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Preprint / Preprint

Arbeitspapier / working paper

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kohnert, D. (2022). 'Enlightened' West African dictatorship challenged by state capture? Insights from Benin, Togo and Senegal. Hamburg. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-81782-2>

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# ‘Enlightened’ West African dictatorships challenged by state capture ? Insights from Benin, Togo and Senegal

Dirk Kohnert <sup>1</sup>

‘the truth makes you free’ <sup>2</sup>



Source: [Agence Fides](#), Cotonou

**Abstract:** Populist nationalism is on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa. Depending on the political orientation, it is both reinforced and confronted by social media and social movements. Nationalism also cements the longstanding rule of autocratic regimes in West Africa, particularly in Togo, Benin and Senegal. Supported by the commodification of the party system, autocrats set up a shadow state. They use populism to prop up their illegitimate rule and to destabilize the opposition. The internet and social media play a crucial role in the spread of fake news through the mostly state-controlled media. The Catholic Church also tried, with little success, to counteract the wave of nationalism. In Benin, for example, in 2019 the bishops of Cotonou called for a ‘fast on the lies that inundate and poison interpersonal and social relationships’. In Lomé, the bishops' conference condemned the systematic persecution of the opposition and the arrest of its leader, presidential candidate and former prime minister Agbeyome Kodjo. Senegal, like Benin, has long been marketed as a 'showcase of democracy' in Africa, including peaceful political transition. But things changed radically with the 2019 Senegalese presidential election, which brought new configurations. One of the main problems was political transhumance, which was elevated to the rank of religion with disregard for political morality. It threatened political stability and peace. In response, social networks of mostly young activists established in 2011 after the Arab Spring focused on campaigning for grassroots voters for good governance and democracy. They proposed a break with a political system they saw as neo-colonialist. Activists such as 'Y'en a marre' (literally 'I'm fed up') and other dissident social movements benefited from the country's particular social conditions, which favoured collective action. Should President Macky Sall opt for a third term in 2024, it would again pose a serious challenge to Senegalese democracy.

**Keywords:** [Dictatorship](#), [governance](#), [autocracy](#), [state capture](#), [devolution of power](#), [multi-party system](#), [social movements](#), [social media](#), [West Africa](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), [Benin](#), [Togo](#), [Senegal](#), [African Studies](#)

**JEL-Code:** F22, F24, F35, F51, F 52, F54, H11, H75, K16, K24, K33, K38, N17, N37, N47, O17, O57, Z13

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<sup>2</sup> “the truth makes you free” - “Benin - Bishops appeal for Lent: "Let us fast from lies””. Source: Fides.org, accessed: 18 August 2019. © (all rights reserved). ‘agenzia fides’, Organe d'information des Œuvres Pontificales Missionnaires depuis 1927

# 1. Introduction

[Populist Nationalism](#) is on the rise not only in [Europe](#), [Asia](#) and [America](#) but also in [Africa](#). This begs the question, why ‘populism’ and why exactly now ? It should be noted that there is a crucial difference between ‘popular’ and ‘populist’ movements. The latter are often nourished by ‘hybrid’ regimes, blending residual democratic forms of government with authoritarian rule and thus also challenging constitutional democracy. This subverting of democracy manifests itself in different organizational forms, e.g. in social movements, political parties, government and regimes (Arato & Cohen, 2021). It spread notably in francophone Africa. Possibly, the more hierarchical direct administration in the former French colonies, in contrast to indirect rule in Anglophone Africa, as well as the clutching on to the outdated [CFA franc](#), facilitated the upsurge of anti-French populist nationalism (Logez, 2021; Kohnert, 2018).

At regional level, neither the Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)) nor the [WAEMU](#) ([UEMOA](#)) are willing to prevent the authoritarian excesses that have been at the roots of growing [populist nationalism](#). The latter was triggered by the growing disappointment of voters with polls that apparently were no longer the ‘nation's meeting place’ in many Sub-Saharan African countries because political parties failed to play the role of credible checks and balances, and thus caused [voter-fatigue](#) (Logez, 2021).

Apparently, these regional institutions were more concerned to rescue the presidents in the name of ‘stability’ in the region than with crisis prevention and democratization. This all the more, because of the continuing backing of vested interest of the informal network of French interest in Africa, the infamous [Françafrique](#), the network of the ‘[moniseurs Afrique](#)’ in France and Africa. At the same time, other global actors like [China](#) and [Russia](#) pushed their impact on the continent without any interest in ‘democratization’. On the contrary, they actively supported autocrats and the divide between African leaders and the former colonial powers, fuelling nationalist rhetoric of anti-colonialism, one of the driving forces of [populist nationalism](#) (Logez, 2021). The later is based on the defense of national sovereignty against the impact of globalization, the supposed protection of the ‘ordinary people’ against the elites and the rejection of multiculturalism (Banégas, 2017; Logez, 2021; Kohnert, 2009).

The rhetoric of [populist nationalism](#) tries to dominate all spheres of life, including ‘patriotic’ commercial advertising (Mapendano Byamungu, 2021). It is closely entangled with the commodification of electoral politics, not just because candidate’s chances increase with their wealth. Thus, the Western concept of [multi-party electoral politics](#) became the ‘tree that hides the forest’. In SSA it degenerated in many cases to a farce that no longer guaranteed the effectiveness of the democratic process but on the contrary slipped into an instrument of legitimization of authoritarianism.

