

## **Benin: Understanding Non-Elite Incorporation**

### ***Introduction:***

Over the last thirty years, Benin has largely managed to maintain a steady elite deal that has only recently begun to be challenged. During this stable period, Benin matured democratically and had come to be viewed as a democratic standout in Africa. Yet, despite what sounds like a recipe for growth, Benin has been stuck in a low-growth equilibrium, with average annual per capita growth rates of only 1.6 percent between 2006 and 2016 (World Bank 2019). Even so, Benin has avoided social upheaval or widespread movements for change over this period, implying a potentially passive citizenry. This essay will explore this contention, parsing out the modes of non-elite incorporation in Benin's political and economic structures.

Previous analysis identified Benin's elite as the top politicians, a burgeoning business elite of which current President Talon is part of, and a pool of traditional rural chiefly elites. This paper aims to look at the groups marginalized in this original analysis, principally rural farmers, urban workers, and lower-level civil servants. While the voice of these groups is clearly muted in comparison to the political and business elites, they make up the vast majority of the population and their interests are thus implicated in any hopes for inclusive development. Understanding the evolving livelihoods of these groups over time is therefore critical for assessing trend lines of development and public opinion in Benin. Not only may this analysis uncover reasons behind low growth, it may help explain Talon's democratic backslide and the potential for impending pushback from the masses.

To pursue the topic of non-elite incorporation and the extent to which non-elite discontent has been an agent for change in Benin, this paper will pursue the following outline. First, a long view will be taken that explores the legacy of slavery in Benin, assessing whether an internalized oppression built up during this period can help explain Benin's seemingly passive contentment to work with the grain. Second, a medium view will be taken which emphasizes the role of non-elites in Benin's transformative national conference of 1990. Often discussed as a model for civil society engagement and mobilization, the national conference provides an important case study and inflection point for non-elite incorporation in Benin. Finally, a shorter view will be pursued, analyzing the political and economic evolution of non-elites throughout Benin's successful multiparty history.

Throughout this period-based analysis, this paper will try to place Benin into typologies informed by Alice Evans (2018) and Albert Hirschmann (1973). Specifically, the piece will identify if Benin has faced a tunnel effect (expressed as benign or malign) and/or an internalized oppression (expressed as mobilized or subservient). Again, this will help better define the evolving role of Benin's non-elites and explain why working with or against the grain has been in fashion at different points in time.

### ***Long View:***

Independent since only 1960, large parts of Benin's identity, administration, and consciousness are rooted in the colonial and precolonial periods. This section focuses on the effects of the slave trade over these periods as a potential factor in explaining Benin's low levels of non-elite mobilization.

Historically, Benin served as a nexus of the slave trade from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Beninese port of Ouidah was West Africa's largest slave port, serving as the point of departure for over one million African slaves (Sieff 2018). European merchants, such as Félix de Souza, led the brutal mercantile expansion of the trade in slaves, but a local complicity on the supply side from competing kingdoms added to the social disruption and legacy that haunts Benin. The mostly southern kingdoms of Dahomey and Porto-Novo, as the dominant coastal powers, ended up supplying slaves of different ethnicities from the interior and north (BTI 2018).

In effect, a master-captive symbolism and hierarchy became internalized on both sides of this slaving network. These dynamics were further entrenched by the longevity of the slave trade, which was not abolished in Benin until 1905, with forced labor staying on the books until as late as 1946. This meant that servile, master-captive conditions remained throughout the colonial period and effectively had centuries and generations to become politically, economically, and culturally embedded (Hahonou 2015).

In addition, the weight of slavery on Benin's contemporary relations is burdened by the fact that no consequential dismantling of the tribes and power structures involved has taken place (Sieff 2018). The Fon in the south are largely descendants of residents of Dahomey, while the widely enslaved Gando remain in the north with their ex-captors the Fulani (Hahonou 2015). Without ethnic dispersion, former identities, symbolism, and relations have proven incredibly resilient, and in effect, the victors have been able to control the narrative. Development has also proceeded unequally, with literacy rates in the northernmost district of 25 percent compared to 87 percent in the coastal capital (UNESCO 2012).

