# Dodging the bullet of electoral violence: a case study of Benin

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Word count: 7687

*Abstract*

*For several countries in sub-Saharan Africa, electoral violence is a regular phenomenon. Benin, however, manages to conduct a series of peaceful elections. Despite that ethnic identity is an important feature of Benin politics, violence does not occur during election times. This paper investigates how it is possible that Benin did not experience electoral violence in a context of politicized ethnic identity. A secondary data analysis is conducted to investigate causes of electoral violence, highlighted in the literature and to investigate the features that could account for Benin's peaceful electoral processes. I find that the electoral system employed in Benin, the absence of a culture of violence and the absence of horizontal inequalities are important factors that contribute to the country's stability.*

# 1. Introduction

For nearly half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa electoral violence is a common phenomenon. Violence in times of elections is not as common as generally thought, but it is frequent enough to raise serious concerns since almost one-fifth of all elections result in significant violence (Straus & Taylor, 2012, p. 32). Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of electoral violence and the context in which it takes place. In media coverage, electoral violence is often portrayed as ethnic or tribal conflict, as was the case in British media coverage of the 2007 post-election violence in Kenya (Somerville, 2009). Even though ethnicity is an important factor in the emergence and intensity of electoral violence, the dynamics of electoral violence are often of a more complex nature and structure than ethnic conflict alone. There have been studies that focussed on causes of electoral violence, which I will also discuss in this paper. The question of when politicized ethnic identity leads to violence and when this is not the case has not sufficiently been addressed, however. In order to better understand the dynamics of politicized ethnic identity and electoral violence it is necessary to study cases of politicized ethnic identity in combination with the absence of electoral violence. This study aims to contribute to this question.

The research question of this paper is: *why does electoral violence not appear in Benin?* Obviously, Benin is the case in this study. Benin has a legacy of peaceful electoral processes, even though the country is characterized by politicized ethnic identity. This makes Benin an interesting object of study to better understand the dynamics of electoral violence. By studying Benin as a deviant case I will contribute to theory by investigation what factors mitigate the effect of politicized ethnic identity on electoral violence. A secondary data analysis is conducted to research how Benin manages to keep away from electoral violence. I also use data from the Afrobarometer project to investigate perceived inequality.

I find that the electoral system employed in Benin, the absence of a culture of violence and the absence of severe inequality between ethnic groups are important factors in Benin's history of non-violent democratic elections.

This paper will follow with a literature review in which contains a discussion of the concept of electoral violence, causes of electoral violence that have been addressed in previous academic research and section that highlights the importance of politicized ethnic identity in explaining electoral violence. After that follows a description of the case. There I discuss the history of Benin, and the country's political and societal structure. The fourth sections contains the analysis, which

focusses on why Benin did not experience electoral violence in a context of politicized ethnic identity. In the analysis institutional factors, the absence of a culture of violence and horizontal inequalities will be discussed. The concluding section contains, besides the findings from the analysis, a short overview of recent developments that are taking place in Benin.

## 2. Literature review

*The concept of electoral violence*

Before I can discuss the absence of electoral violence in Benin, it is important to first define the concept of electoral violence. Straus and Taylor (2012, p. 19) define electoral violence as "physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or an announced electoral result". This approach to electoral violence as an instrument to influence electoral results is also used by Fjelde and Höglund (2016, p. 299). They see electoral violence as a strategic effort to manipulate or influence electoral outcomes. Other authors understand electoral violence as coercive force, which occurs in the context of electoral competition, that is directed towards electoral actors and/or objects (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018, p. 386). Birch and Muchlinski identify a variety of actors that can be target of this coercive force, such as political candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters. A combination of the two concepts above provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept of electoral violence. When the two concepts of electoral violence are combined, we end up with the following concept: electoral violence is the use of physical violence or coercive intimidation, targeted at electoral actors and/or objects that has as goal to manipulate or influence electoral outcomes.

When violence takes place it remains difficult to determine whether it is related to elections, however. To determine whether violence takes place in the context of electoral competition Straus and Taylor use a specific time period. They classify violence in the period six months before elections to three months after elections as electoral violence (2012, pp. 19-20). Although the possibility remains that violence in this specific period is not directly related to elections this paper will follow this operationalization and make use of Straus & Taylor's dataset on electoral violence to assess its occurrence or absence in Benin.

*The scale of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa*

How often does electoral violence take place in sub-Saharan Africa and how big of a problem is it? The data that Straus and Taylor (2012) use provides insights on the scale of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa and on the severity of the violence that occurs. In their paper they establish the general patterns of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 until 2008. They find that electoral

violence is not as frequent as generally thought, but that electoral violence is frequent enough to raise serious concerns, since nearly one-fifth of the elections in the database result in significant violence and that for nearly half of the countries electoral violence is a regular phenomenon (Straus & Taylor, 2012, p. 32). The most severe cases of electoral violence took place in Nigeria (2011) and Kenya (2007), where many people were killed and more displaced.

