



Benin — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[Formerly known as Dahomey]

10/17/1899 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: Dahomey became a French protectorate on 01/01/1894. Since 10/17/1899 it was a colony as part of French West Africa. In 1956 universal suffrage was introduced (see also LIED). Elections with a significantly restricted franchise took place in 1925, 1928, 1932, 1934, and 1936. Hence, the observation of LIED that there were neither multiparty executive and legislative elections during this period is not entirely correct. LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as absent. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were absent during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

12/15/1946 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]: Elections for the General Council in French Dahomey took place on 12/15/1946 and 01/05/1947. The Dahomeyan Progressive Union emerged victoriously, securing 20 out of the 30 available seats. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem's PCLI. In the timeframe 1947-1951, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as limited, showing weak judicial oversight, while V-Dem's LCE shows no value, usually reflecting the absence of a parliament to constrain the executive. However, in this case, there was clearly a parliament that V-Dem might have overlooked. For the year 1952, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. During the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. According to our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

04/12/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date Dahomey became a self-governing unit within the French Community (Republic of Dahomey) (Lansford 2021: 164). LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties as not really present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held.

04/02/1959 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, fairly competitive pre-independence elections took place. On 08/01/1960 Dahomey became fully independent (Lansford 2021: 164, Marshall 2018c). However, after independence a highly problematic winner-take-all system, which cannot be considered democratic, was introduced. The election in one national district led to one party (Dahomeyan Unity Party) taking all seats with 68.7 per cent of the vote and the other party (Dahomeyan Democratic Union) with 31.3 per cent of the vote

was left with no seat at all. Since the elections were competitive, the regime is not classified as a one-party autocracy (Decalo 1973:458, Ronen 1973: 27-28, Carter 1963: 229-231, Mathews 1966:144). In the month before the elections, several opposition deputies were dismissed from parliament and opposition party activists were harassed, further limiting their ability to compete. In April-May 1961, repression intensified. The opposition party was dissolved, and its leaders arrested (Decalo 1973: 458, Ronen 1973: 27-28, Carter 1963: 229-231, Mathews 1966:144, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 44). According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held in 1959, in 1960 executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. In addition, no electoral competitiveness was present (LIED). V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI classify the elections during this period as somewhat free and fair but not really clean. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as not really present in 1959 and as ambiguous in 1960 and 1961. LIED classifies political liberties as absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

05/31/1961 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: On this date, accusations of plotting a coup resulted in the arrest of Ahomadegbe and the prohibition of his political organization, the Union Democratique Dahomeenne. Consequently, Dahomey transitioned into a one-party state under the governance of the Parti Dahomeende l'Unite (Marshall 2018c). It remains unclear which specific features of the rule under Hubert Maga as head of government brought GWF and AF to classify the regime as personalist. V-Dem EF&FI and CEI maintain their scoring. PRC classified it as democratic, which seems clearly wrong, and MCM as single party, which is in line with our observation. As it is often the case with regimes in Africa, there is a lot of disagreement in the regime classification. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. According to our observations, non-multiparty legislative and executive elections are classified as present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Besides, LIED scores political liberties still as absent and V-Dem's PCLI changed to what we interpret as an ambiguous presence.

10/27[&28]/1963 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: Extensive protests and a widespread general strike compelled the military to depose Maga and take control to reinstate order. The military replaced a civilian leader with another, effectively establishing a de facto military regime (Decalo 1973: 458-459, Decalo 1976:52, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 44). On 12/22/1965 Congacou, the President of the National Assembly, was given power as provisional President by General Christophe Soglo, Army Chief of Staff, and had a constitutional mandate to hold elections quickly. However, Congacou failed to do so and was overthrown by Soglo. Following a coup, General Soglo assumed direct control of power (Decalo 1973: 459-460, Decalo 1976: 8, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 44). Since 1965, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Besides, political liberties were coded as absent (LIED) and as ambiguous by V-Dem's PCLI. In 1964 a limited legislative election was held. Therefore, according to our observations, non-multiparty legislative elections were present in 1964, yet absent during the rest of this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