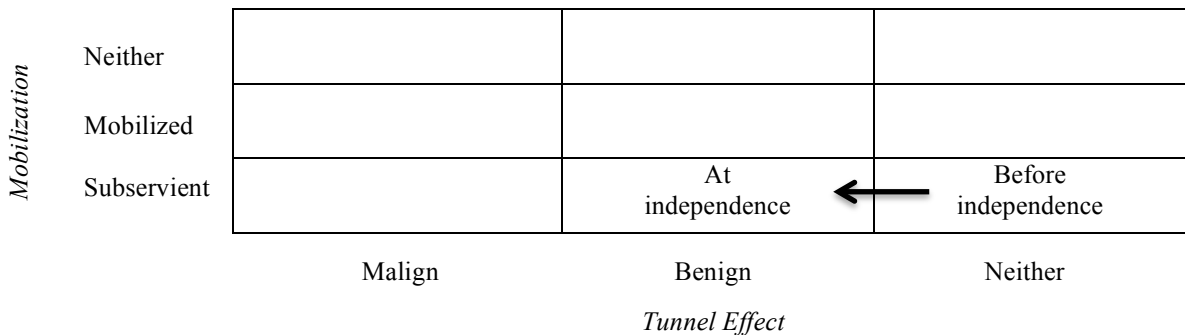
For northern groups like the Gando, internalized oppression is strengthened by daily expressions of hierarchy and perceived place. From his anthropological and ethnographic research, Hahonou (2015) describes the Beninese descendants of slaves' predicament as a lack of honor, causing "an indelible stigma" (p. 333). Though nominal rights and equality have long been the norm now, he argues that the descendants of slaves still face a lower moral condition, which he describes as an unresolved "right to have rights" (p. 343). Internalized, this has led Gando citizens to favor horizontal (within-group) mobilizations and status seeking over vertical integration with other groups. Discussed in the medium view section, this has had important effects on the pace and fervor of Beninese social movements.

The above characterization also confirms a subservient undertone to Benin's precolonial and colonial masses, tying into Alice Evans' ideas of internalized oppression and the power of self-perceptions. Negative ideas and symbolism can hold back human development, especially when constantly reinforced (Evans 2018). Thus, in Figure 1 below, Benin's non-elites are typified as subservient before independence with a nonexistent tunnel effect. The tunnel effect here references a society's tolerance for inequality, with a benign tunnel effect occurring when growth at the top sparks optimism in the bottom ranks, even if the positive effects have not yet trickled down. A malign effect takes over when continued failure to see gains produces anger in the masses (Hirschmann 1973). Before independence, there was arguably no notion of such an effect either way, as much of the population was disconnected and set in their internalized hierarchies.

Few ideas are as powerful as independence, though, and thus a benign tunnel effect became briefly apparent upon the euphoria of independence in 1960. During this period, competing regional leaders vied for political support, with Hubert Maga leading the country briefly as a

representative of the disenfranchised north. His presence in politics was a brief reason for optimism among the northern masses (Country Watch 2019).

Figure 1: Benin Until Independence



Importantly, the residue of slavery is not confined to the eras directly before and after independence. The history of slavery remains politically salient and is a recurring modern-day issue in Beninese affairs. Notably, President Matthieu Kérékou famously apologized for Benin’s role in slavery while visiting an African American church in Baltimore in 1999. Additionally, current President Talon faced criticism from his opponents in the most recent election over his ancestral ties to slave traders (Sieff 2018). Former President Boni Yayi also tacitly fueled rumors that his mother had Gando roots, trying to tap into not only ethnic but class solidarity (Hahonou 2015). Even when supporting these groups, though, it says a lot that he was not willing to outwardly identify himself as a member of a perceived lower caste.

Sieff (2018) provides even more powerfully instructive anecdotes on the staying power of Benin’s internal struggle to frame, accept, and move past its history of slavery. First, a massive statue of de Souza remains prominent in Benin, with the influential de Souza family strongly against its removal. Even starker, the family’s patriarch visits the modern-day king of Abomey each year to pay tribute to their commercial relations centuries ago. Despite heavily implicating a history of profiting off of slavery, this practice continues though with only implicit reference to slavery. Finally, Benin is working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to build museums to commemorate the history of slavery. Again, the de Souza family is against any mention of the de Souza name in relation to slavery, and the country has struggled to formulate exactly how the exhibits should be framed (Sieff 2018).