Besides that Straus & Taylor (2012, pp. 32-33) find that there is variation of electoral violence on a cross-national level and within countries across time, that incumbent forces overall are more violent than challengers, that violence is more likely to take place before the elections, but that violence that takes place after the polling date is likely to be more intense and that presidential elections are slightly more violent than legislative elections.

They also identify six scenarios of how electoral violence takes place. The first is harassment and street brawls, which is the breaking up of political rallies, raiding of newspapers and clashes between groups of party supporters. Second is immobilizing the opposition, in which opponents are removed from the electoral playing field through killings, arrests and torture. The third scenario is similar to the second, but in this scenario, the violence is targeted at opposition supporters and not exclusively towards opposition leaders. The fourth scenario occurs when national and local electoral interest align, this is the case when local actors seek to gain access to vital resources and national actors seek to secure electoral victory. The fifth scenario is related to the fourth, but in this case the violence is centralized in a single region and not a nation-wide phenomenon. The last scenario is violence that takes place when protests, triggered by electoral results, are repressed with force.

*Causes of electoral violence*

In academic literature, several explanations have been given for why electoral violence takes place. This section will discuss the causes of electoral violence that have been highlighted in the literature. I specifically will discuss institutional explanations for electoral violence, the role of a culture of violence and the effects that patrimonialism and zero-sum politics have on violence. This theoretical framework will end with a general summary on the importance of ethnic politics in explaining electoral violence.

*Institutional explanations*

An institutional explanation for electoral violence is given by Fjelde & Höglund (2016). They state that electoral systems are important in shaping the incentives for governments and opposition to engage in electoral violence. They conduct a cross-national statistical analysis and find that in countries with majoritarian voting rules electoral violence is more likely to occur. These majoritarian rules are particularly likely to provoke violence in case of exclusion of large ethno-political groups

from power and significant economic inequalities. This is also emphasized by Höglund (2009, pp. 421-422) in earlier research. There she explains that electoral systems in which a small number of votes can make a big difference, like first-past-the-post systems, violence is more likely to occur. In the same article, she points to the nature of elections as an explanation for violence. Since differences are emphasized during periods of electoral competition, this has the potential danger of intensifying social conflicts and cleavages.

The competitiveness of elections can also be an explanation for the eruption of electoral violence. Electoral violence is likely to erupt in situations where there is a genuine possibility of a swift in existing power-relations. Politicians competing in a close electoral race have strong incentives to resort to violence (Höglund, 2009, p. 421). This argument is supported by the case of the 2007 elections in Kenya. In this election, the results were too close to call and it is argued that these close results sparked underlying factors to ignite, which resulted into violence (Mueller, 2012, p. 146). One of the factors Mueller (2012) identifies fits the institutional explanation for electoral violence. The institutional factor she identifies is that of weak institutions, that are mostly overridden by a highly personalized presidency. However, institutions outside the presidency were also a cause of violence. The institutions associated with vetting a contested election were not viewed as neutral enough to do so (Mueller, 2012, p. 146). The competitive nature of elections as a cause of electoral violence is also found in the case of Nigeria in 2011. Angerbrandt (2018, p. 163) studies how national elections led to increased ethno-regional polarisation. He finds that national polarisation was intensified by the elections, which contributed to mobilization of local networks of security.

Insecure electoral processes are also an important cause, since they tend to exacerbate underlying root causes that are often grounded in perceptions of horizontal inequalities, in which economic inequalities or opportunities overlap with ethnic or religious identity (Sisk, 2012, p. 40). To overcome insecure electoral processes an independent electoral commission can play an important role. Institutional and structural weak functioning of the electoral commission have proven to be significant factors in electoral violence (Oduro, 2012, p. 221). When the electoral commission is an independent body that is hard to be influenced by political actors the electoral process and result is more legitimate, and therefore less contested. In Ghana (2008), the electoral commission played a violence-reducing role by promoting dialogue between parties and building consensus and trust in the electoral process. A special commission was established in 1993 to manage political parties' distrust of the electoral commission and of each other. This commission succeeded to do this in the 2008 elections (Oduro, 2012, p. 227).

*Culture of violence*
Another factor that has been identified as a probable cause of electoral violence is the culture of

violence. This is especially evident in post-conflict countries. When there has been recent conflict and the parties in the conflict have not yet been demobilised or disarmed it is more likely that violence regenerates. When parties are still armed, it is easier to return to violence when actors are dissatisfied with electoral outcomes. This was the case in Angola in the 1992 elections. Peace accords ended a 30-year long civil war, but demobilization did not take place as planned. When the 1992 election results were rejected by the losing party, the violence resumed (Pereira, 1994, p. 2). Another aspect of the culture of violence is that exposure to violence and psychological trauma help to reinforce the circle of violence (Höglund, 2009, p. 421). Meuller (2012, p. 146) also identifies a factor that fits the culture of violence in the Kenyan case. The decline of the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force resulted in an outbreak of violence after the close elections. In Cote d'Ivoire, there has been no accountability for human rights abuses. This may help to explain why, after the 2010 elections in Cote d'Ivoire, the patterns and perpetrators of violence display strong continuities with the previous civil war (Straus, 2011, p. 489).