12/17/1967 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: Another round of political crisis coupled with a devastating general strike promoted a group of junior officers to depose General Soglo from power. Major Kouandate took power and established a provisional military government. The regime elite differed

fundamentally even if both regimes were military. While in the previous regime top officers from the South dominated, in the new regime lower ranked officers from the South reigned (Bebler 1973: 20-23, Decalo 1973:464, Decalo 1976:55, 64-66, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 44-45). The new regime created the Military Revolutionary Committee as a decision-making body, but the main decisions were made by an informal junta (Bebler 1973:23). Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. In this timeframe, V-Dem's JCE is classified as moderate, indicating occasional judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Regarding the political liberties the scores remained the same (LIED, V-Dem PCLI). According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were absent during this period, lasting until 1980, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

12/10/1969 End Military Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: Zinsou, the civilian president chosen by the military, demonstrated a level of independence beyond what was anticipated, prompting Kouandete to order his abduction. The remaining officer corps declined to endorse Kouandete as the government leader but instead replaced Zinsou with a Military Directorate accountable to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. This Directorate included representatives from major regions and factions. While Kouandete remained a part of this structure, his authority was curtailed, and he no longer held the predominant role (Bebler 1973: 25, Decalo 1973: 469-470, Decalo 1976: 72, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 44-45). On 12/13/1969 a Military Directorate responsible to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces replaced Zinsou/Kouandete. The regime is coded as a different regime because the regional/ethnic and rank composition of the ruling group changed. „Fon officers who had previously been retired or arrested under the former regime, were reinstated and entrusted with influential positions in the new government (Decalo 1976: 72-73, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 45). Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Political liberties were coded absent by LIED and can be interpreted as being in an ambiguous state per V-Dem's PCLI.

05/07/1970 End Military Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: In March 1970 elections were held that were aborted (Decalo 1970: 445). The military turned power over to an unelected civilian Presidential Council representing the three major regionally based leaders and parties in the country. The Presidential Council was to serve as a transitional body with the presidency to rotate among the three leaders in preparation for new democratic elections. The military withdrew from politics and members of the presidential council agreed to rotate the presidency (Decalo 1973: 470-476, Decalo 1976: 76f, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 45). The military's withdrawal from governmental power was voluntary in character, thus we code this regime change event as a voluntary exit. In 1970 and 1971, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power. For 1971, V-Dem's JCE is classified as moderate, indicating occasional judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1972, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. LIED continued to code political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI can be interpreted with an ambiguous presence of political liberties.

10/26/1972 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Military Autocracy: Presumably frustrated with the unstable nature of the rotating presidential system, General Mathieu Kérékou together with junior officers staged a coup and established himself as the head of a Military Committee for the Revolution.¹ They replaced the entire senior military establishment (Decalo 1973: 476-477, Decalo 1976-80, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 45). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were not really present in 1973 and absent in the following years until 1989. LIED

identifies political liberties as absent. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

11/30/1974 End Military Autocracy/Start Communist Ideocracy: On this date, Commander Mathieu Kérékou declared that the country is communist. On 11/30/1975 Benin was named the People's Republic of Benin. Strikes and demonstrations from late 1989 to mid-1990 forced the Kerekou government to agree to a National Conference, which transformed itself into a transitional interim government (Soble 2007). According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. Until 1989, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. For the year 1999, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, for this period LIED and V-Dem's PCLI coded political liberties as absent. In the one-party system, unfree and fair legislative elections were staged in 1980. According to our observations, only non-multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

02/25/1990 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Democratizing Regime: On this date the National Conference was declared sovereign by most of its delegates and against the will of Kérékou², thus this regime change event is classified as a civilian opposition coup. It appointed a transitional government. The role of Kérékou was reduced to a figurehead. He gave up the Defense Ministry and military provincial prefects were replaced by civilians. On 03/01/1990 Benin became the Republic of Benin. The transitional government was led by the opposition and rewrote the constitution (Englebert 2004: 67-68).³ According to FH, for the regime period under consideration, a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. Political liberties according to V-Dem's PCLI were somewhat present for this period and still absent following LIED. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. In this period of transition, according to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were absent, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