While narrow and abstract, these anecdotes paint a picture of a country very much still struggling to extricate itself from a passive acceptance of hierarchy and internalized oppression. The next section will analyze how such a society was morphed by socialism under Kérékou’s dictatorship and how mobilization finally came about around the national conference in 1990.

**Medium View:**

Benin’s national conference of 1990 is often considered a spark for the third wave of democracy across Africa and as a model for robust civil society engagement. This rosy perspective is perhaps an overstatement of the role of non-elites, as a consensus has formed that the mobilized groups were largely limited to the urban middle-to-upper class, and these groups’ actions were more a response to and not a cause of state collapse and opening (Bierschenk 2009). However, even if limited and reactive, this mobilization was novel and

did begin to have trickledown effects in rural areas, with the advent of democracy unlocking the marginal associational gains made under Kérékou. Thus, as a true inflection point for non-elite incorporation, this period deserves careful analysis.

To start, Kérékou's 1972 coup and quick consolidation of power into a one-party state ended a tumultuous period of turnover that had eliminated any remnants of the country's brief post-independence euphoria. Nominally socialist, Kérékou nationalized Benin's limited industry and amalgamated Benin's trade unions into one party-backed trade organization in 1974 (Bierschenk 2009). This was evidence of a leveling of top-level associations, as Kérékou reinstalled a basic limited access order, in which organizations autonomous from the state or party were unable to operate.

While constrictive in the urban areas, where more plural political and business associations had previously existed, Kérékou's socialist leveling actually had the effect of bringing associations to the rural domain. In an attempt to limit the authority of traditional chiefs, Kérékou set out to promote state-tied peasant organizations at the village level (Bierschenk 2003). For the first time, elements of democratic voting were brought to the local level, as the village organizations informally elected their leaders. Importantly, chiefs were not allowed to run, but of course the system was not representative overnight. Of note, Gando citizens remained largely unrepresented until the late 1980s when Kérékou's anti-feudal policies expanded to the promotion of sociolinguistic organizations in the north (Hahonou 2015).

It was around this time when hometown associations began developing, bringing civil servants together back at the local level. These groupings emphasized village-level development and began to be an outlet for students and public sector employees who had lost their jobs or scholarships in the urban areas during the economic downturn of the 1980s (Bierschenk 2003). As members of the disgruntled middle class returned to their familial homes, they brought with them their grievances and a desire to develop voluntary associations outside the control of the state (Heilbrunn 1992). With the economy in ruins, the state became less and less able to defend against political opening, making possible a transition to a more mature limited access order.

The failure of the Beninese economy was what prompted the floodgates of mobilization to open. Benin followed the general African pattern of economic crisis and indebtedness during the 1980s, made worse by Nigeria's border closure in 1984, which severely disrupted Beninese trade (Heilbrunn 1992). By 1986, the country was in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a stabilization loan, but this required the implementation of austerity measures. Civil servant salaries were cut by ten percent, housing allowances for public sector employees were done away with, and students began losing government-promised scholarships. Benin received the loan in 1986, but its state-run banks all collapsed the following year. Protests began as early as 1985 (Nwajiaku 1994), and by 1989 civil servant salaries had gone unpaid for seven months and mobilization was inevitable (Heilbrunn 1992).

While associational life had expanded in the rural areas under Kérékou, the relevant protests surrounding 1990 were largely urban and southern affairs. Bierschenk (2009) defines the protesters as members of a "state-based urban middle class" made up of students, teachers, and civil servants, with later support from the Catholic Church and fledgling breakaway trade unions (Bierschenk 2009, p. 341). By 1988, with limited economic options, Kérékou was forced to begin opening up politically. Renewed freedom of the press reinvigorated criticism