*Patrimonialism and zero-sum politics*

Patrimonial relations have often been given as an explanation for electoral violence. Sisk (2012, p. 69) even argues that the persistence of a neopatrimonial state in Africa must be at the heart of causal accounts of electoral violence. Structural grievances can cause violence, and accounts for these grievances can be found in land or chieftaincy disputes; political, cultural or economic marginalization along identity lines; and state fragility and neopatrimonialism (Sisk, 2012, p. 44). Sisk explains that when winning a state office is important, not only for the individual, but also for the livelihood of an entire clan, faction or ethnic group, the stakes for prevailing in electoral violence are dangerously high (2012, p. 45). When violence is perpetrated it is usually to achieve or hinder state capture, but when greed interacts with identity construction it is most politically salient (Sisk, 2012, p. 69).

Taylor, Pevehouse & Straus (2017, p. 408) find that elections where incumbent presidents are running for re-election are more likely to result in electoral violence than elections where incumbent presidents do not run for re-elections. They argue that patron/client relationships and neo-patrimonialism are factors that influence this finding. They argue that clients resort to violence in electoral periods to protect a reliable patron. Höglund (2009) makes a similar claim to explain electoral violence. She argues that patrimonialism leads to violence because it excludes groups and encourages corruption. Clients have an interest in keeping their patron in power, because of the benefits it gives them, in some cases they will use violence to protect their patron's place in office (Höglund, 2009, p. 420). Patronage is also used to boost support or turnout for the ruling party. It is found that land is used as a patronage resource and that by seizing and reallocating land ruling parties

boost support and turnout for them (Boone, 2011, p. 1328).

Zero-sum politics are also an important cause for violence. Mueller (2012) finds that in Kenya the political parties were not programmatic, but driven by ethnic clientelism. In addition, that the parties had a winner-takes-all view of political power and its associated by-products. These party politics predisposed leaders and followers of parties to see politics as a zero-sum game. This, in combination with the close election resulted in severe violence (Mueller, 2012, p. 146). The zero-sum nature of politics is portrayed by how violence was perpetrated deliberately, to gain electoral advantages and maintain power (Mueller, 2012, p. 147).


*The importance of ethnic identity in explaining electoral violence*

Ethnicity plays an important role when it comes to electoral violence. In many cases of electoral violence, ethnicity plays a role. In Nigeria in the 2011 elections, national polarisation intersected with local grievances between Muslim and Christian ethnic groups, which led to regional violence (Angerbrandt, 2018, p. 163). In Kenya, rival ethnic groups were intimidated to discourage them from voting, or they were driven from their homes, so they could not vote on election day (Boone, 2011, p. 1328). Sisk argues that the scramble for resources is only part of the picture in explaining electoral violence. He states that mobilization for violence often occurs along ethnic or religious lines, so theories of root causes of violence must look deeper then explanations of economic scarcity (Sisk, 2012, p. 40). He says ethnic fragmentation is a contingent factor for violence that depends on the nature of social structure and of elites' mobilization along ethnic lines and that ethnic differences and a history of prior conflict along ethnic lines are leading social factors for conflict (Sisk, 2012, p. 45). Ethnicity plays a role in violence when there is exclusion of ethno-political groups or severe economic inequalities, when polarisation intersects with horizontal inequalities, and when patrimonialism and patronage are linked to ethnic identity. Party politics can be influenced by ethnicity also, as we have seen in the case of Kenya (Mueller, 2012, p. 146).

Apart from this ethnicity also has an effect on the self-identification of voters. In periods of elections, especially competitive elections, ethnic self-identification is higher than periods when there are no elections (Eifert, Miguel & Posner, 2010, p. 508). Because politicized ethnic identity has an influence on so many aspects of electoral violence in Africa, we can say that ethnicity is important in explaining electoral violence.


Ethnic identity, however, does not always lead to violence, even when ethnic identity is considered important in electoral politics. This is the case for Benin, which has not experienced high levels of electoral violence, even though voting occurs along ethnic lines. The question of when politicized ethnic identity leads to violence and when this is not the case has not sufficiently been addressed,

however. Indeed, in most of the causal explanations outlined above, ethnicity has played an important role. This raises the question whether well-designed institutions, the absence of a culture of violence, and absence of group inequalities and zero-sum politics, can actually contribute to peaceful elections, even in the face of politicized ethnicity. To contribute to this theoretical question I conduct a case study of Benin.

The research question of this paper is hence: *Why does electoral violence not appear in Benin?* By studying a deviant case we can contribute to theory by examining which factors mitigate the effect of politicized ethnic identity on electoral violence. A secondary data analysis will be conducted to explain the absence of electoral violence in Benin, making use of academic literature, reports from NGOs and news reports. I will also make use of data from the Afrobarometer project. This is useful in understanding perceptions from the people in Benin, with regard to inequality, violence and identity.

