resistance (NVR) also point at the long-lasting effect of successful nonviolent campaigns that enhance the likelihood of success (Chenoweth and Stephen 2011), the degrees of freedom in years following the transition (Ackerman and Karatnycky 2005) and the survival of democracy (Bayer et al. 2016).

However, although NVR is often assumed to spawn a more democratic culture, the mechanisms linking NVR and democratic consolidation hitherto remained in the dark. By looking at Benin, one of the most consolidated democracies in Africa with a genesis in a broad-based nonviolent struggle for democratization, this study tries to uncover possible mechanisms linking NVR and the consolidation of democracy.

Benin, one of the poorest countries in Africa, had been an unexpected candidate for such a development due to its chronic political instabilities, which made it known as “sick child of Africa” (APRM 2008). This analysis shows that NVR had a strong impact on democratic survival and consequently its consolidation. As will be demonstrated, NVR influenced the following democracy in three key aspects: First, it induced a highly inclusive process to draft a new constitution and, second, it spawned an active civil society committed to the constitution and the democratic principles anchored within. Last but not least, it levelled the playing field for an integrative multi-party system. Nevertheless, NVR is not sufficient for consolidation. The lack of economic development and effective parties, and prevailing networks of clientelism still prevent Benin from becoming a consolidated democracy.

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1 The paper resulted from a project on “Nonviolent Resistance and Democratic Consolidation” at the University of Duisburg-Essen. I am grateful for the helpful comments of Andrea Pabst, Daniel Lambach, and the two anonymous reviewers of swisspeace. Furthermore, I am indebted to Lena Pohl, Leah Ngaba and Ibrahi Alhadjiui for supporting my research.

2 Many other countries like Congo/Brazzaville (1990), Gabon (1990), Mali (1990), Togo (1991), the former Zaire (1991), Niger (1992), and Chad (1993) followed the example of Benin, often, however, with limited success.
Critical junctures can be understood as “formative or founding moments” (Munck and Leff 1997: 343) and as periods of “significant change, which typically occur[s] in distinct ways in different countries (Collier and Collier 1991: 29). Transitional events, like the end of the Marxist regime of Mathieu Kérékou in Benin in 1989, are such critical junctures. Theoretically, critical junctures are hypothesized to produce distinct legacies. The link between both, critical juncture and the distinct legacy, is thereby explained with path dependency.

Most generally, path dependence simply means that contemporary decisions and events depend on earlier decisions and events (i.e. historical dependency). More specific, path dependency means that, although several causal path were available (causal possibility), some causal paths become less possible or impossible (closure) and that some processes keep actors on the once chosen track (constraints) (Bennett and Elman 2006).

Economists like Page (2006) often assume that path dependency is driven by increasing returns (a steps in a particular direction is assumed to induce further movement in the same direction), self-reinforcement (a certain policy which leads to institutions that encourage to sustain these decisions), positive feedback (positive externalities occur, when that same decision is made by other actors) which finally lead to a lock-in situation in which a decision appears better in relation to other alternatives because a sufficient number of people have already made that choice. According to Pierson (2004), these mechanisms travel to politics as well. Nevertheless, Thelen (1999) states that political, contrary to economic institutions, depend more on power, legitimacy and functionality and less on efficiency. Thus new institutions can be undermined by a loss of power and legitimacy of the actors that maintain them. For political transitions in which the basic political order is renegotiated and new political institutions are installed, this objection seems highly relevant. Nevertheless, with that in mind, positive feedback and self-reinforcement seem to be applicable concepts. Correspondingly, a “lock-in” can, in terms of transitology, be described as democratic consolidation.

2 Democratic Transitions as Critical Junctures

Critical junctures can be understood as "formative or founding moments" (Munck and Leff 1997: 343) and as periods of "significant change, which typically occur[s] in distinct ways in different countries (Collier and Collier 1991: 29). Transitional events, like the end of the Marxist regime of Mathieu Kérékou in Benin in 1989, are such critical junctures. Theoretically, critical junctures are hypothesized to produce distinct legacies. The link between both, critical juncture and the distinct legacy, is thereby explained with path dependency.

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Modes of Transition

There are many roads to democracy. Addressing this, Huntington (1991) differentiates between three modes of transitions:

1) ‘transitions’ which are mainly driven by the elites of a regime themselves,
2) ‘replacements’ which are driven “from below”, represent a rupture in the authoritarian regime and result in a replacement of the prevailing elites, and
3) ‘transplacements’ which represent a mixed form in which a democratic reform is negotiated between the regime and the opposition.
Democratic Transitions as Critical Junctures

3 This paper follows the regime definition of Skanning (2006: 13), who argues that a political regime can be understood as an “institutionalized set of fundamental formal and informal rules structuring the interaction in the political power center (horizontal relation) and its relation with the broader society (vertical relation)”.  

4 Johnstad replicated the study using regime data from Polity IV and the Economist Intelligence Unit and verified its results (Johnstad 2010: 475).

Like Huntington (1981), Munck and Leff (1997) argue that the mode of transition coins the post-transitional regime. Depending on the drivers controlling the process, the mode of transition influences the pattern of elite competition, the institutional rules crafted during the period of transition and, finally, the question if key players accept or reject the new “rules of the game” (Munck and Leff 1997: 343). Thereby, in a path-dependent manner, the mode of transition is assumed to predetermine whether and how democracies consolidate.

So far, studies from the field of democratization have only indirectly acknowledged peaceful transitions as conducive for the consolidation of stable democracies. In this vein, so-called elite pacts (Hamann 1997), pacted transitions (Linz and Stephens 1996) or cooperative pacts (Guo and Stradiotto 2010) between elites have been considered to reduce the uncertainty that commonly characterizes transitions and thereby contribute to smooth transitions and stable democracies. However, most studies neglected the role of the masses and the effect of nonviolent contention.

3 Nonviolent Resistance and Democratic Consolidation

As both NVR and democracy are multi-faceted terms, it is important to introduce the definition used in this study. With regards to NVR, this study follows the definition of Chenoweth and Lewis (2013: 417) who define a resistance campaign as mass-level phenomenon in which multiple actors pursue a common political goal and mobilize at least 1000 supporters in two different events during one year. Furthermore, they distinguish between ‘primarily’ violent and ‘primarily’ nonviolent resistance campaigns by referring to the means of resistance applied during the campaign. A campaign is primarily nonviolent if participants are mostly unarmed civilians who have not directly threatened or injured the physical welfare of their political opponents. All other resistance campaigns that do not meet these criteria are defined as violent (Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013: 418).

Defining democratic consolidation is an even harder task since it depends on the underlying concept of democracy. Authors following a minimalistic definition of democracy therefore tend to use “simpler” concepts where consolidation more or less equates to democratic survival only. Accordingly, Gasiorek and Power (1998: 747) define a democratic regime as consolidated when it survived a second election including, ideally, a peaceful political turnover. This is assumed to have happened after roughly twelve years. Similarly, Huntington (1991) coined the “two-turnover test” as the most famous rule of thumb for democratic consolidation. It states that a democracy is satisfactorily consolidated if it has witnessed two successful and peaceful transitions of power. However, these definitions do not provide any information about the quality of a democracy.