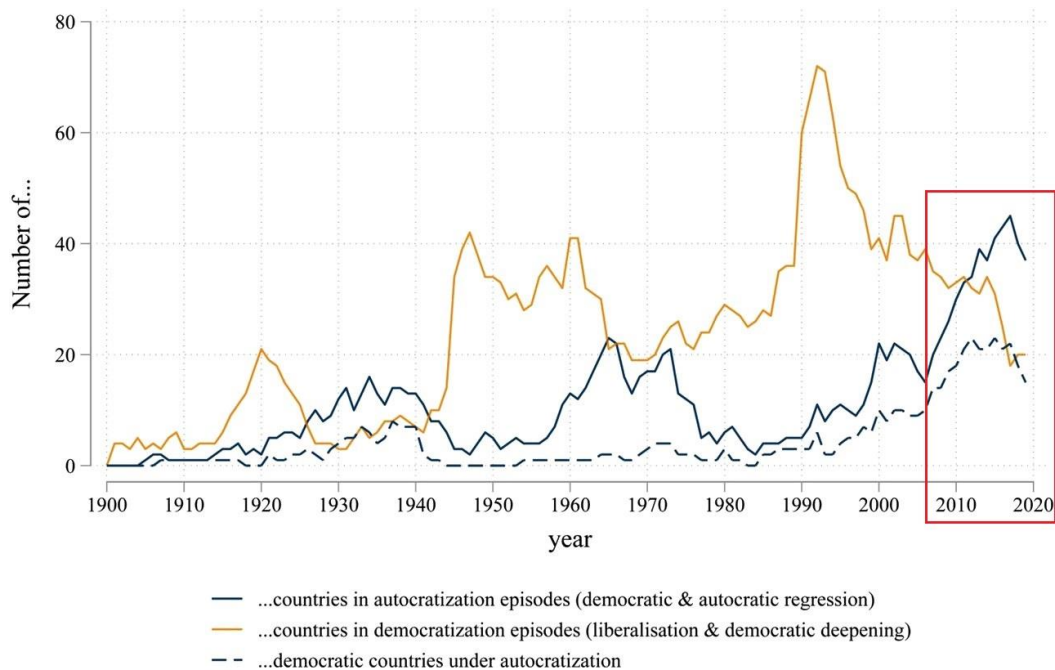
The plutocratic tendencies encouraged the development of [State capture](#), i.e. a hidden parallel- or *shadow state* by introducing new agencies with hitherto unimaginable prerogatives dependent on the presidency. [Achille Mbembe](#) coined the label of ‘indirect private government’ for this duplication of state and administrative procedures and institutions closely related to the interest of economic elites of the (Mbembe, 2001; 1999; Logez, 2021). According to [Jean-François Bayart](#), there is a close link between this progressive privatization of the state and the nationalist rhetoric agitated by the populists, such as that of ‘[Ivoirité](#)’, first used by [Henri Konan Bédié](#) in 1995, ‘[Togolité](#)’, employed by [Gnassingbé Eyadéma](#) (Kohnert, 2019a), or ‘[Congolité](#)’, introduced as draft law in the National Assembly of [Kinshasa](#) in July 2021 (Hugo, 2021). Also, the [Nigerian](#) example shows that in absence of a clear alignment

between protectionism and liberalism, nationalism might win in the case of doubt (Agwu, 2021).

The uneasy relationship of populism to constitutionalism that could result in nationalism poses still another problem, that of a delimitation between the ‘popular’ and the ‘populist’. This may be relevant not only for a characterization of a regime or government, but also for political parties and socio-political movements. In the best case it would result in enhancing the plurality of democracies and even rescue some of left populism's more benevolent host ideologies (Arato & Cohen, 2021). Thereby, the impact of the fast paced growth of digitalization increased populism for both left-wing and right-wing political parties (Güvercin, 2022; Kohnert, 2022).

**Graph 1: ‘Worldwide democratic backslide’<sup>3</sup>**

(number of countries experiencing [autocratization](#) and [democratization](#), 1990-2020)



Source: Boese & Lindberg & Lührmann, 2021 (reprinted in: [Democratic backsliding](#), Wikipedia):

A historical perspective may help to understand the dilemmas of African intellectuals between nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Because the post-colonial Pan-Africanism, initially meant to overcome national borders, entrenched the crisis of the nation-state in Africa. Nationalism, as ideology fuelled the struggles for independence (Bah, 2019; Kohnert, 2009).

[Francis Fukuyama's](#) controversial thesis on the 'end of history', published in 1992, that is, the depiction of the global spread of liberal democracies and Western capitalism as the [end of humanity's sociocultural evolution](#), turned out to be history itself. Even Fukuyama had to revise his hypothesis and scrutinized whether the rise of populist nationalism would reflect merely a '[democratic backsliding](#)' or 'democratic recession' in the sense of [Larry Diamond](#), or rather a long-term downturn of the model of liberal democracy worldwide (Fukuyama, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Since 2010, the number of countries autocratizing (*blue*) is higher than those democratizing (*yellow*).

But in the past decade, the democratic credentials of many Sub-Saharan governments faded away. Since about 2010, the number of countries autocratizing was world-wide higher than those democratizing (see Graph 1). According to the EIU democracy index 2021 a total of 16 out of 44 SSA countries showed a decline in their score <sup>4</sup>.