02/17/1991 End Democratizing Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date the first multi-party elections (for parliament) in the country since 1964 took place.⁴ On 03/10+24/1991 multi-candidate presidential elections were held.⁵ The elections were won by opposition politician Niiéphore Soglo, who had headed the transitional government (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 16). Per FH's scoring until 1994, the country is classified as free with a score of 5, which falls into our interpretation of the rather free category. For the period from 1995 to 1998, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. In 1999, the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework and in 2000 the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Between 2001 and 2002 Benin is rated once again as free with a score of 5 (rather not free in our interpretation). From 2003 onwards, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4. Political liberties according to LIED were present from 1995 to 2017 and according to V-Dem's PCLI present from 1991 to 2018 and somewhat present from 2019 onward. Free and fair elections were the norm in Benin from 1991 to 2016 although there have been claims of electoral fraud in the 2001 presidential elections, leading to a boycott by the Renaissance Party of Benin (Gisselquist 2014: 137).⁶ Freedom of expression and association were generally respected, although there were periods of restriction, such as the months-long ban on student

association activities that began in late 2016. Additionally, corruption remained a challenge. While the executive branch generally acknowledged judicial independence, the courts operated with inefficiency and susceptibility to corruption. The procedures for nominating and advancing judges lacked transparency.⁷ According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED and our observations the elections were competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores the elections as somewhat free and fair while the CEI scores bounces between in our interpretation somewhat clean and elections with ambiguous cleanliness. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive encountered substantial institutional limitations on power. From 1992 to 2017, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were comprehensive. For 2018, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. The following year, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive.

04/28/2019 End Electoral Democracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: The government under Talon elected in 2016 introduced a new electoral code in 2018 that required parties to obtain a threshold of 19 percent of the overall votes to win seats in the National Assembly and pay a deposit to put up candidates. Moreover, the national Constitutional Court declared further party assessments in February 2019, which were only passed by two parties.⁸ The 2019 legislative elections were described as neither free nor fair. Only the Republican Bloc and the Progressive Union, both of which are assumed to be linked to incumbent President Patrice Talon, were registered to contest the elections, while the election commission disapproved the applications of the five other opposition groups.⁹ Protests erupted following the elections demanding the President Talon's resignation. As a response, security forces arrested major opposition leaders and political journalists. In April 2021, President Talon was re-elected as president with 86 percent of the vote (Lansford 2021: 167).¹⁰ In parliamentary elections on 01/08/2023 the pro-government parties emerged as winners, ensuring that the incumbent president, Patrice Talon, continued to lead the government, despite not being a member of either party. Talon enjoyed support from both the UPR and BR. Éric Houndété, leader of the opposition LD party, alleged instances of vote buying and ballot stuffing without providing evidence. He expressed dissatisfaction with the election results, claiming that they did not reflect the will of the people to make his party the leading political force in the country. Election observers, including the local organization Civic Academy for Africa's Future (CiAAF), noted that these elections were notably free from violence compared to previous elections in 2019 and 2021.¹¹ According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. While our observations indicate that the elections were not free, fair, or transparent, they were nonetheless multiparty, thereby fulfilling the prerequisites for an electoral autocracy. Elections were not competitive per LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI indicates that elections were not really free or fair and their cleanliness was ambiguous per V-Dem's CEI. According to FH, a score of 6 to 7 until 2020 designates the country as partly free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather free. From 2021 onwards, the country is partly free per FF with a score of 7 to 8, which we interpret as rather not free. Moreover, regarding the political liberties they are absent since 2019 per LIED. We classify V-Dem's PCLI as dropping back to somewhat present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

Electoral Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Carter 1963, Decalo 1990a, Hartmann 1999, Houngnikpo 2001, Lansford 2021, Magnusson/Clark 2005, Mathews 1966, Ronen 1973, Soble 2007)

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathieu_K%C3%A9r%C3%A9kouli
- ² [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conf%C3%A9rence_nationale_souveraine_\(B%C3%A9nin\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conf%C3%A9rence_nationale_souveraine_(B%C3%A9nin))
- ³ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Benin_1990?lang=en
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Beninese_parliamentary_election
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Beninese_presidential_election
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3_November_1975_Bangladeshi_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat;
<https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BEN>; <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BEN>
- ⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2018>
- ⁸ <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/africa/suicide-of-a-democracy-3438/>.
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Beninese_parliamentary_election
- ¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2020>
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Beninese_parliamentary_election

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