Since this explorative study aims to elucidate mechanisms linking NVR to democratic consolidation, it seems appropriate to use a more fine-grained concept of democracy to guide the analysis. For this purpose, Merkel’s (2004) concept of “embedded democracy” which claims that a substantial definition of democracy has to go beyond “simple democratic electoralism” (ibid.: 16) will be used. Merkel characterizes democracies by an open access to power, a pluralistic power structure, an exercise of power limited by the rule of law, and a limited claim to power rooted in the sovereignty of the people (Merkel 2000: 23). Beyond this, according to Merkel, democratic consolidation has four dimensions and takes place in an interactive and hierarchical multi-level system:

First, ‘constitutional consolidation’ describes the consolidation of the central democratic institutions anchored in the constitution like government, parliament and elections. Constitutional consolidation takes place on the macro level and is a necessary condition for the second level. Second, ‘representative consolidation’ is given when a territorially and functionally differentiated system of representation is established via existing parties, unions and organizations. Third, ‘behavioral consolidation’ means the acceptance of the democratic rules by potential powerful veto players like the military, traditional elites and the political and economic elites. The fourth level is the establishment of a culture of citizenship which, if fully developed, can immunize the other three levels.
In Merkel’s model, these four dimensions are linked logically, but also hierarchically and temporally. In this sense, constitutional consolidation comes first and influences the consolidation of the following dimensions (Merkel 2010: 112). Merkel’s concept of consolidation therefore can be described as an elite-centred and legalistic approach. Since the literature on NVR and social movements has shown that the population plays an important role, there is room to argue that a culture of citizenship a) is highly dependent on preexisting pro-democratic attitudes and prevalence’s within the broader population (instead of being a product of a top-down process of political education and socialization) and b) might have strong influence on other dimensions – especially the behavioral consolidation. Contrary to Merkel’s term “levels” of consolidation, this paper will instead use the term “dimensions” of consolidation, since it does not imply such a strict hierarchy.

Linking NVR and Democracy: Some causal assumptions

The basic mechanism behind NVR is to disperse the power concentrated in the hands of few by refusing obedience, while violent insurrection works by concentrating power (Ackerman 2008: 119). Further, NVR can be used by nearly everyone but also requires the participation of the masses. Due to higher requirements concerning physical fitness, training and equipment (Zunes 1994), armed uprisings are typically smaller in numbers and more homogeneous than NVR-movements.

Additionally, both are assumed to spawn different organizational structures and democratic attitudes: the one being based on a clear structure of order and command, the other based on diversity, flatter hierarchy and the necessity to uphold a consensus of action without the power to sanction deviation (Cunningham 2006). While the smaller armed movements, having paid the blood toll of the liberation and being trained and equipped for war, tend to develop an “ethos of a secret elite vanguard [...] which tends to create less democracy and less tolerance for pluralism” (Müftüler-Baç and Keyman 2012: 419), nonviolent movements are expected to leave nothing but a society having overcome their fears and isolation, having regained self-esteem (Sharp 1973: 778), and being trained to resist deviation from the democratic track in future (Sharp 2008: 53). Thus, we can expect NVR to impact all four dimensions of democratic consolidation:

Constitutional Consolidation: Having been active in the struggle for democracy, we can expect movement activists to occupy influential positions in the state administration of the emerging democratic system. In these positions they can monitor the compliance to democratic standards and procedures (Grodsky 2012: 12) and advance their ideals of participation. Others might stay outside the institutions but create civil society organizations like NGOs and private media, taking over the watchdog function and observing the consolidation process (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 138).

Representational Consolidation: Since NVR per definition consists of a broad coalition of diverse forces, it can nurture a culture of compromise and negotiation which spills over to the post-transition phase (Ackerman and Rodal 2008: 118; Della Porta and Diani 2006: 21; Sharp 2005: 428). Activists and participants are used to respect internal dialogue and autonomy (Jochheim 1984: 275) and can foster the establishment of multiple parties and organizations. Just as well, NVR is based on cooperation and solidarity, which can help to create “alternative social and political institutions” (Sharp 2005: 426) like unions, solidarity funds, independent media, human rights and legal networks etc.

Behavioral Consolidation: For the dimension of behavioral consolidation, one can assume that NVR spares the post-transition society many of the dysfunctionalities induced by violent transitions. First, it does not contribute to a polarization of the political spectrum - including violent transgressions - like armed resistance often does. Consequently, it can facilitate reconciliation and rapprochement between former adversaries during the post-transitional phase (Dudouet 2011). Second, none of the participating civic groups gains a potential veto power derived from the advantage of having experiences in armed uprisings and weapons at hands (Cunningham 2011). Lastly, the higher number of participants and the higher diversity of NVR movements makes it unlikely that single persons or groups develop an ethos of elite vanguard (Embaló 2012: 256) and derive claims to rule the country or at least to occupy an elevated position in the new regime.

Culture of Citizenship: Here, the underlying assumption is that an active civil society is an important part of a stable or consolidated democracy. NVR is assumed to have a positive effect on the evolving civil society and a certain culture of citizenship that is required in democracies. First, high numbers of participants are said to make NVR per se more democratic than armed movements (Engler and Engler 2016: 26). Second, according to Sharp (2005: 424), nonviolent struggles have lasting effects on the activists themselves as well as on the broader system. NVR builds on individual and collective action, i.e. it only works when people become active and end submissive behavior (Sharp 1973: 778). Furthermore, the fact that people have previously fought for democracy leads to a stronger commitment to these values (Sharp 2008: 53).
Suitable to make inferences on structural or macro-level explanations (George and Bennett, 2005: 142, 214), Process Tracing (PT) is frequently applied by “historically oriented social scientists [...] to explain the occurrence of particular events” (Mahoney 2012: 571). PT can be used in different variants either to explain an outcome or to measure the effect of a certain independent variable on a specific outcome. These variants can be described as “X” and “Y” centred approaches with “X” describing the independent variable and “Y” the outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2013).

In this way, PT follows the logic of causality and tries to discover mechanisms linking the independent variable and a certain outcome (and vice versa). According to Glennan (1996: 52), a mechanism can be understood as “a complex system” producing an outcome “by the interaction of a number of parts”. Since a correlation between nonviolent resistance inducing the transition and democratic consolidation in terms of survival (see Bayer et al. 2016) and quality (see Ackermann and Karatnycky 2005; Chenoweth and Stephen 2011) has been established, PT is used in this study in an inductive, theory developing variant (Beach and Pedersen 2013: 16). As opposed to this, theory building on the effects of nonviolent resistance on democratic consolidation is still in its infant shoes. Thus, the above-mentioned hypothesis derived from the literature will serve as guiding line to discover the mechanisms. According to Beach and Pedersen (2013: 16), theory-building PT is suitable to build mid-range theory by describing a causal mechanism that is generalizable. Nevertheless, it does not claim that the detected mechanism is sufficient to explain the outcome.

Figure 1: PT-schema according to Beach and Pederson (2013: 34)

The consolidation of democracy is a complex and long-lasting process. Further, since the outcome “democratic consolidation” has a dual meaning (survival and quality) two separate analysis will be conducted. First, I will recount the effect of NVR on democratic survival, before examining its effect on Merkel’s four dimensions of democratic consolidation in a second step.

Figure two shows the PT schema for the analysis of the democratic quality.