In the following section, I provide a short historical overview of Benin. This is followed by an analysis of the role ethnicity plays in the country and an overview of Benin's experience with electoral violence. After that, I turn the analysis itself focussing on why Benin has not experienced electoral violence in a context of politicized ethnic identity.

## 3. Case description

*History of Benin*

Benin used to be named the kingdom of Dahomey. Under Mathieu Kérékou, the name changed to Benin in an effort to create a set of symbols of national identity. In 1904, the kingdom of Dahomey became a part of French West Africa. In 1946, the country becomes an overseas territory of France, and the kingdom of Dahomey is now Dahomey. Twelve years later, in 1958, Dahomey becomes a self-governing state within the French community and on the first of August 1960, Dahomey is granted full independence (Houngnikpo & Decalo, 2013, pp. xxxi-xxxii). In the colonial period, traditional and local authorities were severely undermined by the French. Therefore, Benin had few local authority figures when the period of mass politics began (Koter, 2013, pp. 203-204).

The first years of independence Benin experienced troubles, with several military interventions. Nugent (2004, p. 210) describes the Benin military regimes as caretakers, that is, a military regime that accepts the premise that the military does not belong in politics. Yet the military claims an obligation to remove bad civilian politicians, as part of their obligation to defend the interest of the nation. On the 26th of October in 1972, Major Mathieu Kérékou seized power through a military coup. The armed forces established the claim to rule in their own right in the supposed absence of an

alternative for Benin (Nugent, 2004, p. 211). This military regime brought stability and ended political hegemony of colonial educated elites by transferring power to a new civilian and military generation (Riedl, 2014, p. 90).

Although Kérékou first articulated a nationalist position and declared he did not want to follow any ideology, Marxism-Leninism was announced as the official ideology of the regime in November 1974. After declaring the socialist regime assets of foreign companies were quickly nationalised, the government dedicated itself to egalitarian allocation of state resources, and new political structures were created, which were supposed to provide more political participation. The regime institutionalised itself through a political party, the Parti Révolutionnaire du Benin (PRPB), founded in November 1975, but in reality the regime was still under control of military officers (Nugent, 2004, pp. 248-249). In its attempt to consolidate rule the authoritarian regime neutralized the strength of traditional chiefdoms. The regime tried to change existing political, economic and social structures and substitute them with control of the party. By initiating an anti-voodoo campaign to target traditional and religious authorities the PRPB wanted to overcome the feuds that led to instability in the previous decade. The party succeeded in neutralizing the political organizing capabilities of the traditional kingdoms, a critical basis of social and religious identity, which had been involved in the political contests in the prior decades (Riedl, 2014, pp. 113-114).

Halfway the 1980s the incumbent regime was in serious trouble. The county was in heavy debt, the economy was shrinking and there was not enough money to pay public employees on a regular basis. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) instructed the regime to dismantle the system of state controls. These measures influenced public sector employees, students and members of the armed forces, which expressed their dissatisfaction through strikes and demonstrations (Nugent, 2004, p. 250). Another important factor that had important consequences was the implosion of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The demise of Communism removed much of the ideological legitimation of Marxist regimes, like Benin (Nugent, 2004, p. 373).

The bankruptcy of the state led to mass demonstrations and strikes that were centred on economic and political reform, because it was generally believed that the government was the source of the crisis, since they controlled the entire economy (Riedl, 2015, pp. 93-94). Incumbent president Mathieu Kérékou realised that repression of the protests was not working, so he made a tactical decision. He promised to legalise political parties and to convene a national conference. The national conference consisted of a variety of social groups that would deliberate on changes to the constitution. The 500 members of the conference consisted of government representatives, opposition politicians,

trade unionists, women's leaders and churchmen. The first thing the conference did was declare sovereignty, which stripped the PRPB of its mandate to govern. Effective power was transferred to an interim government, with Nicéphore Soglo as interim Prime Minister. The interim government was given the responsibility to organize elections (Nugent, 2004, p. 387). The reforms focused on political pluralism, universal human rights, national sovereignty, economic development, political participation and expression, and the promotion of personal and political liberties. The reforms presented by the opposition forces were much more far-reaching than the initial incumbent agenda (Riedl, 2014, pp. 165, 167).

By referendum, a new constitutional draft was approved at the end of 1990, and national elections followed over February and March of 1991. In the national elections, Nicéphore Soglo defeated Kérékou and the PRPB, and the incumbent regime was voted out of office without further troubles. According to Riedl (2014, p. 133), the weak/fragmented state of the incumbent party and the weak/fragmented state of the opposition challengers led to this open transition process. Benin had become the model of a successful transition through democratic elections and in 1996 Benin became the first country to alternate its government. In this election, Kérékou was voted back to the presidential office (Nugent, 2004, p. 388).