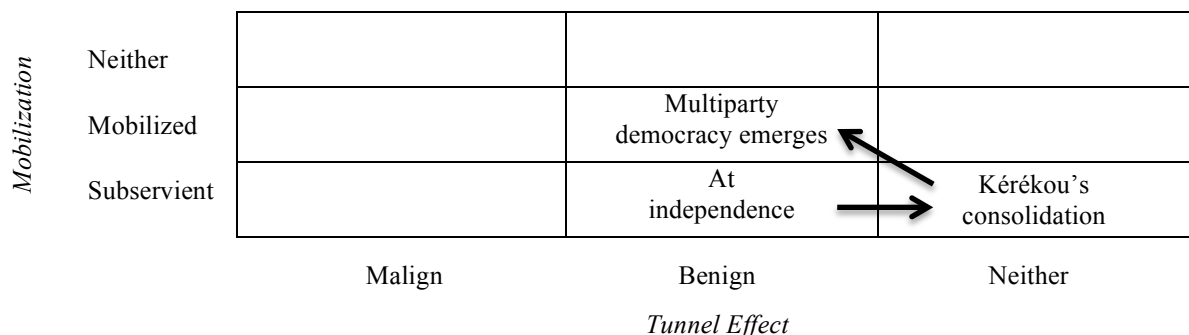
of government mismanagement and corruption, while independent trade unions began testing the waters for the first time since 1974 (Bierschenk 2009). The final straw was an ultimatum from the protesting civil servants and teachers at the end of 1989. They called for general strikes until they were paid in full, which Kérékou could not meet. He tried to earn goodwill by disavowing socialism, but his rhetoric fell on deaf ears. With few options remaining, he agreed to a national conference that would pave the way for multiparty elections (Bierschenk 2009).

Reflecting on the mobilization that led to the national conference, an important realization is that Benin’s society does not readily fit the mold of a dichotomous elite and non-elite. When speaking of the tunnel effect in Benin during this period, it is easier to imagine three lanes. One lane would be a privileged high-occupancy vehicle lane for the upper elite, encompassing maybe one percent of the population. Next, would be a lane for the salaried urban middle class, making up less than twenty percent of the population (Nwajiaku 1994). Lastly, the vast majority of the population is left in a third lane, which has been helplessly static for too long to remember.

In this framework, the middle class developed a malign tunnel effect in relation to the upper elite. Yet, their imperative was not to open the way for the third lane to enter, but merely to gain access to the first lane for themselves. This fits a pattern of elite circulation and cooptation described by both Bierschenk (2009) and Nwajiaku (1994), where the easiest way for a stable elite deal to be maintained was to slowly integrate the upper middle class. However, as the economy worsened and the purse strings of the state tightened, this became impossible without expanding the political arena. The implication, though, is that the democratic changes espoused in 1990 were aimed more at this intra-elite integration than true reform of the system’s political economy.

Referring back to the typologies, Figure 2 maps Benin’s progression from Kérékou to multiparty democracy, focusing on how the conditions of the non-elite masses are best expressed in this framework. As discussed, the quick loss of independence euphoria ended Benin’s brief benign tunnel effect, leaving Benin’s non-elites back in neutral gear in the third lane. Kérékou’s anti-feudal policies did at least marginally lead to associational growth, which spurred mobilization upon the gains of the middle class in 1990. When the middle class succeeded, the masses finally saw movement in the second lane, spawning a benign tunnel effect. Thus, even if the national conference only marginally implicated the masses at first, the resulting glimmer of upward mobility sparked optimism and mild mobilization.

Figure 2: Benin From Kérékou Through 1990



Building off of 1990, non-elites took advantage of democratic channels to leverage associational gains made under Kérékou. The Gando, for example, had begun joining village organizations in the late 1980s, but initially only in subservient positions to Fulani ex-captors. However, invigorated by the national conference movement, they formed their own sociolinguistic groupings separate from the Fulani around the early 1990s and even began expanding into leadership positions in local producer organizations. Then, in the first official municipal government elections in 2002, Gando representatives won seats, marking important concrete and symbolic gains (Hahonou 2015).

Thus, the impact of the national conference was felt across social strata but with a lag. The middle class led the initial movement, opening the way for a benign tunnel effect that compelled the rural masses to mobilize through village associations at a newfound clip. While the impacts of internalized hierarchy remained obstacles to rural mobilization in this period, associational gains marked important steps toward healthier rural identities. As Evans notes, marginalized groups may be able to gain self-esteem and tackle norm perceptions by merely coming together, reevaluating external narratives, and politicizing their perceived inequality (2018).