Since definite causality is impossible to observe, PT often refers to the work of detectives like Sherlock Holmes to illustrate how the process of finding evidence and assessing its value looks like. The researcher should investigate the given case like a prosecutor in court, linking outcome and independent variable to each other by offering a mechanism or a chain of events supported by different “evidences”. Such pieces of evidence which indicate the causality of a mechanism are called causal-process observations (CPOs). (Collier et al. 2010) evidence, These CPOs can take every form of data, ranging from empirical observations to statements and interviews, historical documents and so forth. In this analysis, CPOs were gathered from expert interviews and historical documents collected during two field trips to Benin between August and November 2016 as well as from secondary literature. Overall, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews have been conducted to assess the current status of democracy and to complement usual democracy indicators like the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI). Apart from this, they were designed to gain deeper insights in the NVR movement and its legacy. First, party and union representatives, civil society members, national and international scholars on democratization and democratic consolidation and civil society members were used as main informants for the current status of democracy. The interviews with these informants were intended to decipher the current institutional and symbolic meaning of nonviolent transition. Second, historical figures like former members of the resistance movement or the NC served as informants on the movement itself and the following early period of institutionalization and consolidation of democracy. To investigate mechanisms linking nonviolent resistance and democratic consolidation, Benin’s “civilian coup d’état” in 1989 and the following democratization serve as an ideal case. After a major nonviolent resistance campaign (Ackerman and Karatnycky 2005) had triggered the abolition of Marxism
and one party rule and subsequently the introduction of a National Assembly, Benin eventually became democratic in 1991 after adopting a new constitution and holding the first free and fair multi-party elections. It became Africa’s first democracy of “the third wave” (Huntington 1991) and is still one of its most advanced democracies. The latest presidential elections in 2016 were the sixth of its kind and resulted in the fourth peaceful political turnover. Benin had already passed Huntington’s “two turnover-test” in 2006 when the first President after the “democratic renewal”, Nicéphore Soglo, was voted out and former President Mathieu Kérékou was reelected.

Since 1991, all elections have been rated as mostly free and fair (Houng and De Callo 2013: 14). This is remarkable since Benin’s development level was “well below the levels commonly associated with democratic success” (Gisselquist 2008: 789–794) so that its democratization was perceived as “against all odds”. With its bankrupt government, its looted banking system and with its civil service on strike, Benin had by any “historical or economic standard [...] a poor prospect for democracy” (Magnusson 2001: 218).

Furthermore, what constitutes Benin an interesting case is that its transition happened before the famous conference of La Baule in 1989 when France declared democratization to be a condition for further loans. External pressure to democratize was therefore less important than in following transitions (Banégas 1997; Bierschenk 2009; Gisselquist 2008).4 Having said this, Benin can be considered a deviant case in a double sense (Dorenspleet and Mudde 2008) as it can neither be explained by classical theories of modernization nor by democratic spillover.

Additionally, the slightly above average duration of resistance against the Marxist regime of Kérékou promises to provide insights into the mechanisms, since the duration of a NVR campaign might affect the campaign’s outcome (Wittles 2017) and the quality of the following democracy (Kadivar et al. 2017). In sum, due to the strong nonviolent movement and Benin’s unfavorable conditions for democratization, we can assume a strong effect of the nonviolent resistance, which makes Benin the ideal case to uncover the underlying mechanisms.

5 Nonviolent Resistance and the Democratic Renewal in Benin

The former French colony Benin gained independence in 1960. After a short interregnum as a democratic republic, the small country located between Togo in the west and Nigeria in the east gained a “sad reputation of being famous for successive military coups” (Koko 2008: 4) and was regarded as “the sick child of Africa” (APRM 2008). From its independence in 1960 to 1972, the country experienced eleven Presidents, six different constitutions, twelve attempted and five successful coups d’états (Bierschenk 2009: 13). The last one in 1972 brought Kérékou to power and with him some stability. Kérékou declared himself President and introduced Marxism as official state ideology. From 1974 onwards, Benin became a single party state with Kérékou acting as President of the Politbureau of the newly founded single party, the “Parti de la révolution populaire du Bénin” (PRPB). Kérékou’s moderate socialism helped to align the left with the regime and “provided a way of explaining past failure while promising a viable and effective development path” (Allen 1992: 44). Far from being a dogmatic socialist, Kérékou soon earned the nickname “chameleon” (Claffey 2007) due to his protean approach to politics. Nevertheless, the regime came under attack from the more radical left represented by the Communist Party of Benin.

Rising repression against the communists and widespread dissatisfaction with the economic deterioration led to a growing opposition first led by students and teachers. From 1985 onwards ever growing parts of the population disentangled from the regime: Since wages were payed irregularly, the unions and the urban population joined the ranks of the opposition and even- tually forced Kérékou to open the regime and allow a free press and independent unions in 1988/89. However, these appeasement measures proved unsuccessful. Throughout the entire year of 1989, Benin was characterized by massive nonviolent protests and strikes, making it increasingly ungovernable (Bierschenk 2008: 3) and eventually leading to what is known as “renouveau démocratique” – the democratic renewal.

On 7th December, 1989, Kérékou officially announced the end of Marxism-Leninism in Benin. Furthermore, Kérékou called for the appointment of an “assemblée nationale des forces vives de la nation” – a national assembly of the active forces of the nation. What was originally meant as a symbolic act to introduce some minor reforms, turned out to be a serious national assembly that worked out a new constitution, put into place a provisional government and set the pace for democratic elections. Since large segments of the society participated in the protests and strikes, it became known as “Peoples Revolution” (Koko 2008: 43) or – referring to Benin’s history of coups – as “civilian coup d’état” (Seely 2009: 14)
6 From Resistance to Democratic Survival: Tracing Causality

According to Collier (2011: 825), many studies using PT in international relations focus on a single event or process which cannot be further disaggregated. Thus, they may refer to plausible alternatives which cannot be observed in the case and consequently represent hypothetical or counterfactual explanations.

To verify the initial assumption that NVR had a causal effect on the democratic transition and the survival of democracy in Benin, I will trace the process of democratization and democratic survival along some critical junctures. For this I will focus on events in which NVR had an effect on the survival of democracy. In order to be in line with the logic of PT, counterfactual scenarios (Collier 2011) of regime failure and autocratic backlash will also be taken into consideration for each event.

As illustrated by the following causal chain and as I will explain below, NVR led to the national conference triggering the transition towards democracy. Furthermore, NVR had an effect on the first and the second peaceful turnover and two attempts to stretch the two-term limit anchored in the constitution. In this context, the role of the Constitutional Court and civil society proved to be vital, an insight which can be traced back to the lasting effect of NVR and the NC.

Figure 3: Survival of Democracy in Benin

6.1 From Resistance to the National Conference

There is relatively little doubt that the "miracle beninois" – the Beninese miracle, as the peaceful democratic transition in Benin is frequently called (Fatton 1995: 83 f.) – was mainly caused by popular protest and NVR. In its final stage, NVR paralyzed ordinary life (Koko 2008: 44 f.) and led to the downfall of the regime (Heilbrunn 1993; Robinson 1994; Gbado 1991; Adamon 1995).

Form early on, the Beninese students had been at the forefront and built the "strongest pro-democracy opposition party during the dictatorship" (Gisselquist 2008: 796). First resistance of the Union Générale des Étudiants et Élèves du Dahomey (UGEED) was directed against education reforms. However, when all independent unions were merged into a single trade union (Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Bénin/UNSTB) and the UGEED was consequentially banished, the scope of the protest widened. Student groups soon began to criticize poor working and living conditions and the authoritarian character of the regime. Thereby they joined forces with university and school teachers and the labour movement.

Using the slogan “Rise up to get rid of Kérékou and his clique” (Hounkonko and Decalo 2013: 12) the students mobilized workers and federal employees to establish autonomous trade unions, starting with the Syndicat National de l’Enseignement Supérieur (SNES) in the late 1980s. Although always connected to economic grievances these protests cannot be dissociated from the democratic demands that were always part of the protests (Nwajiaku 1994: 436). This demand for independent trade unions and media, freedom of speech and association, which were formulated during the protests “constituted an important catalyst of the crisis and, ultimately, the fall of the regime” (Bierschenk 2009: 6). Finally, the opposition comprised students, workers, public employees.

