

Trajectories of Disputes and Violence in the Democratic Electoral Contests in Benin: The Example of Elections in 2001 and 2008

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In this paper, I trace the path of protest and violence during the electoral contests of 2001 and 2008 in Benin. I argue here that the organization of elections in regular periods does not, in my opinion, reflect the vitality of democracy. I note that we often forget that behind the results that appear to be unanimous among challengers or political actors, lie election violence that could plunge the country into conflict with unpredictable consequences.

It is, indeed, that the elections that allow the selection of rulers have so far held at regular periods and this, according to the rules (for example: electoral codes) which were previously established and known to all political actors. By far, we have the impression that leaders are appointed through fair, transparent, honest and peaceful elections. This brings the international institutions and some authors (Akindès 1996, Banégas 2003) to consider the Benin as a good example of democracy in Africa. This study will provide arguments to point out the flaws of this consideration.

I assume that elections are often a reflection of how political life is structured around the actors who act and interact through negotiations in the local and trans-local arenas. This paper shows the flaws of the appropriation of global standards of democracy in Benin and discusses the problem of entrenchment of democratic culture.

By combining sociological and historical approach (Agulhon 1979) from a six-month of empirical research in Benin, I will first analyze the forms and actors of protests and violence in the electoral process. Then, I focus on politic actors, ordinary citizens and on structures that were responsible for elections organization in order to analyze their degree of involvement in these disputes.

Finally, I will show how these disputes and violence threaten the credibility of the elections, create instability in the affairs of local government and undermine democracy in the Benin context.