At the turn of the millennia, expanded mobilization seemed to be an optimistic yet reasonable outlook, as rural groups continued to gain at least nominal representation in the country's electoral politics. However, as noted, democracy does not necessarily tackle issues of underlying political economy, especially if the elite in power and the middle class challenging power are content with the status quo. The next section will further analyze Benin's development under multiparty democracy, highlighting how structural continuities may be outweighing democratic gains for the country's non-elites.

### ***Short View:***

While Benin's democracy was successfully consolidated in the decade following the national conference, its impacts on inclusive development have proven to be more aspirational than practical for non-elites. The literature, both technical and academic, agrees that Benin's institutionalized democracy has not transformed the political economy (BTI 2018; Bierschenk 2003; Nwajiaku 1994). In this environment, Benin has stagnated, allowing inequality to rise from a Gini coefficient of 0.38 in 2003 to 0.48 in 2015 as growth has favored those already in elevated positions (Index Mundi 2015). This section looks to trace Benin's contemporary economic stagnancy, while understanding both how it has affected livelihoods and how the public is responding.

In terms of democracy, Benin's democratic renewal in 1990 failed to restructure local institutions. Bierschenk (2003) contends that local elected representatives are just an additional layer of bureaucracy, and one that can be bypassed. Actors can still choose to approach other traditional or elite players at the local level, undermining the transformative potential of nominal democracy for non-elites, while adding further confusion and inefficiency at the local level. Thus, the municipal gains of the Gando, discussed above, have remained largely symbolic. Symbolic wins are still wins, but the lack of tangible advancement has stalled momentum.

Economically, a familiar stable elite deal has survived the democratization frenzy. This is partially a function of the return to economic stability, which was restored through IMF stabilization, debt restructuring, and increased export receipts during the commodity super cycle boom. Nominal or not, democracy brought with it a dividend in the 1990s and early

2000s as Western aid and debt forgiveness flowed in (Bierschenk 2009). Growth has faltered, though, with just above one percent annual per capita growth since 2008 (World Bank 2019). Yet by avoiding crises like 1990, Benin has been able to pay civil servant salaries and coopt upper middle class elites as necessary to avoid broader reforms.

Looking at rural livelihoods, surprisingly little has changed. Eighty percent of Beninese still make a living based on farming, with 93 percent of agricultural production going to domestic food production. Further, only eleven percent of farmers produce any cotton, despite the crop accounting for seventy percent of all export revenue (USDA 2014). The government has even admitted that agricultural productivity is regrettably low, leaving the labor force only partly rewarded (da Silva 2019). Central to the inefficiencies are mismanagement of inputs and credit, with deficiencies limiting room for growth.

Of the changes that have been pursued, reform has been most evident in the cotton sector. Yet, these reforms have been far from consistent or lauded. Over the last decade, control over cotton inputs and marketing has swung from the private sector to the state and now back to the private sector. It was under President Boni Yayi in 2013 that the professional cotton association (AIC) was subsumed into the state apparatus, tripling seed production in three years (Sasse 2016). Priorities were laid out to pay back farmers quicker, to consolidate and strengthen local cooperatives, and to provide local capacity building (Agritrade 2014). Soon after, though, President Talon reversed the policy, reprivatizing the AIC. These moves, in both directions, are largely viewed as political as both men led the AIC at one point (Sasse 2016). Thus, it is unsurprising that reforms have not supported local farmers, as the policies have in fact been in response to interests at the top.

Bringing the conversation back to rural livelihoods, the president of Benin's cotton farmers' federation put it succinctly:

“We farmers have no weight. We don't have the means to be heard . . . Neither the monopoly of the state nor of the private sector is a good thing” (Sasse 2016)

With the increased involvement of businessmen in politics, the private-public line is being increasingly blurred. Again, though, Talon's electoral win and his consolidation since are more the markers of intra-elite competition than any reformist push. In contrast to 1990, his ascendance has not been met with the optimism of a benign tunnel effect, but is instead sowing the seeds of either anger or disengagement. Afrobarometer polling helps give a clearer picture of how the Beninese public has reacted to the country's evolving economic and political situation since 2008.