While the liberalization of the media in 1988 was Kérékou’s appeasing reaction to a rising internal opposition, the private press did not reduce the pressure on the regime, but contributed to the mobilization against it by speaking out against the rampant corruption (Robinson 1994a: 594). As a next step, the regime announced the end of the Marxist-Leninist regime on 7 December 1989. Once again, this did not bring the intended relief. Instead, only four days later, on 11 December, Cotonou, the economic hotspot of Benin, saw one of the biggest demonstrations with 40,000 participants demanding the resignation of Kérékou (Seely 2009: 40). Underestimating the “strength and efficacy of the urban opposition” (Amuwo 2003: 150), Kérékou called for a “Conférence Nationale des forces vives” – a National Conference of the Active Forces (NC). However, Kérékou saw this NC simply as “forum for ideas” (Kérékou 1994: 43) for small reforms. The pre-conference period, however, already indicated that the “active forces” had other ideas. When on 15th February 1990 the preparatory committee published the list of participants with predominantly PPRB members and affiliates on it, opposition triggered the so-called “quota war” to change the composition of the NC. (Seeley 2009: 41). The fact that the members of opposition knew each other from the prior years in resistance against Kérékou enabled them to act in concert (Seeley 2009: 43) and to muster a great deal of power (Heilbrunn 1993: 278).
6.2 From the National Conference towards the Transition

The quota war, however, was only the first victory of the opposition. After the quota had been changed in their favor, the opposition was able to hijack Kérékou’s NC. While Kérékou saw the NC as a way to “tackle the objective of structural adjustment” (Kérékou 1994: 15 ff.), the opposition turned it into a constituent assembly.

For the whole process it was crucial, however, that the military did not intervene to back Kérékou. Thus, the unity and the strong peaceful mobilization of the opposition, combined with the general amnesty guaranteed for the members of the ancient regime, contributed to the army’s return to the barracks (Morency-Laflamme 2018; Houngnikopo and Decalo 2013: 13). Another explanation claims that only a minority of the military personnel had expressed loyalty to Kérékou during the consultations prior to the NC and that the large majority of soldiers took anti-PRPB stances favoring political reforms (Noudjenoume 1999: 166). The first position, however, seems more convincing since there exist records of military representatives who threatened that one could easily close the doors and shoot everybody down during the NC sessions (Seely 2013). Hence, it is more than doubtful whether the military would have accepted its return to the barracks without being challenged by the opposition. Against this background, the counterfactual stories of 1) a transition without a national conference and the quota war and 2) a transitional national conference without nonviolent resistance seem unlikely. Consequently, Allen describes Benin’s transition as “collapse brought about by popular mobilization and mediated through a national conference” (Allen 1992: 42).

Besides these initial events, data analysis reveals three further critical moments for the survival of Benin’s democracy.

6.3 First National and Presidential Elections

The first critical event, although it was technologically speaking still part of the transition, was the first national and presidential election in 1991. This election became a critical event since both presidential candidates were in possession of state resources (Kérékou as incumbent President and his challenger Soglo as prime minister at this time) (Adjahouinou 1994: 218 ff.). Additionally, prior to this event no African President had ever been defeated at the polls and resigned peacefully.

This novelty was made possible because the struggle for democracy had been peaceful on both sides and an amnesty was granted to members of the regime. Furthermore, the mediation by the widely respected archbishop of Cotonou, who had also presided the NC (La Nation 20.2.2018), as well as by France (Hartmann, interview 29.09.2016) contributed to the first political turnover with a remarkable end: Kérékou’s confession of guilt and begging for forgiveness for the flaws of his regime in front of the National Assembly which made it “culturally as well as theologically […] impossible to refuse forgiveness” (Claffey 2007: 98 ff.).

In this sense, NVR forced Kérékou out of office, but still provided the opportunity to compete for the presidency democratically. Five years later, Kérékou returned and became President for another ten years. Today, he is widely acknowledged as respectable statesman.

Counterfactually argued: On the one hand, it is unlikely that Kérékou would have accepted both the elections and his electoral defeat without the gentle but nonviolent push by the opposition that was additionally backed by international actors. On the other hand, more than a gentle push would have made an honourable resignation and reconciliation between Kérékou and the opposition impossible. This in turn would most probably have minimized Kérékou’s chances for a renewed presidency through electoral means and would have increased his reluctance to resign peacefully.

6.4 Resistance against the Third Presidential Term

The other two critical events affected by the legacy of NVR were the end of Kérékou’s second term and, respectively, the end of Yayi Boni’s second term (Oussou, interview 31.10.2016; Dossa, interview 23.11.2016). Both Presidents considered to change the constitution to allow them a third term, but have been stopped by popular uproar and broad, mass-based campaigns in defense of the constitution. A look at other African cases might serve as counterfactual scenario here: In many other African countries like Rwanda, Uganda or Namibia – interestingly, all countries with a legacy of armed struggle, the constitution was adapted or stretched to allow the respective presidents a third term (or more). Uganda’s President, Yoweri Museveni, is currently even serving his seventh term.

Contrary to that, Benin’s democratic constitution from 1990 remains untouched until today – despite its history of coup d’etats in early post-colonial years. This democratic resilience was caused by two factors that will be outlined in more detail in the next section: First, a high respect for the Constitutional Court as the “final arbiter of serious interinstitutional dispute” (Magnussen 2001: 225) and, second, the commitment of the civil society to the constitution and its values.

Generally, the democratic survival in Benin can be described as sound because “there has hardly been any serious threat capable of suggesting democratic recession” (Amuwo 2003: 156). Therefore, the next section takes a closer look at the quality of democracy along the above-mentioned levels of consolidation.
This section is going to evaluate the quality of democracy in Benin using Merkel’s four dimensions of consolidation introduced above. To enhance the quality of the assessment, triangulation is used. Thereby qualitative expert interviews are complemented by BTI data adapted to mirror Merkel’s concept of embedded democracy and its dimensions.11

Generally most experts agree that Benin survived several political turnovers and fulfills central characteristics (institutions like parliament or Constitutional Court) (Dossou, interview 23.11.2016). It could thus be formally characterized as a consolidated democracy (Kitty, interview 18.10.2006). Nevertheless, utmost admit, that it is better described “as young but growing up” (Asogba, interview 21.10.2016), “minimal” (Gisselquist 2008: 79a) or „democracy under development“ (Asogba, interview 21.10.2018). Commonly, the lack of economic development (Da Silva, interview 07.11.2016) and widespread poverty were seen as most pressing problems and as the biggest danger for democracy (Kitty, interview 18.10.2006). Similarly, Benin, according to Merkel’s model of embedded democracy based on the BTI data, reaches an overall democracy rating of 7.9 of ten possible points in 2018. On the original BTI scale, which also includes the economic transformation, Benin only reaches the level of a “limited” transformation.

7.1 Constitutional Consolidation

According to the BTI, the overall constitutional consolidation with 7.3 out of 10 points is considerable in Benin. Some of the indicators like the acceptance of the democratic institutions (10), the rating of the civil rights (8), separation of powers (8) or the performance of democratic institutions (8) are quite high and represent ratings of a consolidated democracy. However, these strong foundations are counteracted by a weakness in the independence of the judiciary (6) and a dangerously low rating for the prosecution of office abuse (4).