*Political structure*
Benin is a presidential republic and the president serves a five-year term and is eligible for a second term. The president is elected by a two-round majority formula. The president is both head of state and head of government. The legislative body is unicameral and consist of 83 seats. Members of the National Assembly are elected directly in multi-member districts by proportional representation, and serve a four-year term (The World Factbook, 2016). In the period before the first democratic election there was a rapid expansion of the amount of political parties (Creevey, Ngomo & Vengroff, 2005, p. 473). However, Benin represents low levels of party system institutionalization. The political parties are fluid and because of that, they have less influence on voters and the political system (Riedl, 2014, p. 55). Benin is rated as 'Free' by the Freedom House index. The country scores an aggregate of 79 out of 100, where 100 is most free. On both freedom rating, political rights and civil liberties Benin scores 2 out of 7, where 1 is most free (Freedom House, 2019).

*Ethnicity*
Ethnicity plays an important role in the politics of Benin. The country has about 40 different ethnic groups, from which the Fon are the largest (38.4%), followed by Adja (15.1%), Yoruba (12%), Bariba (9.6%) and Fulani (8.6%). About 50% of the inhabitants is Christian, about 25% Muslim and about

15% practices Voodoo or other traditional religions (The World Factbook, 2016).

The policies of the French colonial regime and the Marxist regime reduced the power and influence of local authority figures in Benin. In the absence of strong local leaders and hierarchical ties, politicians pursued ethnic politics during the first mass electoral politics and in contemporary elections and ethnic affiliations have been an important tool of political mobilization in Benin (Koter, 2013, pp. 190, 206). Since the democratic election in 1991, voting behaviour in Benin has been influenced by ethno-regional cleavages. The ethno-regional cleavages and groups serve as a cost-effective resource for group mobilization and interest definition. That is why politics in Benin is likely to remain structured around ethno-regional lines (Creevey et al., 2005, p. 472). The main political parties in Benin have a distinct ethnic character and ethnicity alone can predict 41% of the vote choice in the country (Koter, 2013, p. 214). Evidence is found for co-ethnic favouritism in Benin. Through a survey experiment, Adida found that 'playing the ethnic card' in politics works in Benin, subtle ethnic references by politicians result in more support (2015, p. 19).

*Electoral violence in Benin*

As has been discussed in the literature review, electoral violence in Sub-Saharan Africa is less frequent than commonly thought, but frequent enough to raise serious concerns. Nearly one-fifth of the elections in the African Electoral Violence Database (AEVD) results in significant violence, and for almost half of the countries in the database electoral violence is a regular phenomenon. Yet for Benin, the data show that there were never incidents of high electoral violence in eight elections spanning from 1991 to 2007 (Straus & Taylor, 2012, p. 27). Only in one elections, that of 1991, electoral violence has been observed. This is labelled as violent harassment in the AEVD, which is the existence of limited violence, but not as a central feature of the electoral period.

In the literature review, I discussed the importance of ethnic identity on explaining electoral violence. In this section we have seen that ethnicity plays an important role in the politics of Benin, and that many of the political mobilization moves along ethnic lines. Still Benin manages to dodge the bullet when it comes to experiencing serious levels of electoral violence. This makes Benin an interesting deviant case to study. In an attempt to learn more about the cross-national variation of electoral violence we can use the case of Benin. Given the ethnic diversity and the political mobilization along ethnic lines, it would be expected that Benin experienced electoral violence more often/more regular. By studying Benin as a deviant case I will contribute to the question of why politicized ethnic identity does not necessarily lead to electoral violence.

**4. Analysis**

In the following section I will discuss factors that can possibly explain the absence of electoral violence in Benin. The analysis will be structured in the same way as the literature review. First, the institutional explanations for Benin's stability will be addressed. After that, I will discuss the absence of a culture of violence in Benin as a possible explanation for peaceful electoral processes. The final section of the analysis addresses the topic of horizontal inequalities in Benin.

*Institutional dimensions in Benin*

There are several institutional factors that help to manage diversity and distrust. Benin possesses several institutional factors that promote stability in the ethnically diverse country. This section will discuss the institutional factors in Benin that help to promote stability and, thus, reduce the likelihood of electoral violence. I will discuss the electoral system, the closeness of elections and the functioning of the electoral commission.

In majoritarian electoral systems, electoral violence is more likely to occur. On the other hand, systems of proportional representation and a greater number of legislative seats per electoral district significantly reduce the risk of actors engaging in violent electoral strategies. Proportional systems are particularly important in mitigating the risk of electoral violence in countries where large ethno-regional groups are excluded from power and where large wealth inequalities exist (Fjelde & Höglund, 2016, p. 316). The exclusion of ethno-regional groups and inequalities will be discussed later in this analysis. Cheeseman (2015, pp. 204-209) argues that it is important to establish inclusive political systems in which parties that fail to secure the presidency are still able to participate in government, and that power-sharing agreements help to generate a more stable political environment, as was the case in Burundi in the 2005 elections. He also discusses the politics of inclusion, as advocated by Arendt Lijphart. That states that political systems are more legitimate and stable when different communities feel that they are included in government, and that their core interests are protected. Mechanisms of this politics of inclusion are power-sharing cabinets and a proportional distribution of the entire political system to the size of ethnic groups in a country (Cheeseman, 2015, p. 211).