Meanwhile, the question seems to be answered by mere facts. A substantive democratic backslide has been observed worldwide (see graph 1). Moreover, from the onset resilient democratic countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are significantly less common than in the rest of the world (s. Graph 2). As for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) even former 'model democracies' like Benin and Senegal turned into illiberal 'façade democracies', if not outright authoritarian regimes and dictatorships (Mounk, 2020). In Togo's and Senegal a 'constitutional coup' of the ruling regime opened up a third presidential mandate for the incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé and Macky Sall (Logez, 2021) and therewith perspectives for lifelong rule.

A typical legitimization of creeping regime change by populist nationalist leaders is, to cover it up by assuring the electorate protection against threats of cultural infiltration by outsiders that allegedly endanger the (imagined) own self-importance. This is frequently done with recourse to an idealized past, the good old days, including the regress to historic national heroes. The most recent example took place in Cotonou the (informal) capital of Benin end of July 2022. Acting President Patrice Talon celebrated, in presence of elder statesmen like Nicephore Soglo, the grandiose inauguration of monuments of national pride, i.e. the larger than life 'golden' statues of an Amazon female warrior, and of 'Bio Guera', a 'fighter for African freedom and dignity' who died in combat against French colonialist in Northern Dahomey end of 1916 (see below, Chapt 2).

Populist African national movements, for example in Cameroon, often exploit and inflame ethnicity, preferably going back to the supposedly glorious precolonial period (Eyenga, 2017). Thereby, the digital is increasingly becoming a site of public expression and civic agency, but also of cheap propaganda and the spread of fake news in populist social networks, even in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kohnert, 2022). Thereby, citizenship is often 'constructed', and the politics of belonging used as an exploited flexible category, malleable, sometimes even negotiable, and to be played with, but mostly used to exclude 'foreigners' (Pype, 2021; Kohnert, 2009).

The spread of fake news was used progressively more as instrument of consolidating autocratic power in West Africa. The increase in the rate of internet penetration, the use of smartphones and of the mobile internet was used both by oppositional social networks and ruling parties. It impacted on the process of democratization like in Senegal and other West African countries and on the political order in these countries in general (Gamai, 2022). Thereby, propaganda and the spread of false information was nothing new. It had been used already systematically by colonial powers and socialist African regimes alike already before the invention of the internet. In fact, the mechanisms of the *shadow state* rely on lack of transparency and surveillance by concealed networks of states and businesses (Pype, 2021).

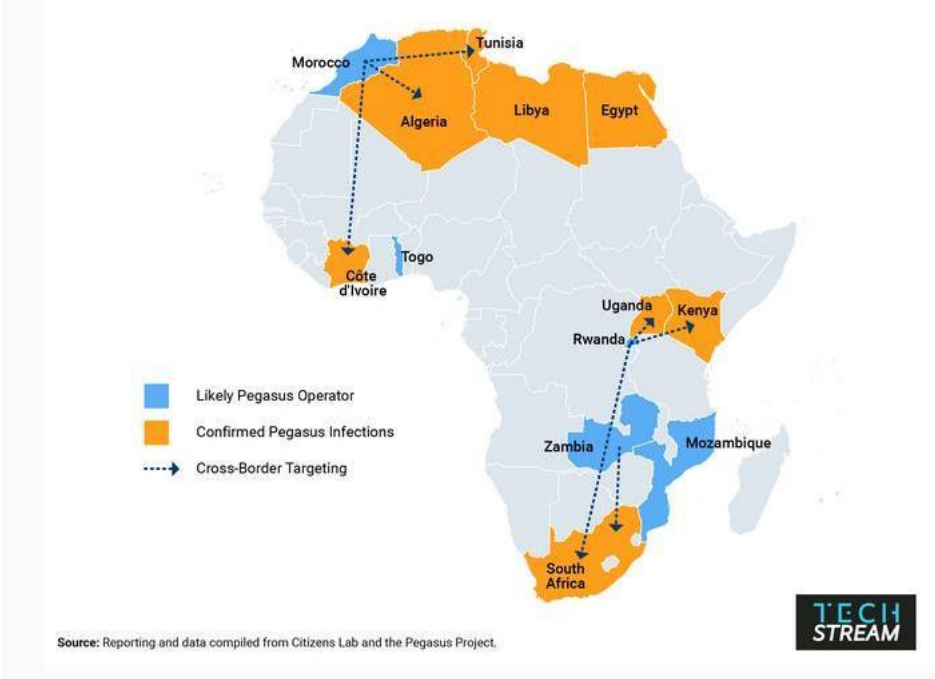
Moreover, at least ten African government used the notorious Israeli Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli surveillance technology company, NSO Group, which is a weapon of

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<sup>4</sup> The most abrupt decline included Benin (-0.39), (rank: 106 – at the bottom of 'hybrid regimes', three ranks above the threshold 'Authoritarian'). Senegal ranked 88 ('Hybrid regime'), and Togo 136 ('Authoritarian'). According to the Democracy-Dictatorship Index, (not to be confused with the EIU 'democracy index', compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU, London), the three countries were ranked as follows: Benin = 'Presidential Democracy'; Senegal = 'Semi-Presidential Democracy', Togo = 'Civilian dictatorship'.