Most interview partners agree that the democratic institutions are performing well and that the national conference has given the Beninese democracy all essential democratic institutions (Elia, interview 08.11.2016; Kitty, interview 18.10.2006; Dossa interview 23.11.2016). Similarly, other authors highlight that an effective institutional arrangement including a “highly respected Constitutional Court and an autonomous Election Commission to strengthen the foundations of democratic governance” is in place (Fomunyoh 2001: 37). In the latest survey of the Afrobarometer in 2017, 93% of the Beninese are in favor of limiting presidential mandates to two terms. Solid 89% are in favor of regular elections to select their representatives and overall 78.2% of the total population support democracy. Similarly, the BTI rates the separation of powers, civil rights and performances of democratic institutions as comparable to democracies in consolidation.

The transition to a new democratic order in Benin in 1990 is counterfactually argued: Without the existence of a strong opposition, the NC would not have been in need of a neutral arbitrator and would not have had elected de Souza as President of the NC and, subsequently, of the preliminary Constitutional Court. De Souza as highly respected personality of integrity successfully limited the power of the then President Soglo, who was said to have displayed some authoritarian tendencies after the first year and also contributed to the image of a neutral Constitutional Court presided by independent figures (Houngnikpo and Decalo 2013: 109). Similarly, like de Souza, many other participants of the NC were also part of the interim government and the first government under Soglo (Da Silva, interview 07.11.2016). This, together with a close monitoring of government actions by the still mobilized civil forces, helped to create an accountable and inclusive government that respected the values of the National Conference during the first years after the transition (Asoba, interview 19.10.2016). Even today, a quarter of a century after the transition, the NC still serves as “important point of regime and the members of the NC saw themselves as representatives of the people as a whole, they felt accountable for them and put great effort in consulting the public during the drafting process of the constitution. As Ahanhano Glele, the then President of the Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting the constitution put it: “We wanted it to be a people’s constitution” (Glele, interview 10.11.2016). Due to the consensual, inclusive and participatory process of constitutional drafting, the constitution gained widespread respect. As a result, the constitution, especially the two terms and the age limit for the President, the Executive, the Prime Minister and the Senators, the two terms for the President and the Senators, the Court of Auditors and the National Assembly, which is elected every ten years were permanently put into practice. In 2005, the National Assembly was elected for ten years. Since the approval of the new constitution, the Constitutional Court and an autonomous Election Commission to strengthen the foundations of democratic governance” is in place (Fomunyoh 2001: 211). This performance can also be indirectly ascribed to the peaceful resistance which led to the NC. Beside the generally high acceptance of the democratic institutions, the reputation of the Constitutional Court was essentially influenced by one person, Archbishop Isidore de Souza, who presided over the National Conference as a representative of the Catholic Church and later became the first President of the preliminary Constitutional Court. De Souza was elected as a neutral arbitrator and prudently and successfully mediated the conflict between regime and opposition.

Linked to the acceptance of the constitution is a high awareness of civil rights. Since the NC and the resulting constitution had become the “founding myth” for the new nation (Stroh, interview 5.10.2016; Hartmann, interview 29.09.2016), most citizens know the basic civil rights guaranteed in the constitution (Moussou and Deguenonvo, interview 20.10.2016). Considering the high number of individual civil rights cases brought before the Constitutional Court, the citizens are also aware of how to exercise them and trust the institutions in helping them to do so (Mey, interview 18.10.2016).

As mentioned previously, the Constitutional Court played a crucial role for the survival and the quality of the democracy since it “established its independence from executive and legislative authority early on, holding the other branches of government accountable to the new constitution” (Magnusson 2001: 211). This performance can also be indirectly ascribed to the peaceful resistance which led to the NC. Beside the generally high acceptance of the democratic institutions, the reputation of the Constitutional Court was essentially influenced by one person, Archbishop Isidore de Souza, who presided over the National Conference as a representative of the Catholic Church and later became the first President of the preliminary Constitutional Court. De Souza was elected as a neutral arbitrator and prudently and successfully mediated the conflict between regime and opposition.

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As we have seen, the acceptance of the democratic institutions is the most remarkable feature in the dimension of constitutional consolidation of the Beninese democracy. This stems directly from the fact that the people nonviolently opted for the democratic renewal and thus were already committed to democracy. Beyond this, the members of the NC – and later the provisional government – were seen as legitimate representatives of the people and acted accordingly, drafting a “people’s constitution”, and were endeavored to be inclusive and transparent in their actions. In this way, it is true that some of them occupied important positions and advanced their ideals of participation, as Grodsky (2012: 12) assumed. As we will see later, it is also true that other activists stayed outside the institutions and created civil society organizations which took over a watchdog function and observed the consolidation process. However, this direct effect soon vanished after the end of the provisional government and after the return of Kérékou in 1996. Thus, the symbolic effect of being committed to what is perceived as a national consensus seems to have played a bigger role than the effect which the movement and its participants had on the institutions.

7.2 Representational Consolidation

The assessment of the BTI indicators indicates that the representational consolidation seems to be the Achilles heel of Benin’s consolidation. Reaching only 6 out of 10 possible points, the representational consolidation in Benin is far from being accomplished. Generally, the party system (4 out of 10) seems to perform badly, while organizations outside the party framework perform quite well (8 out of 10).

In the terms of Guo and Stradiotto (2014), one could classify Benin’s transition as a cooperative transition which was driven from below. Since the opposition was heterogeneous and not spearheaded by one oppositional party, the constitutional assembly opted for an “integrative liberalism” without any restrictions to party foundation (Da Silva, interview 07.11.2016; Seibou, interview 25.11.2016). With the collapse of the regime as well as the implication and delegitimization of the former ruling party PRPB, the political playground was levelled and “provided a political opportunity structure from which robust opposition could emerge” (Dickovick 2008: 1129). Furthermore, conditions for a diverse party system were promising: With a civil society engaged in the struggle for liberalization, a very liberal electoral system and Benin’s previous legacy of democratic parties, Benin was never in danger of becoming a dominant party system. As a matter of fact, no single party controlled a majority of seats at that time (Magnusson 2001: 219). The flip side of the liberal party system is, however, that officially roughly 230 political parties exist in Benin. Many of them only exist on paper and only a few of them operate on the national level or regularly participate in the elections (Seibou, interview 25.11.2016; Videgla, interview 29.11.2016). Most of them lack a coherent program and internal democratic structures. Given the fact that the only existing oppositional and “strongest pro-democracy opposition party during the dictatorship” (Gisselquist 2008: 796) – the Communist Party – did not participate in the NC and that the former single party was widely discredited, the transition in Benin was “so complete, dramatic and open” that it left “behind a situation in which parties proliferated based on localised concerns” (Dickovick 2008: 1129). Thus, the downside of the “levelled playground” is a lack of consolidation within the sphere of representational consolidation (Oussou, interview 31.10.2016). Due to the high number of parties, “coalitions remain fleeting and uncertain” (Magnusson 2001: 219).

To sum up, the oppositional civic forces levelled the political playing field by delegitimating the rule of the single party and paving the way towards multi-party democracy. This theoretically provided a fertile ground for representational consolidation, only the realization proved to be difficult. Dozens of “embryo” parties had participated in the national conference and in the year that followed, approximately 34 were officially registered and allowed to compete in elections (Allen 1992:49). Additionally, many already existing organizations, like for instance the Development Association, transformed into political parties, further contributing to a fragmentation of the party system (Droit de l’Homme, Paix et Développement 2015: 38). Overall however, the nonviolent protest had only little effect on party formation (Allen 1992: 57), respective representational consolidation.