On the democratic front, demand for democracy has remained steady at 73 percent per the latest 2017 polling. However, satisfaction with democracy has gone down from 69 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2017 (Afrobarometer Sept. 2019). Over this period, strong majorities have expressed the erosion of political liberties and openness, as well as an increase in intimidation around elections. Interestingly, though, despite a democratic backslide, the polling shows a significant jump in the percentage of people favoring the need for government accountability over performance, spiking from fifty to eighty percent from 2014 to 2017 (Afrobarometer Sept. 2019). This would not be expected if the public truly supported Talon's shift to a growth-first Kagame model of governance. Finally, signs point to Benin's political framework remaining fragmented and dominated by independent candidates, as less

than thirty percent of Beninese feel close to one party (Afrobarometer Sept. 2019). A lack of top-down party consistency makes it easier for elites to coopt elections and harder for non-elites to grow grassroots support or press for accountability.

Economically, the picture is even more nuanced, with the topline stats produced in Figure 3 below. Supporting the presence of economic stagnancy, negative perceptions of the Beninese economy have held steady between sixty and seventy percent between 2008 and 2017. Further, respondents' perceptions of their own economic conditions have also been steadily negative, indicated by fifty to sixty percent of respondents over this period. Harder to explain is the sustained low-level optimism that the next year will be better economically. This supports the notion that a benign tunnel effect is still in effect.

<b>Perception of:</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2017</b>
Country's economic condition	62% bad	59% bad	67% bad	67% bad
Respondent's economic condition	60% bad	52% bad	60% bad	59% bad
Respondent's economic condition compared to others	37 / 37 / 20 % Worse, Better, Same	35 / 40 / 25 % Worse, Better, Same	45 / 24 / 30 % Worse, Better, Same	59 / 14 / 17 % Worse, Better, Same
Country's economic condition in a year	55% better	79% better	64% better	63% better

*Figure 3 Sources: Afrobarometer 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017*

The answers to other Afrobarometer questions get at a more granular understanding of Beninese economic grievances. Unemployment and economic management were the top two challenges indicated by respondents. Based on self-reported employment status, 42 percent of rural respondents were unemployed in 2017 compared to 33 percent of urban respondents (Afrobarometer Aug. 2019). Regional employment numbers vary from 18 to 54 percent, with northern districts falling closer to the bottom of the scale. The survey found that being male, older, urban, and educated all increased a respondent's likelihood of being employed, indicating that strong inequalities remain, especially as northern literacy lags (UNESCO 2012). In terms of government response to these challenges, Beninese have consistently felt that the government has mismanaged its response to unemployment, with current sentiment 75 percent against (Afrobarometer Aug. 2019).

The most interesting response is related to how respondents view their economic condition compared to others. In 2008 and 2011, about one third of all respondents felt that they were worse off than their fellow compatriots, but this figure climbed to 45 and 59 percent respectively in 2014 and 2017. So while their personal conditions have stagnated, they see themselves as slipping compared to others. This seems to be possible evidence of an impending malign tunnel effect as Beninese lose their patience with growing real and perceived inequality.

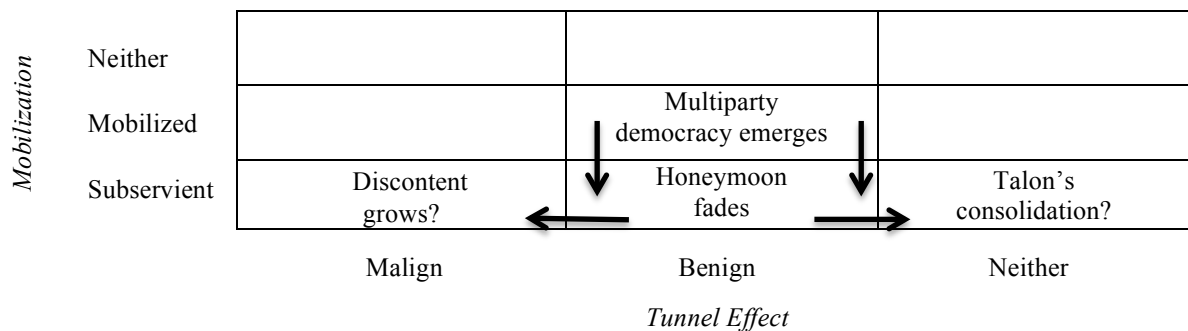
Thus, putting contemporary Benin into the Evans-Hirschmann typologies is not fully clear. Since the national conference, the statistics show a retained optimism that supports a continued benign tunnel effect, but there is also evidence that it is fading. In terms of the Evans internalized oppression criteria, Benin has returned back to subservience after a blip of mobilization following the advent of nominal democracy. Now, the question is whether



Benin is moving toward a malign tunnel effect or if Talon will be able to sweep this discontent under the rug as Kérékou did in 1972?

