



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Beninese people protest against alleged election fraud, 2011

February

2011

to: April

2011

Country: Benin

Location City/State/Province: Cotonou

Goals:

To postpone the date of the election until the opportunity to register to vote was provided to every Beninese citizen. Postponement length was unclear.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Methods in 6th segment:

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- Beninese Citizens

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Adrien Houngbedji, Beninese Citizens, Union makes the Nation (UfN)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

United Nations, African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Involvement of social elites:

UN, African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- AU
- ECOWAS
- UN

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: Approximately 5 Days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Independent Electoral Commission, Beninese President Yayi Boni, The Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None Known

Campaigner violence:

None Known

Repressive Violence:

Teargas, Baton beatings by Benin Police

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The protestors were somewhat successful in obtaining an extension for the primary election date in order to ensure that more people could register to vote, however they were unsuccessful in that the extension was not long enough for everyone to be able to register. Overall, the campaign was rather unsuccessful. The only success was the election date extension, and even that is seen by officials as a "compromise solution".

In 2011, the Independent Electoral Commission of Benin organized a new electronic voting system for the upcoming presidential election, which would require voters to be pre-registered in order to fill out their ballots. The Commission registered people by going door to door in 77 different Beninese counties. This method didn't prove to be effective enough however, as around 1.3 million Beninese citizens were still not registered to vote. Many questioned the credibility of the voters role when such a large number of voters were unregistered by the end of February (close to election time). The election was originally going to be held on 27 February, followed by a second round on 23 March if necessary.

In response to the faulty registration system, angry Beninese citizens participated in a march and protest organized by Benin's main presidential opposition group, the Union makes the Nation (UfN). They argued that more than one million Beninese were denied their right to vote and called for the first round of elections to be postponed until a further date. This would, hopefully, give the unregistered voters a chance to register. Adrien Houngbedji, a leader of the UfN, was filed as their presidential candidate for the polls. Next to the President at the time, Yayi Boni, Houngbedji was thought to be equal competition.

On 21 February, around a thousand citizens took part in a peaceful march ending in the Red Star Square in central Cotonou, where they then began to picket and inhabit the square. Police fired teargas and beat citizens with batons in order to break up and disperse the protesters. However the anger didn't stop with these demonstrations. Eleven of the fourteen possible candidates urged President Yayi Boni to hold back the elections by a few weeks as well, in order to allow the commission to complete registration. Boni and his political party turned down the petition that was presented, stating that it would be unconstitutional to postpone.

Once the announcement was made that the elections were not to be postponed, the UN, along with the AU (African Union) and the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), stepped in and urged the president to delay the poll to ensure enough time for the election process to be considered credible. Once these elite groups joined the fight, Boni reconsidered requests, and the Constitutional Court of Benin ruled in favor of the protesters. On 4 March, the court agreed to delay the elections for another week (until 13 March).

However, one week clearly wasn't long enough, and many voters were still unregistered to vote on the day of the election. It was expected that Yayi would receive a little under half of the votes, and Houngbedji would come in a close second with a little under half as well, which would lead to a second round of polling. Yet when results were released on 18 March, Houngbedji only received about 35% of the votes, leading to a straight win by Yayi and no second polling.

The opposition claimed that the voting had been rigged, and massive protests broke out on the Thursday following the election. Protesters asked for Yayi to step down, as they believed he had won the election unfairly through fraud, and on 28 March, the Constitutional Court began examining these claims. The opposition first asked for a second round of polling, and then began simply claiming the victory of their candidate outright. Houngbedji claimed he was the winner of the election, and that the people wanted him to be president. The opposition expected the court to declare Houngbedji winner of the elections.

Both citizens and candidates were allowed to file appeals regarding election results for five days after results were released, and eight appeals were received by the court. The court then had ten days to rule on the appeals, and by 6 April a new president must be sworn in. This put a lot of pressure on the courts, and ultimately it was decided that Yayi Boni would be recognized as the

president of Benin.

There were no extra protests following this declaration of Boni as President, and Houngbedji, as well as his supporters, ultimately accepted the outcome of the election, though with much skepticism.

Research Notes

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A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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