In Benin, an electoral system of proportional representation is used, which reduces the risk of (political) actors engaging in violent electoral strategies. By employing a proportional electoral system Benin has an inclusive political system. Through the proportional representation, the different groups in the country feel represented and representation makes it more likely that their interests are protected. Although Benin does not make use of power-sharing agreements that guarantee seats to

particular groups, the electoral systems provides a power-sharing legislature through proportional representation. This also results in the need of politicians to form coalition governments. Because of the two-round majority formula in presidential elections, presidents can not be elected by a tiny fraction of the vote. Therefore, presidential candidates often need to build support across the political spectrum, often in the form of coalitions, in order to win office. From this, we can deduce that Benin, indeed, has inclusive institutional mechanisms that are important in reducing the chance of escalation along ethnic lines.

As discussed above, ethno-regional cleavage in Benin have serious consequences on electoral results. Although these ethno-regional cleavages have decisive effects on voting patterns, party strategies, and party system structure, the influence is contingent. This is because of sub-ethnic divisions within the ethnic groups, and the spatial dispersion over the administrative districts. These factors and the interaction with the electoral system prevent any single ethnic group from winning a majority in elections. This pushes political parties to the formation of cleavage crossing electoral coalitions to win competitive elections (Creevey et al., 2005, p. 474).

In addition, in Benin it is relatively easy for parties to compete in elections, which reduces the feeling of exclusion. In Zambia and Malawi, opposition parties pointed to the ruling parties' control of traditional leaders as the most significant factor that prevents them to be able to compete in elections (Cheeseman, 2015, p. 230). The lack of strong traditional leadership in Benin, as a result of undermining policies in the colonial and Kérékou periods, could explain why competing in elections is easier for opposition parties in Benin.

Electoral violence is especially likely to occur in the case of close race elections. I used the African Elections Database (2012) to see how close elections in Benin have been. Overall, election result in Benin do not portray close races. The first parliamentary elections in 1991 were relatively close, with many parties winning a sizeable part of the vote. The 1995 parliamentary elections were also relatively close, but not dramatic. In this election, the largest party won 21 of the 83 seats, and the runner-up won 19 seats. The closest presidential election was in 1996, between Soglo and Kérékou. In the second round, Kérékou won the presidency by winning with 52.49% of the vote. Thus, close race elections are not common in Benin and the emergence of electoral violence as a result of a close election is therefore unlikely in Benin.

Strong institutions and an independent electoral commission can be important in overcoming insecure electoral processes. According to Birch & Muchlinski the risk of electoral violence can be lowered

by increasing political inclusion, and by altering perceptions of likely exclusion and intentions of actors (like the electoral commission) in the electoral process. Lapses in the electoral process can result in violence if people believe that they are disadvantaged by these lapses. When there are no lapses in the electoral process the chance of violence is reduced (Birch & Muchlinski, 2018, pp. 387-388). Benin has an Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA), which includes representative from both the ruling party and the opposition. The country scores 3 out of 4 in the Freedom House (2019) on the question whether the electoral laws and framework are fair, and implemented impartially by the relevant election management body. The CENA, however, is not undisputed. After the presidential elections in 2011 there was doubt in the performance of the CENA, and the commission was accused of irregularities by the opposition (Freedom House, 2014). This indicates that lapses in the electoral process sometimes take place in Benin. However, these lapses do not result in violence, so likely people do not feel really disadvantaged by this.

*Culture of violence*

In the literature review, a culture of violence has been highlighted as a cause of electoral violence. This factor is especially evident in post-conflict countries. When a country did not experienced severe conflict in the past, and therefore does not know a culture of violence, stability during electoral periods is more likely. As mentioned above, the data from Straus and Taylor (2012) show that in Benin there have been no elections that experienced high levels of electoral violence. This tells us that violent behaviour during electoral periods is not in the country's DNA. Using the UCPD/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg & Strand, 2002; Petterson, Högbladh & Öberg, 2019), I find that from 1946 to 2018 there has been no armed conflict in Benin. In the UCDP one-sided violence dataset (Eck & Hultman, 2007; Petterson et al., 2019) and the UCDP non-state conflict dataset (Sunderberg, Eck & Kreutz, 2012; Petterson et al., 2019) there are no documentations of conflict in Benin. This means that in the period from 1989 to 2018 there were no events of one-sided or non-state conflict. The absence of any form of serious conflict in Benin's history could be a possible explanation for the absence of electoral violence, since a history of violence along ethnic lines is one of the leading social factors for conflict (Sisk, 2012, p. 45).

Violence is also not common in Benin in the context of public protests. On the question whether respondents feared for and experienced violence during public protests in the past two years, almost 80% responds that they have not feared for violence (table 1). Violence is rarely experienced during public protest, which indicates that there is quite a safe environment to protest.

**Table 1: Feared violence during public protest**

|  | % | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| No, never | 79.8 | 957 |
| Yes, feared but not experienced | 13.9 | 166 |
| Yes, feared and experienced | 5.8 | 69 |
| Don't know | 0.6 | 7 |
| (N) | (100) | (1200) |

Data: Afrobarometer R7 2016/2018.