choice for repressive governments according to the head of [Amnesty International](#), [Agnès Callamard](#) (Kodjani, 2021); Dadoo, 2021). Namely, [Botswana](#), [DRC](#), [Egypt](#), [Equatorial Guinea](#), [Kenya](#), [Morocco](#), [Rwanda](#), [Togo](#), [Zambia](#) and [Zimbabwe](#). According to another report of recent report of the University of Toronto’s [Citizen Lab](#), titled ‘Running in Circles’, which investigated digital espionage against civil society, 25 governments worldwide, including Africa, used another tool developed by the Israeli telecoms company ‘Circles’, which is sold to nation-states only (Dadoo, 2021). Also the government in Benin was accused of using the service of the Israeli espionage. A Franco-Israeli, Didier Sabag, running the company Sapna Ltd. was suspected to make the go-between (Touré, 2021).

**Graph 2:** Infections, users, and cross-border targets of ‘Pegasus’ spyware in Africa

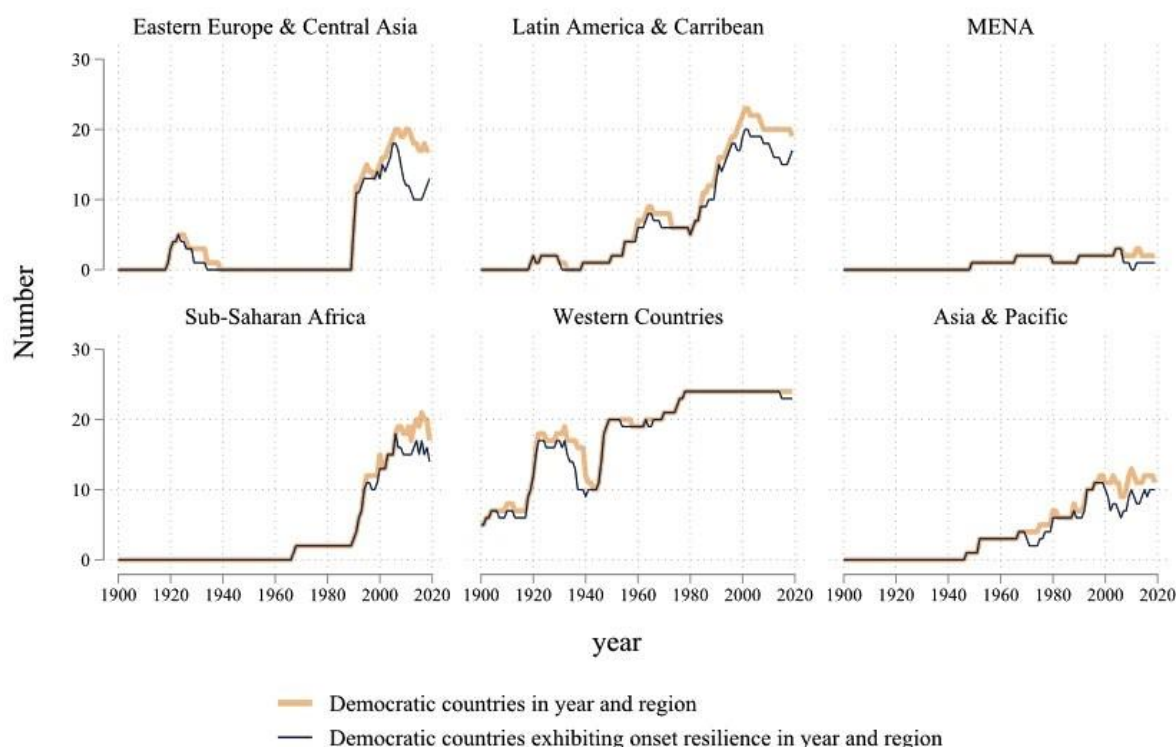


Source: Allen & La Lime, 2021 © (all rights reserved)

In September 2022 it the press revealed that also [Ghana](#), otherwise lauded as Africa’s model democracy, was among 26 countries worldwide that had purchased Pegasus spyware from the Israeli group NSO under dubious conditions to spy on the private communications of individuals (Dadoo, 2022). In December 2015, the in [Accra](#) registered private company Infralocks Development Limited (IDL) had signed a US\$ 5.5 m contract with the NSO Group to purchase Pegasus. IDL then sold Pegasus to Ghana’s telecommunications regulator, the National Communications Authority (NCA). Neither the NSO Group, nor officials in the Israeli Ministry of Defence, which grants export licenses for Pegasus, verified whether IDL was a recognised Pegasus reseller. In May 2020, Accra’s High Court ruled that the purchase of Pegasus was illegal and unauthorized (Dadoo, 2022). Also, the examples of Benin, Ghana and Senegal show the growing strategy that governments as well as opposition politicians and political parties adopt, i.e. a strategy of mobilizing legal reforms through social movements before the African regional and subregional courts. This may be an effective and important way to strategically orchestrating national and international media attention. Thereby, litigants can bring extraordinary pressure on national governments to avoid “naming and shaming” (Akinkugbe, 2021). In the case of Benin, there were reasons to doubt that the principle of balance and separation of powers still prevailed. Instead, governance was increasingly established through the despotism of texts and laws and the breakdown of dialogue within the political class (Akueson, 2020).