This had different reasons: First, Benin found itself in a severe economic crisis which limited the leeway of the transitional government. Attempts to manage the economy of scarcity by structural adjustments alienated large parts of the student movement and the public servants and led to widespread disillusionment. Nonetheless, the population focussed their hopes on economic elites like Nicéphore Soglo who had previously worked for the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Yayi Boni who was the former deputy director of the West African Central Bank, or influential businessman Patrice Talon known as Benin’s “Cotton King”. Many of the new political parties emerging after the NC were created around economically influential personalities and were consequently characterized as “political companies” (Videgla, interview 29.11.2016), or “political enterprises [...] created to produce political ‘gains’ as well as economic and financial benefits for their founders and active members” (APRM 2008: 55). Since the survival and success of such parties often solely relies on the founder and funder, they can be compared with stock companies and as the “private property” of the party president (Engel 2005: 8) with the militants having the status of employed staff members (Dawodoun 2007: 127). Few of

13 First forerunners of political parties in Benin have existed since 1920. The first real party was founded in 1947 with the “Union Progressiste Dahoméenne” (UPD) (Engel 2005: 4).

14 Some activist, especially former unionists founded or joined political parties. Emmanuel Golou is one of these examples. Golou was part of the workers movement to protest against the dictatorship of Kérékou and founded the PSD in 1990.
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these parties hold regular congresses or general assemblies (Droit de l’Homme, Paix et Développement 2015: 43). The internal organization of political parties is not regulated by law (Engels et al. 2008) and the majority never witnessed a change in their leadership so that in sum the internal democratic nature of Benin’s political parties needs to be doubted.

In short, the political playing field was de facto captured by economic elites and influential former politicians and their parties. The practice of “pay-back” job postings for those who had supported his [a president’s, MB] candidate means that it is not at all clear whether continued clientelistic practices will allow the recently introduced ‘democratic’ procedures and institutions to function” (Nwajiaku 1994: 44).

In the end, NVR led to an integrative liberalism and contributed to the foundation of several parties, but it only had a limited effect on the consolidation of the party system. The movement successfully opened the political space and temporarily levelled the political playground, but most political parties never gained significant influence. Similarly, the political culture of compromise and negotiation was transmitted via the individual representatives into the NC and the preliminary government, but did not influence the party system as such.

7.3 Behavioral Consolidation

Benin’s behavioral consolidation, measured as the effective power to govern by the BTI with solid 9 points, reaches the level of a democracy in consolidation. In this section, I will show that although elites tried to deviate, from the democratic path from time to time, democratic institutional control mechanisms and civilian intervention always prevented such.

One major advantage of nonviolent transitions over violent ones is that no political actor has a veto power based on military potential. Very often, former armed actors inherit a special position within the political system since they can always threaten to return to violent forms of dispute settlement. Furthermore, armed liberators frequently develop a sense of entitlement to rule the country due to their role during the struggle (Zunes 1994; Bayer and Pabst 2016). Consequently, armed liberators frequently develop a sense of entitlement to rule the country due to their role during the struggle (Zunes 1994; Bayer and Pabst 2016). 

Contrary to that, during nonviolent transitions, no political actor develops the ability to overpower other actors or to attain a veto position and the state security forces are the only armed actors in the country. Therefore, the commitment of the military is crucial for the behavioral consolidation of the country. This is especially true since Benin has a long history of military interventions into politics.

As stated above, the military forces returned to the barracks in 1990 after having been confronted with a broad coalition of civil forces. International financial and military assistance were contributing factors which influenced the neutral behavior of the military. It appears doubtful whether the military would have received new international financial aid after having quelled a civil pro-democratic movement.

On the contrary, returning to the barracks and sticking to their business guaranteed them not only exemption from punishment but led them to profit from the subsequent “democracy bonus” (Bierschenk 2009: 15). This democracy bonus in form of international military cooperation and the possibility to participate in international peacekeeping missions of the United Nation - options that they would lose if Benin deviated from the democratic path - built strong incentives to stay on the democratic track (Brillsauer 2016). Importantly, the army of Benin developed a new ethos as democratic troops through their participation in joint international peacekeeping missions for those who were preparing for a coup (Brillsauer 2016). Nevertheless, a danger of renewed military intervention was always given or at least feared. Especially the last term of Yayi Boni showed warning signals like tanks patrolling the streets of Cotonou (Asoba, interview 19.10.2016). Due to the mentioned internal developments within the army “and an active opposition and civil society, this has not occurred.” (Akindes 2015: 56).

Another factor contributing to the behavioral consolidation is the low political polarization in Benin. In the case of Benin, the return to multi-party democracy was widely supported by the population. Even the Communist Party of Benin (PCB), which had boycotted the NC in 1989 and which still builds the radical flank of the political system, is committed to the democratic order and rejects violent actions against the state to change the system. As PCB activists suffered most under the repressions of Kérékou, they appreciate the existing political freedom. Like Albert Gandonou puts it: “we fought for bread and freedom. We won freedom, the bread is still missing” (Interview 25.10.2016). Thus, in the sense of realpolitik, today’s PCB follows a more social democratic line.

Furthermore, another factor that promoted behavioral consolidation in Benin was that the previous Marxist regime, although having been repressive, had no legacy of severe and systematic human rights abuses (Amuwo 2003: 149; Houngnikoko and Decalo 2013: 9). In the end, Kérékou accepted the advance of the NC for a new constitution because he was granted immunity and not asked to resign (Adamon 1993). This, in turn, was acceptable for the NC since the regime’s human rights record was not too poor and since the risk that he would stay in power after free elections was relatively low (Houngbedji 2005: 36).

Up to now, the political elites have stayed on the democratic track. However, as mentioned earlier, President Kérékou and Soglo both attempted to change the constitution in order to allow themselves a third term in 2006 and 2016, respectively. These attempts have been successfully countered by the civil society and oppositional politicians. Despite these attempts to change the constitution, political elites ultimately accepted the basic “rules of the game” that are vehemently defended by civil society (Hartmann, interview 29.09.2016; Moumouni, interview 15.10.2016). So the NC and the prior resistance against the regime of Kérékou serve as a reminder that it was the rejection of authoritarian rule which led to democratic renewal, a trap that should be avoided in the future (Asogba, interview 21.10.2016). After four peaceful turnovers until today, the basic idea of an alteration of power through regular open elections can be regarded as consolidated within the political system (Stroh, interview 5.10.2016).
However, rising corruption and widespread clientelism (Watcheken 2003) put Benin’s high behavioral consolidation at risk. As a consequence, be it in political offices or in business, the elites are seldom confronted with political restrictions of their interests. These legal double standards and the lacking prosecution of office abuse might represent a form of veto-power: a veto-power stemming from economically-driven clientelism and the willingness to accept double standards and inequality for economic opportunities.

It has become clear that the nonviolent struggle spared Benin some serious dysfunctionalities within the dimension of representative consolidation. As embraced by Dudouet (2011), NVR did not contribute to a polarization of the political spectrum like violent resistance often does. Furthermore, no political actor was able to credibly claim any special rights or a veto position and also the military – often in a powerful position as they command weapons – contained themselves in the face of nonviolent people’s mass mobilization. However, economic actors gained a strong political influence. Widespread corruption and clientelism guarantee “the haves” a dominant position within the system.

7.4 Culture of Citizenship

Besides the good performance in the dimension of behavioral consolidation, Benin’s culture of citizenship is another remarkable feature of its democracy (7.5 out of 10 points at BTI). This high rating is driven by an extremely solid approval of democracy (9) and a decent rating for social capital (6).

Most scholars on democratic consolidation admit that democratic consolidation is not only based on the mere acceptance of the rules of the game by elites, but also on a deeper commitment and support for democracy rooted in wider parts of the population (Almond and Verba 2015; Lipset 2004). As stated above, the culture of citizenship is rated quite high with an extraordinary approval of democracy in Benin. Since the civilian ousting of the military-Marxist government in 1990, Benin even “may have become West Africa’s most vibrant civil society” (Magnusson 2001: 219). Additionally, there “are many indications that the population has also internalized democracy to a significant extent: high voter turnout, information about most candidates” (Bierschenk 2009: 22).