*Horizontal inequalities in Benin*

The existence of horizontal inequalities in a country and the perception of politics as a zero-sum game can be a determining factor that spurs electoral violence, which has been addressed in the literature review. Birch & Muchlinski (2018, pp. 388-389) argue that capacity-building electoral violence prevention strategies are not sufficient to address underlying grievances. According to them, attitude-transformation in the form of mediation, dialogue and 'social enforcement', are more likely to be effective in altering attitudes towards violence. Especially in circumstances where actors instrumentally resort to violence in electoral periods, due to grievances and/or belief in the efficacy of violence as a tool. The instrumental use of violence at election time is not something that happens in Benin. Structural grievances and horizontal inequalities, however, can also explain electoral violence. I follow with a few tables to investigate horizontal inequalities in Benin, where only the largest ethnic groups of Benin are taken into account and presented.

**Table 2: Living conditions compared to others**

|  |  |  | **Ethnic group** |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Total | Adja | Bariba | Fon | Fulani | Yoruba |
|  | Much worse | 9.7% | 6.4% | 20.8% | 10.5% | 9.7% | 7.4% |
|  | Worse | 28.9% | 23.2% | 17% | 31.6% | 38.4% | 31.6% |
| **Living** | Same | 29.6% | 36% | 10.2% | 29.2% | 39.2% | 25.5% |
| **conditions** | Better | 29.7% | 32.4% | 49% | 27.1% | 12.7% | 32.8% |
|  | Much better | 1.4% | 1.9% | 3.1% | 0.9% | - | 1% |
|  | Don't know | 0.8% | - | - | 0.7% | - | 1.6% |
|  | (N) | (1200) | 232 | 118 | 410 | 42 | 181 |

Data: Afrobarometer R7 2016/2018.

Table 2 shows that people in Benin experience some differences in living conditions. The perception

of much worse living conditions are quite low. Twenty percent of the Bariba say their living conditions are much worse, but it is also the ethnic group with the highest percentage of better living conditions. Differences in perceived living conditions are not very high. There are some inter-group variations, but not dramatically and not larger than intra-group variation. Further, Benin scores medium inequality when it comes to income inequality (UNDP, 2017), which places the country in the centre of the spectrum. Therefore, there a no reasons to assume severe horizontal inequalities on living conditions and income.

**Table 3: How many times experienced discrimination based on ethnicity**

|  |  | Ethnic group |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Total | Adja | Bariba | Fon | Fulani | Yoruba |
|  | Never | 79.3% | 76.1% | 71.8% | 82.3% | 53.9% | 85% |
|  | Once/twice | 5.7% | 7% | 8% | 3.9% | 12.7% | 3.6% |
| **Experienced** | Several | 11.1% | 13.5% | 14.3% | 9.4% | 22.5% | 9.1% |
| **discrimi-** | Many | 3.7% | 3.4% | 5.9% | 3.7% | 10.9% | 2.3% |
| **nation** | Don't know | 0.2% | - | - | 0.6% | - | - |
|  | (N) | (1200) | 232 | 118 | 410 | 42 | 181 |

Data: Afrobarometer R7 2016/2018.

**Table 4: How often is respondent's ethnic group treated unfairly by the government?**

|  |  | Ethnic group |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Total | Adja | Bariba | Fon | Fulani | Yoruba |
|  | Never | 53.2% | 38.7% | 50.6% | 57.1% | 27.5% | 63% |
|  | Sometimes | 25.4% | 31.3% | 23.9% | 24.4% | 35.9% | 22.1% |
| **Treated** | Often | 10.9% | 18.2% | 15% | 5% | 24% | 10.9% |
| **unfair by** | Always | 8.7% | 11.4% | 10.5% | 9.7% | 12.7% | 3.2% |
| **government** | Don't know | 1.8% | 0.4% | - | 3.8% | - | 0.7% |
|  | (N) | (1046) | 218 | 104 | 348 | 39 | 174 |

Data: Afrobarometer R7 2016/2018.

In table 3 you see that discrimination on basis of ethnicity is an uncommon happening Benin. Almost 80% of the respondents say to never experience discrimination based on their ethnicity. Unfair treatment based on ethnicity is only experienced by a small 20% of the respondents. Table 4 shows that unfair treatment by the government is experienced more often, however. While around 50% responds that their ethnic group was never treated unfairly by the government, close to 40% say to

have experienced unfair treatment by the government, of which 20% regularly. The data from tables 3 and 4 show that the Fulani experience the highest amount of discrimination based on ethnicity and unfair treatment by the government.

Based on the data discussed above I say that the Fulani feel more marginalized than other ethnic groups. Since the existence of horizontal inequalities is an important cause of electoral violence, it is interesting that electoral violence did not yet occur. A possible explanation for this could be that marginalized ethnic group is relatively small (8.6%), and that therefore the group lacks strength and mobilization power to resort to violent electoral strategies.