There are different concepts of [enlightened absolutism](#) and enlightened [despotism](#), including '[Benevolent dictatorship](#)', '[Civilian dictatorship](#)', and last, but not least, '[Development dictatorship](#)'. The latter concept flourished in the early days of African liberation and national independence in the 1960s. 'Development dictatorship' was considered as a sometimes necessary intermediate step, helping the newly independent states to create national unity through nation-building and development (Kohnert, 2009).

**Graph 3:** From the onset resilient democratic countries, 1990 - 2020 (countries *not* experiencing autocratization in that year in different regions <sup>5</sup>)



Source: Boese & Edgell & Hellmeier & Maerz & Lindberg, 2021

Yet, the renowned Nigerian political scientist and activist, late [Claude Ake](#) and others cautioned to gauge the progress of African societies by formal democratic indicators. They alternatively suggested assessing the true socio-cultural value of popular protest movements by its positive or negative impact on societal consciousness and political imagination, on their capacity to imagine new visions of democracy and development for the ordinary people (Polet, 2016).

According to periodic surveys of [Afrobarometer](#), most Africans support democracy as a preferred type of political regime. Large majorities also reject alternative authoritarian regimes such as presidential dictatorship, military rule, and one-party government. Yet, there exist considerable cross-national and intra-national differences in demand for democracy (see Graph [xy](#)). The highest demand for democracy – not necessarily Western style democracy - occurs in the urban centres, among the educated elite and young people. Moreover, on average, African women are significantly less likely to demand democracy than men (Mattes & Bratton, 2016; Mattes, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> [MENA](#) refers to countries in the [Middle East](#) and [North Africa](#).

[Hybrid](#), electoral authoritarian regimes are the most common regime type in sub-Saharan Africa since the end of the Cold War (Morse, 2019). Recently, [Yonatan Morse](#) introduced a thought-provoking distinction between 'tolerant' and 'repressive' electoral authoritarian regimes. To be clear about it, tolerant autocracies are nevertheless autocracies, and no amount of 'tolerance' toward the political opposition should be mistaken for democratization (Morse, 2019; Bogaards, 2020).

**Cartoon 2: 'A heavy burden'**

Africa: simplification is sometimes a mask for ignorance <sup>6</sup>



Source: Moya, 2021

Still, autocratic regimes can be differentiated, according to Morse, concerning the degree of 'credible commitment' of ruling parties, e.g. regarding competitiveness, transparency and legality of the nomination process of candidates, as well as broad social incorporation. Yet, although these attributes are rare in SSA, investment in party building pays off. This may lead in the case of dominant ruling parties in the long run to [voter fatigue](#) and quasi-toleration of hegemony nationally (Morse, 2019; Weghorst, 2020), like in the case of [Togo](#).

Nevertheless, those authoritarian multi-party regimes not blessed with credible parties have to maintain their grip on power the hard way, through repression, corruption, nepotism and clientelism, which, even from a [Machiavellian](#) perspective, may not be sustainable (Morse, 2019; Bogaards, 2020). This is all the more true as the existing empirical evidence contradicts the positive prediction model of the concept of 'development dictatorships' (Olson, 1993). Scholarly analyses revealed that worldwide in 92 countries studied in 2015, dictatorship adversely affected economic development as measured by the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI). In contrast, the transition from extreme dictatorship to ideal democracy would increase the HDI by 17% (Khan & Batool & Shah).

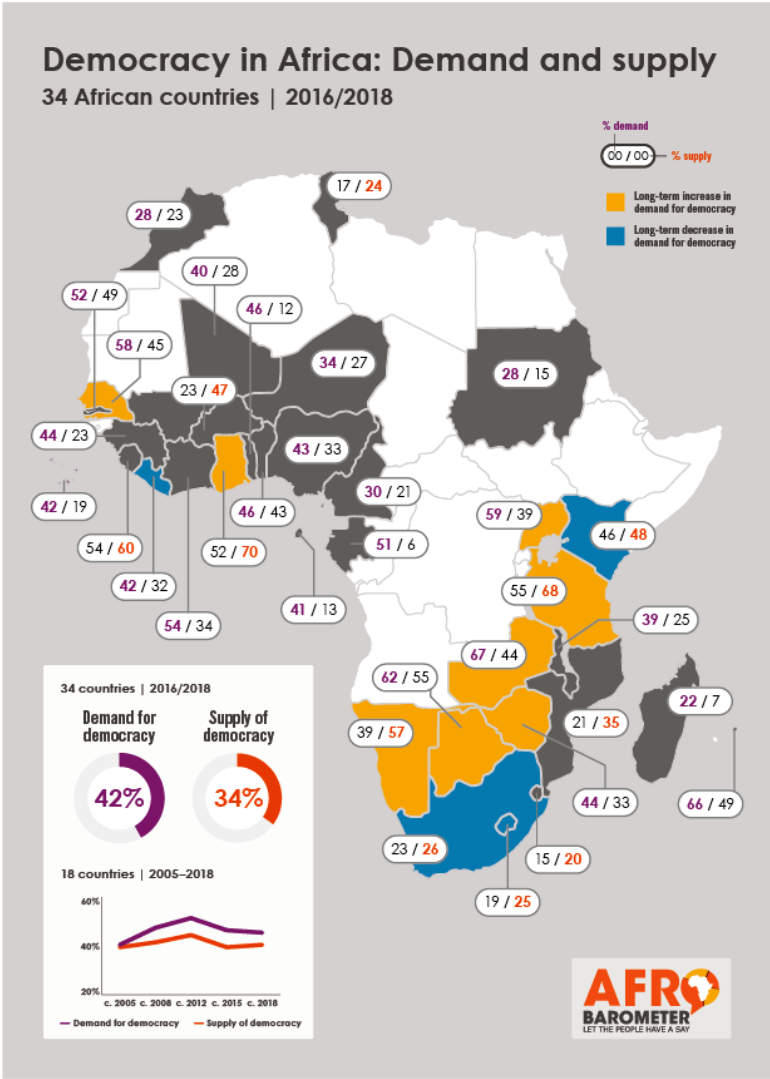
In short, it seems the concepts of [enlightened absolutism](#) or [benevolent dictatorship](#) gained traction again, both within SSA and beyond, even in the US and Europe. For example, Britain, as well as other Western industrialized states like Israel and Denmark, tried to dispose its unwanted immigrants in Rwanda, lauded as sustainable democracy respecting basic human rights. Are autocrats like Rwandan President [Paul Kagame](#) now politically and socially