The experience of the repressive Marxist-Leninist regime under Kérékou left a society which highly values the existence of civil rights within the given democratic regime (Moussou and Deguenonvo, interview 20.10.2016). An indicator for these attitudes is a high rate of rejection of single-party and military rule in Benin. Overall, 78.7 % of the population oppose military rule and 81% oppose a one man rule (Afrobarometer 2014). This is coupled with a broad support for democracy in general (78.2%) and a widespread pride in the historical achievement of being the first African country to manage a peaceful transition (Deguenonvo and Moussou, interview 20.10.2016) and their pioneering role for democratization in Africa (Banégas 2014: 451).

How the democratic transition was achieved plays an important role in the development of the existing culture of citizenship in Benin. As in the other dimensions of consolidation, the emergence of Benin’s culture of citizenship has also been impacted by the fact that the people non-violently opted for a political change and that this change was achieved consensually through the NC.

First, the mode of transition anchored a sense of sovereignty and agency within the people. Citizens in Benin mostly have the feeling that they have the right to interfere in politics and to express their opinion and they feel able to influence politics. As Kombi (cited by Amuwo 2003: 150) states, “the conférence nationale’s myth of a radical rupture gives the people the illusion of the total mastery of their destiny and of having reclaimed sovereignty”. Similarly, the former NC member, later prime minister and party leader Adrien Houngbedji stated that “the future is not a blind destiny […]. In 1990, the Conference of the active Forces of the Nation allowed us to see it.” (Houngbedji 2005: 35). Further, the fact that the NC was able to find a peaceful and consensual solution for the conflict induced a high value for consensus within the political culture of Benin (Asogba, interview 21.10.2016).

Second, rare and unique events “may have extraordinary influence on people and organizations long after the fact”, since “how a community responds to conflict will be, quite simply, how the community has responded in the past” (Schunk 2011: 289). In this line, the transparent and participatory procedure of Benin’s NC including radio transmission, public consultation during the drafting process and extra referenda for critical points created a strong sense of ownership and the feeling that the constitution is truly a “people’s constitution” (Gisselquist 2008: 797; Giele, interview 10.11.2011). Today, the basic principles of the constitution are well-known within Benin (Moussou and Deguenonvo, interview 20.10.2016) and most Beninese feel strongly attached to their constitution and the principles agreed upon (Mey, interview 18.10.2016; Moumouni, interview 15.10.2016).

In general, the resistance against Kérékou mobilized and politicized large parts of the urban population. Today, Benin still has a vibrant civil society interested in politics with roughly 13.000 officially registered NGOs (Bierschenk 2009). In some sectors like education and transport, unions attained remarkable influence (da Silva, interview 07.11.2016). However, formal organization remains weak in most other areas and civil society therefore fragmented (Stroh, interview 5.10.2016). There are some locally grown watchdog NGOs that have been founded by former activists of the anti-authoritarian struggle. As well, former leading figures of the NC started recently to build NGOs in the field of human rights, democracy, peace or anti-discrimination. More influential are, however, international NGOs which became active in the late 1990s and are often more or less local branches of international networks like the West African Network for Peace, Social Watch or Amnesty International. These NGOs have no direct ties to the nonviolent struggle, but their presence in Benin is only possible because of the political legacy of the peaceful struggle that provides them with a stable working environment (Oussou, interview 31.10.2016; Degue, interview 03.11.2016).

Interestingly, there is personal continuity between those having been part of the NC and those now active in the CS. Thus, the organizational link between the activists in resistance and new emerging civil society...
organizations is indirectly mediated by the participation in the NC. This might be explained with political demobilization and disillusionment of the pro-democracy movement. As already mentioned, interest in the NC and the interim government was very high from the beginning. During the first year, the interim government - mostly consisting of former NC members - tried to be as transparent and inclusive as possible and was willing to discuss any grievances with the population (Asoba, interview 19.10.2016). However, it lacked the means to satisfy them since “the issues that had undermined Kérékou remained, and strikes began to occur once again, especially under the elected government that followed the interim one” (Allen 1992: 46). The implementation of austerity measures and structural adjustment by the new democratic government disappointed many students and former activists (Moumouni, interview 15.10.2016) and this “generated sentiments that democracy itself was responsible for their loss of influence” (Magnusson 2001: 223). This led to a demobilization of the broader movement. A few years later, “the second national assembly elections in 1995 removed eighty percent of incumbents” (Magnusson 2001: 217) and with them, most members of the NC committed to transparency and public consultation.

Nevertheless, the majority of Beninese remains committed to democracy and the constitution. As already mentioned above, Benin witnessed two prominent cases of mass mobilization against an attempt to deviate from the democratic rules inscribed in the constitution. The first one occurred at the end of Kérékou’s second term in 2006, the other ten years later at the end of Yayi Boni’s second term. Both attempted to change the constitution in order to allow a third term for the acting President. In 2006, the “Don’t touch my constitution” campaign, organized by an NGO called ELAN, gained widespread support from civil society organizations (Asogba, interview 21.10.2016). However, although it became apparent later that the campaign was financially backed by next President Yayi Boni (Asoba, interview 19.10.2016), it gained widespread support and found a fruitful breeding ground in the pro-democratic attitude of the people.

The second event occurred ten years later when Yayi Boni attempted to change the constitution to constitute a new republic which would have allowed him to rule another two terms (Stroh, interview 5.10.2016). In order to prevent that, new organizations like the “Alternative citoyenne” and long established associations like ALCRER organized widespread protests like the “Mercredi Rouge” campaign. On some occasions, the old “Don’t touch my constitution” banners were re-used to protest against Boni’s attempt to gain a third term. Ironically, it was Boni who had “invented” the slogan against his predecessor Kérékou (Asogba, interview 21.10.2016). This clearly shows that the population is in support of their democracy’s basic fundamentals anchored in the constitution and that they are willing and, importantly, also able to defend them. Furthermore, members of the government like Reckya Madougo also supported the resistance against Boni, even though her influence appears to have been rather limited (Oussou, interview 31.10.2016).

However, the nature of the civil society has some negative effects on the dimension of representation consolidation. While the political parties lack funding, many NGOs are financed by international donors and therefore provide better working conditions. Furthermore, since campaigns like “Don’t touch my constitution” and “Mercredi Rouge” have proven highly effective in gaining publicity and grassroots support, they were often used as a springboard into political offices, transforming social capital into political power. One example is Reckya Madougo, the organizer of the “Don’t touch my constitution” campaign, who became minister of micro-finance in the cabinet of Yayi Boni afterwards. Djogbenou, minister of justice under Thalon, was widely known as civil rights activists, founder of “Droit du l’Homme”, and organizer of the “Alternative citoyenne” and “Mercredi Rouge Mouvement” (Kitty, interview 18.10.2006).

Due to the strong influence of the civil society, political parties are side-lined (Seibou, interview 25.11.2016). On the one hand, civil society organizations with international support often take over the function of political parties. They control the government, observe elections, mobilize and educate the population. On the other hand, and due to the lacking capability of political parties to mobilize support, local civil society organizations sometimes organize support for political leaders and bring them into influential positions. (Dossa 2010). The consequence is that the lines between political society and civil society in Benin are blurred.