The answer likely relies on the level of internalized oppression still present in society. In the tunnel example, Benin’s masses remain in the third lane traffic jam and are choosing between starting to honk the horn against Talon or to just shut off the engine and wait out the traffic. They have done both in the past: submitting to Kérékou’s consolidation in 1972 and disengaging, in contrast to becoming more active in the aftermath of the national conference.

Figure 4: Benin From 1990 to Present



A lesson from the 1990s is that Benin’s non-elites have their eyes more so on the middle class than the elites, and thus this group’s mobilization may be instructive. A democratic backslide may be enough to prompt a middle class response, yet so far protests have been in the hundreds and not thousands of people and Talon has been able to push through policies over public dissent (Freedom House 2019). Another potential lesson is that it took an economic crisis for mobilization to undo Kérékou. With Nigeria’s border closure threatening trade volumes, Talon could thus potentially be on thin ice with elections planned for 2021.

**Conclusion:**

The point of this paper was to explore if and why Benin’s non-elite masses have been largely passive in the face of stagnant growth. Foremost, the findings *do* support the notion that Beninese non-elites have generally avoided mobilization, helping to explain why working with the grain has been accepted over such long periods of time. However, this is not to say that non-elites have been static throughout Benin’s history. Tracing their identity, perceptions, and actions over time presents a fuller picture of Beninese history and allows for a better understanding of the country’s recent democratic backslide.

First, a key finding is that Benin’s legacy of slavery undoubtedly has a part to play in Beninese identities and willingness to mobilize. Slavery created internalized hierarchies that have proven incredibly resilient, affecting not only individual identities but group dynamics, especially in the north of the country. Favored status of the coastal commercial class has also created structural inequalities that have only widened, having never been fully addressed.

Second, an analysis of the national conference movement indicates that non-elites did not play a catalyzing role; however, real knock-on effects were felt as the installation of democracy led rural groups to leverage associational gains made under Kérékou. Even more importantly, the case study of 1990 sheds light on a more nuanced divide between elites, the middle class, and the masses in Benin. The country’s tunnel effect is more accurately described as a pair of elite-middle class and middle class-masses relationships, where conflict

and change has occurred at the margins but never in a revolutionary manner. The middle class has been a broker or gatekeeper to date; yet their interests have not aligned enough with the masses to incentivize more disruptive calls for change. It is not that mobilization has not been possible in Benin, but that agency has been far more in the middle class camp than that of rural farmers and urban poor.

Third, a review of the past twenty years indicates that Benin may be struggling more with harmful continuities than any policy missteps. Democracy has not been a magic bullet and may have even created a deceptive façade that has allowed Benin's structural and political economy issues to fester under the radar. Rural livelihoods are largely unchanged and back and forth reforms between the public and private sectors have pushed farmers to distrust and disengagement. Economic perceptions are generally bad, yet optimism for the future remains. But as perceptions of relative economic status continue to deteriorate, the traditional tolerance for inequality may finally be fading.

At present, Benin is at its first inflection point since 1990 and democracy is facing its first real test as Talon consolidates his control over the government's checks and balances. While speculative, this paper's tracing of non-elite incorporation across periods can help identify the likely trajectory moving forward. For better or for worse, it does not appear likely that Benin's rural masses will spontaneously mobilize, as subservience has been the norm except for mild blips around independence and the inauguration of democracy. Based on the context of these blips, though, ideas matter, and a symbolic backslide in democracy could promote a mild associational response, as has arguably begun. In 1990, though, the middle class took the reins and the floodgates only opened when crisis was in full effect.

Thus, as the country barrels toward elections in 2021, keen observers should focus their attention on the state of the economy and the role of urban salaried workers as the key indicators for potential mobilization. At some point, working against the grain will be necessary if Benin is to foster inclusive development, but without an external shock, the system seems insulated and content to keep working with the grain.

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