<sup>6</sup> Cartoon: "A heavy burden", the Congolese [Junior Heritier Bilaka](#) illustrates the influence of Western powers on African politicians. (Braun & Pinto, 2013). © (all rights reserved).



acceptable in the Western world again like in the times of the Cold War? And could it be that these autocrats create a ‘shadow state’ in close cooperation with the domestic and foreign economic elites, like in the olden times of [Françafrique](#), however, now extended to the whole of SSA? Could it be that the civil society, represented by social movements and –media, will create a ‘plurality of democracies’ dominating and transforming the conventional multi-party system by multiple and complementary projects in politics, the economy, and culture, and thus renew the democratization processes in SSA, as Arato and Cohen in a recent publication suggest (Arato, Andrew & Jean L. Cohen (2021)? These are the questions the following tries to answer by taking three country cases, Benin, Senegal, both allegedly former African ‘model-democracies’, and Togo that had been praised during the cold war as the ‘Swiss of Africa’ as examples.

**Graph 4: Democracy in Africa : Demand and supply**  
(34 African countries surveyed in 2016/2018)



Source: Afrobarometer, Mattes, 2019

## 2. Benin: from model democracy to autocratic nationalism

According to the most recent EIU democracy index of 2021, Benin ranked among the [SSA](#) countries that declined most severely, i.e. Benin (-0.39), together with [Guinea](#) (-0.80), Mali, (-0.45), [Congo](#) (Brazzaville, -0.32) and [Angola](#) (-0.29). [Benin](#) was downgraded because of its increasingly dubious elections, the exploitation of the biased justice system and custom-made election rules for the [2021 presidential election](#) by President, [Patrice Talon](#), to exclude credible challengers to remain in power<sup>7</sup>. Talon and his party had introduced a new ‘buddy system’ (sponsorship), meaning in practice that no strong candidate from the opposition was allowed to run. Prominent member of the opposition were subsequently arrested and imprisoned (EU, 2022). Already two years before the Talon government had drastically restricted the eligibility of political parties for the [2019 parliamentary elections](#), with the effect that only two pro-government parties had been able to run, and all opposition parties were excluded. (Kohnert & Preus, 2019). In February 2019, the [Constitutional Court](#) in [Cotonou](#) ruled that the parties must submit a ‘Certificate of Conformity’, issued by the Ministry of the Interior, in addition to the documents to be submitted to the electoral authority. As a result of the examination of the candidatures by the electoral authority, only two parties had been accepted (Kohnert & Preus, 2019). Consequently, also in the most recent local elections on 17 May 2022, opposition parties having been barred from standing in the 2019 parliamentary elections no longer played a role in this ballot (Preuss, 2020a).

**Cartoon 3** : Benin : *Electoral crisis the snake of Talon ...?*  
*‘Come help me save you from my snake ...!’*



Source: Evariste Amouzouvi Folly, on [Twitter](#), 14 March 2019<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> EIU democracy index, 2021; accessed: 29 September 2022; next update February 2023; see also Appendix 1: Benin's development compared with its pairs.

<sup>8</sup> Evariste Amouzouvi Folly, alias 'Aeffolly', is a renowned cartoonist, labelled 'the Plantu Béninois' (RFI-2019) with reference to the famous French cartoonist Jean Plantureux (pen name: '[Plantu](#)'). URL: <https://twitter.com/Evariste0026?lang=fr> accessed: 18 August 2019. © (all rights reserved).

## 2.1 The growth of populist nationalism and state capture in Benin

In West Africa and beyond signs of an authoritarian nationalism are to be observed. The [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (ACHPR) in [Banjul](#) asked [Côte d'Ivoire](#) and [Benin](#) to suspend judgments and arrest warrants against [Guillaume Soro](#) and [Sébastien Ajavon](#). In response, the two countries withdrew in April 2020 from the protocol establishing the ACHPR, denouncing interference by the Commission in their internal affairs. Also in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, similar plutocratic reforms supposedly introduced to improve electoral processes by combating the inflation of the number of political parties, in reality, mainly allow leaders to disqualify their opponents or to get rid of the old political guards. In fact, populism and nationalism were becoming one of the mainsprings of this authoritarianism (Hugo, 2021).