As we have seen in the previous analysis tracing the effect of NVR on democratic survival in Benin, civil society played a major role in it. Sharp’s hypothesis that the basis for NVR is the end of submissiveness (1973: 778) and that a society having witnessed mass-based NVR comes along with a “just and democratic (civil) society” (Schock 2015: 111) seems to hold true to some extent. Furthermore, and more importantly, it seems to be true that people having fought for democracy are also more committed to defending it (Sharp 2008: 53). As we have seen, this mechanism works on the symbolic level. Thus, it is not only the veterans of the struggle who defend democracy but also the next generation. However, this effect is a fading one: Missing positive side-effects of democratization like an economic upturn can endanger it in the long run.
Conclusion

According to Gene Sharp, “no one should believe that with the downfall of the dictatorship an ideal society will immediately appear.” In this sense, the mode of resistance against the authoritarian regime or the mode of transition to a democratic regime alone is far from sufficient to explain the consolidation of democracy (Sharp 2008: 63).

In the case of Benin, nonviolent protest during the 1980s opened up the space to hold a NC and provided a level of organization within the oppositional camp to take over the NC and pave the way for the transition. It led to a provisional government and the creation of democratic institutions which prevail until today. Without NVR, that bestowed the opposition with a great amount of power within the conflict and at the same time left room for reconciliation, the NC might have ended inconclusive like the “conference du cadre” ten years before. Similarly, many other NCs like the one in neighboring Togo did not end in a transition because they lacked cohesion within the oppositional movement and eventually left the presidential power base untouched.

Furthermore, Benin has undergone four peaceful turnovers in six presidential elections since 1991. In Sub-Sahara Africa, this is only surpassed by Mauritius, which became a democracy after its independence in 1968, 30 years prior to Benin. Namibia and South Africa, two countries exhibiting similar BTI ratings for democratic quality but higher economic development, both did not witness a single turnover in the same period.

According to Thelen (1999), political institutions depend to a higher degree on legitimacy and functionality and less on efficiency so that stability is very much a question of acceptance of these institutions. As was argued above, NVR and the consensual transition led to a generally high acceptance of democracy and its core institutions. Thereby, it foremost contributed to constitutional consolidation and the development of a culture of citizenship.

Eventually, both the generally high approval of democracy leading to repeated interventions by civil society and the Constitutional Court have proven vital for democracy and its survival in Benin. Furthermore, the repeated civil society interventions in defense of the constitution supported the founding narrative of the sovereignty of the people and helped to uphold it over time.

The effects on representational and behavioral consolidation are less clear. Although NVR leveled the political playing field by discarding the former single party and opening up the space for new political parties, the new playing field was soon dominated by old players. The NVR movement spawned a substantial number of new parties. Due to the economic situation, however, economic elites gained massive influence in the new system and began to enter and dominate the political sphere. More programmatic parties were not able to compete with economic strongmen who reward political loyalty materially. As a result, widespread clientelism prevails, prohibiting democratic consolidation. Whereas basic democratic principles like the citizen’s rights and the alteration of power through election are widely agreed upon, the routine daily essence of democracy like the fact that economic dependence does not mean political dependence, that political debates are guided by arguments and not by loyalty, or that elites are subordinated to the same laws, is not. Although it currently seems unlikely that the country will deviate from the basic democratic rules anchored in the constitution, it is not consolidated either. A sufficient proportion of the population is still following political leaders for pragmatic reasons. As Olivier Kitty put it, “democracy is not the will of the elites but a commitment of the masses. It was the commitment of the masses that let Kérékou resign in 1990 and forced him to organize the national conference” (Kitty, interview 18.10.2006). However, this commitment to democracy shown in 1990 does not seem to be able to counterbalance the urgent material needs. Thus, the democracy of the everyday life is sacrificed to satisfy urgent needs while the basic principles of democracy agreed upon are untouchable.

Against this background, NVR provided a good basis for the consolidation of a democracy against the odds. Benin’s democracy proves to be stable against backlashes, at the same time the quality of “doing” democracy is constrained by economic inequalities. In this sense, NVR positively affected institutional consolidation and the development of a culture of citizenship but proved unable to induce an economic transformation, creating more favorable preconditions for a “deeper” democracy. This raises the question, if NVR is suitable for inducing fundamental social change or if it is reformistic in its essence, like some claim. Another interesting result of this study is that the founding narrative of “people’s power” was relevant for the renewed remobilization of civic forces. Still, there is more to learn about the power of these founding narratives and their effect on political culture. This is of particular importance as it seems that the effect of NVR is fading. What helps to upkeep it, what contributes to its further dismay?


Levels of Consolidation

Constitutional Consolidation
- "Rule of Law": Separation of powers / Independent judiciary / Prosecution of office abuse / Civil rights
- "Stability of democratic institutions": Performance of democratic institutions / Commitment to democratic institutions

Representative Consolidation
- "Political and social Integration": Party system / Interest groups

Behavioral Consolidation
- "Political Participation": Effective power to govern

Culture of Citizenship
- "Political and social integration": Approval of democracy / Social capital

Table 1: Conceptualization of Merkel’s (2010) concept of embedded democracy, based on BTI Indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Consolidation</th>
<th>Indicators of the BTI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional Consolidation</td>
<td>&quot;Rule of Law&quot;: Separation of powers / Independent judiciary / Prosecution of office abuse / Civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Stability of democratic institutions&quot;: Performance of democratic institutions / Commitment to democratic institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative Consolidation</td>
<td>&quot;Political and social Integration&quot;: Party system / Interest groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Consolidation</td>
<td>&quot;Political Participation&quot;: Effective power to govern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Citizenship</td>
<td>&quot;Political and social integration&quot;: Approval of democracy / Social capital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Interview partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Alexander Stroh</td>
<td>University of Bayreuth</td>
<td>05.10.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Christof Hartmann</td>
<td>University of Duisburg-Essen</td>
<td>29.09.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Olivier Kitti</td>
<td>Amnesty international</td>
<td>12.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Guillaume Mousmouni</td>
<td>University of Abomey Calavy</td>
<td>15.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eliya May</td>
<td>Attachés des Coopération Ambassade de France Bénin</td>
<td>18.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nathanael Kitti</td>
<td>University of Abomey Calavy</td>
<td>18.10.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Simon Asoba</td>
<td>Chargé de Programmes FES</td>
<td>19.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alfred Deguenonvo</td>
<td>GIZ, consultant for civil participation</td>
<td>20.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Comlan Théomas</td>
<td>GIZ, consultant for civil participation and decentralization</td>
<td>20.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Martin Asogba</td>
<td>ALCRER</td>
<td>21.10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Angélique Voisin</td>
<td>Ambassade de France Bénin, RAEB</td>
<td>24.10.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Albert Gandonou</td>
<td>PCE</td>
<td>25.10.16</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Julien Ousso</td>
<td>WANE</td>
<td>31.10.16</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Alphonse da Silva</td>
<td>SNES</td>
<td>02.11.16</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Jean Pierre Degue</td>
<td>Social Watch</td>
<td>03.11.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Alphonse da Silva</td>
<td>SNES</td>
<td>07.11.16</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Franck Kapotcheme</td>
<td>UPMB</td>
<td>07.11.16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Jean Baptiste Elias</td>
<td>FONAC</td>
<td>08.11.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ahanhanzo Gbile</td>
<td>National Conference member, drafted the constitution, president Constitutional Court</td>
<td>10.11.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>André Dossa</td>
<td>Chanaains</td>
<td>23.11.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Arsane Seilhou</td>
<td>ABT</td>
<td>26.11.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Augustine Videgia</td>
<td>Union Fait la Nation</td>
<td>29.11.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Colonel Thomas Brilllauer</td>
<td>German military attaché for Nigeria, Bénin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Togo</td>
<td>05.09.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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