Top-down nation-building strategies have proven to be able to be effective in managing diversity and ethnic politics. President Nyerere in Tanzania used the presidency to promulgate a new national identity, underpinned by the promotion of Swahili as a national language, and the adoption of a set of national cultural symbols (Cheeseman, 2015, pp. 205-206). Benin also experienced this kind of top-down nation building. Under president Kérékou, the country name was changed to Benin in an effort to create a set of symbols of national identity. If this nation building has been effective, it can explain the absence of electoral conflict in Benin, since a sense of national identity can make ethnic divisions less salient. When Beninois are asked to choose between feeling national or feeling ethnic, a minority of 20% responds to feel more ethnic than national or only ethnic (see table 5). Ethnic identity plays an important role in voting patterns in Benin. Nevertheless, we see in table 5 that there is not necessarily a trade-off between national and ethnic identity. Although ethnicity is important in Benin, there is also a sense of national belonging.

**Table 5: Choose between feeling national or ethnic**

|                              | %      | Frequency |
|------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| Only ethnic                  | 6.8    | 82        |
| More ethnic than national    | 13.2   | 158       |
| Equally national and ethnic  | 41     | 491       |
| More national than ethnic    | 7.1    | 85        |
| Only national                | 18.6   | 223       |
| Missing                      | 12.6   | 151       |
| Don't know                   | 0.6    | 8         |
| (N)                          | (100)  | (1197)    |

Data: Afrobarometer R7 2016/2018.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper investigated how it is possible that in Benin electoral violence did not occur. With a context of politicized ethnic identity electoral violence would be expected in the country, since electoral violence often moves along ethnic lines. By conducting a secondary data analysis, I tried to find why politicized ethnic identity does not necessarily lead to violence. I did this by analysing factors that contribute to stability. By studying a deviant case I tried to contribute to theory by examining which factors mitigate the effect of politicized ethnic identity on electoral violence.

Several factors in Benin can account for the stability during election times. First, because of Benin's electoral system of proportional representation all ethnic groups in the country can be represented in the government. Therefore, groups are less likely to feel excluded in the political sphere. The electoral system, in combination with the composition of ethnic groups in Benin prevents that a single ethnic group wins the election. Coalitions across the political spectrum are needed to win office, which leads to a higher sense of representation. Second, elections in Benin are normally no close races. Close race elections enhances the change of a violent escalation of the competitive nature of the election. In Benin, this characteristic of elections is not present. Third, there is no culture of violence in Benin. The country did not experience violent coup d'états, no civil or ethnic war and the instrumental use of violence during elections is not a strategy that is used. This shows that violent escalation is not part of the culture in Benin. Fourth, there are some differences in living conditions, discrimination and unfair treatment between ethnic groups, but these differences are not dramatic. There are also quite large differences experienced by members of the same ethnic groups. I find no signs of serious horizontal inequalities in Benin, and since horizontal inequalities are an important cause of violence, the absence of these inequalities can explain the stability. Finally, although ethnicity plays an important role in Benin politics and voting patterns, Beninois still have a sense of national belonging. There is not necessarily a trade-off between ethnic and national identity. This can explain absence of mobilization for violence along ethnic identity lines.

We see that the effect of politicized ethnic identity on electoral violence can be mitigated by several factors. Some of these are a part of the culture and history of a country, but some can be the result of policy. The absence of a culture of violence and the competitiveness of elections can not be influenced or altered by policy. In order to prevent electoral violence governments can use policy. By employing an electoral system of proportional representation, the feeling of political exclusion can be reduced. Horizontal inequalities can be reduced by employing egalitarian distributive politics. And a sense of national identity can be strengthened through specially designed campaigns. By introducing policies

of this kind, governments can reduce the chance of electoral violence.

Since this study only contains one case, it is difficult to make generalizations about the factors that mitigate electoral violence. To be able to do this more research, encompassing more cases, is necessary. To make more sense of horizontal inequalities in Benin statistical analysis of the Afrobarometer data needs to be conducted. In this paper no statistical methods were used, but in this lie possibilities for future research. Another interesting topic for future research lies in the recent electoral violence in Benin. How did the recent elections in Benin lead to violence? Does the violence have an ethnic dimension? And what can be done to restore stability? I will conclude this paper with a short overview of the recent developments and violence in Benin.

On the 28th of April 2019, legislative elections were held in Benin. These elections were not without controversy. All the 83 seats of the National Assembly were up for re-election. However, a new electoral code, with the aim to change the political landscape, and reduce the number of parties in Benin caused controversy. Based on the new electoral code, the electoral commission blocked all party lists, except for two. This decision excluded all the opposition parties from participating in the election. Not surprisingly, this led to a political crisis and demonstrations in the capital of Benin. Despite the protests, the elections were held and the two parties of the presidential majority now share all the seats of the National Assembly. The participation rate for this election was extremely low. Since 1990 turnout has not been under 50%, but for this parliamentary elections the turnout was only 27%. After the elections opposition supporters clashed with security forces, which resulted in several deaths (Election Watch, 2019). Here we see a scenario of violence that has been addressed by Straus & Taylor (2012) in their research. It is the scenario of violent repressing of protests, which were triggered by election results.

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