Most recently, the populist campaign of Benin's President Talon in recourse to the National hero [Bio Guera](#), culminated in the battle call: '*I am Bio Guera*'. Thereby Talon reclaimed the fame of an anti-colonial warrior of Northern Benin against French colonialist during World War I for the legitimization of his own autocratic rule, on occasion of the inauguration of a huge monument of the freedom fighter on 30 July 2022 in Cotonou, beside three other monuments of national pride, a statue of an [Amazon warrior](#) and a monument in honour of the countries patriots, in presence of his diplomatic entourage, including former President [Nicéphoe Soglo](#) (Sokegbe, 2022).

### Cartoon 4: '*This beautiful statue will be for us*'<sup>9</sup>



Source : *24 heures sur Bénin*, 20 August 2022

[Patrice Talon](#) is a wealthy [Beninese](#) politician and businessman who has been [President of Benin](#) since 6 April 2016. As President he took control of the [Constitutional Court](#), whose members he appoints. It is currently chaired by one of his former ministers and his former personal lawyer. All this enabled Talon to curb the human rights of the opposition by excluding the opposition from the legislative and presidential elections of 2019 and 2021 and to restrain the right to strike (Lepidi & Kpatindé, 2021; Kohnert & Preuss, 2021). The turnout of the legislative elections of 2019 fell to 23 %, from nearly 75 % in 2015, the lowest turnout in the country's history (Kpatindé, 2019a).

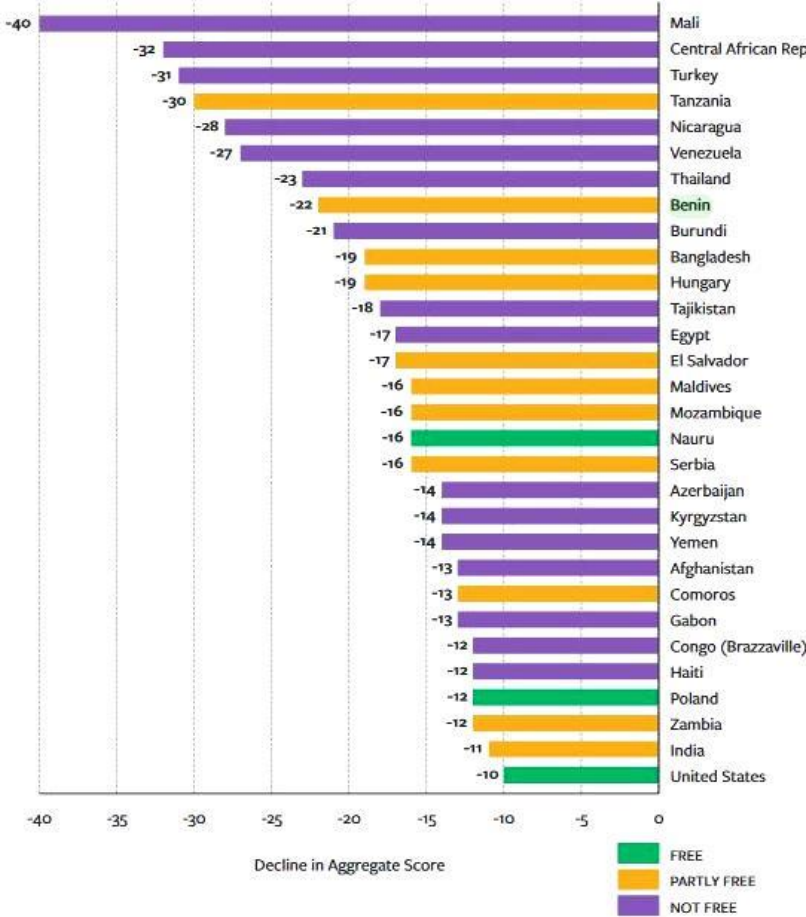
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<sup>9</sup> Cartoon on autocratic reign in Benin: « *This beautiful statue will be for us* » --- ironic reference to the erection of imperious national monuments to glorify nationalism in Benin in 2020. - Bénin : Le monument Bio Guéra inauguré à l'aéroport Bernardin Gantin. ActualitésSociété. Par Léonce Adjevi, *Le Matinale*, 30 July 2022. © (all rights reserved).

Since Patrice Talon presidency in 2016, the use of the judicial system to attack its political opponents increased. New electoral rules practically excluded all opposition parties from the 2019 legislative elections. Severe restrictions on civil liberties, including an internet shutdown, and police violence against protesters increased. Therefore, Freedom House downgraded Benin as ‘partially free’ with a score of 65/100. Thus Benin counted among the countries with the largest 10-year declines worldwide of -22 in aggregate score (Graph 5).

In Benin, the trials of opponents by the biased judiciary are linked and the verdicts are heavy. The former Minister of Justice, Reckya Madougou, whose candidacy for the presidential election of 11 April 2021 had been rejected before, was sentenced in December 2021 to twenty years in prison for terrorism, four days after the conviction of law professor Joël Aïvo to ten years in prison for ‘money laundering’ and ‘undermining state security’ by the controversial Court for the repression of economic offenses and terrorism (Criet), newly created in July 2018. Four other defendants tried in this case were punished with the same sentence, another was acquitted. Already in 2018, Sébastien Ajavon, opponent who came third in the 2016 presidential election, had been sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for ‘drug trafficking’ and ‘use of forgery and fraud’ (Kpatindé, 2019a).

**Graph 5:** Largest 10-year declines in freedom, 2012 to 2022



Source: ‘Freedom in the World, 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule’. Freedom House, 2022

On 29 March 2019, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in Arusha (Tanzania) denounced the abuses that were distancing the country from the rule of law (Kpatindé, 2019; Lepidi & Kpatindé, 2021).

In March 2020, the Constitutional Court in Cotonou notified the [African Union](#) of its withdrawal from the Protocol to the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (known as 'Banjul Charter') establishing an [African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights](#). This withdrawal marked a dangerous setback and a significant regression in terms of the protection of human rights by blocking the direct access of individuals and NGOs to the African Court according to [Amnesty International](#) (PPLAAF, 2022). Regarding the growing opposition to his regime, Talon had to rely even more on his trusted old security guard. In April 2022, he reappointed General Soumaïla Yaya as head of the director of police for two years because he lacked a successor to the post following a scandal about passports of convenience. He also promoted his former military chief of staff, Bertin Dada, who played a pivotal role in the police crackdown just ahead the presidential election 2021<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the plutocratic tendencies encouraged the development of [State capture](#), i.e. a hidden parallel- or *shadow state* by introducing new agencies with hitherto unimaginable prerogatives dependent on the presidency also in Benin. These interactions led to great harm to producer and consumer welfare alike through affecting market structure.

One outstanding example was quoted by Canen & Ch & Wantchekon (2021). In March 2020, the mayor and the official responsible for public contracts in the commune of [Pehunco](#) in the [Atakora Department](#) of Northern [Benin](#) deliberately favoured the 'Logic' enterprise over another ('ECBEM') in the contracts to develop and asphalt the [Djougou-Pehunco-Kérou-Banikoara](#) cotton road. The latter was financed by the [AfDB](#) (AfDB, 2018) and aimed at revitalizing and making the cotton sector in Benin more competitive. The officials did not verify 'Logic's' eligibility, did not address its delay in providing the necessary information and openly wished to grant the market to 'Logic' in exchange for bribery (Canen & Ch & Wantchekon, 2021). Benin's institutional development facilitated clientelism and patronage in favour of vested interests of the state class and rival strategic business groups, bargaining for the booty of increasing development assistance and the private use of local government resources (Kohnert & Preuss, 1992). Although, theoretically, an increase in electoral competition by free and fair elections correlates with more direct forms of state capture because of the higher uncertainty of party candidates to win, there are exceptions. For example, if electoral uncertainty does not result in consumer welfare, what has been rather the rule than the exception in SSA, citizens could prefer autocrats who promise policies that do benefit them, like in the case of Talon. However, increasing state capture, which might come along with autocratic regimes, could result in undermining citizen's trust in democracy and the rise of populism. (Canen & Ch & Wantchekon, 2021). The [Corruption Perception Index](#), 2021 of the public sector, as measured by [Transparency International](#), ranked Benin 78th out of 180, i.e. among countries perceived as more corrupt, with a score of 42/100 and slightly decreasing tendency (-5 places compared to 2020; PPLAAF, 2022).

There have been created at least three quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations ([Quangos](#)) meant to control and fight all forms of corruption, including embezzlement of public funds, illicit offences, influence peddling, forgery and impunity, like the 'Front des Organisations Nationales contre la Corruption' (FONAC), the 'Observatoire de Lutte Contre la Corruption' (OLC) and 'Social Watch Benin' (PPLAAF, 2022). However, in actual practice they are rather 'lame ducks'.

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<sup>10</sup> AI (2022): [In the police and the army, Talon turns to his tried and trusted old guard](#). *Africa Intelligence*, 5 April 2022.

## *The shadow state in Benin*

In the case of President Talon state capture was evident beyond doubt. In fact, he has been one of the principal perpetrators. This has been facilitated by his excellent integration into the socio-political fabric of Benin's political and business elite, including rewarding contracts which made him one of the wealthiest tycoons in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa (Kpatindé, 2019; Lepidi & Kpatindé, 2021). In 2008, he obtained a government contract for the takeover of the 10 ginning factories still under state control, which made the Talon group *de facto* a quasi-monopoly in the cotton sector. Moreover, he gained control of the government's lucrative market for the import verification program (PVI). State capture started already during his career as former President [Thomas Boni Yayi](#)'s chief financial banker, financing his election campaigns in the 2006 and 2011 presidential elections, when [Yayi Boni](#) was re-elected.

Beside Talon, [Aliko Dangote](#), a Nigerian billionaire [business magnate](#) and the richest person in Africa, richest black person and the 75th richest person in the world had a decisive influence on Benin's state administration and politicians. The Dangote Group is one of the largest multinational in Africa, the largest industrial corporation in Nigeria and one of the main producers and traders in Sugar, [Dangote Cement](#), and flour, including international operations in [Benin](#). In March 2022, the government announced that it planned to build a new large cement plant by 2026, possibly in cooperation with the Chinese. It was to use local limestone deposits to produce 5000t/day clinker with a cement production capacity of 1.6Mt/yr. Cement sales had increased by 30% in from 2016 to 2021 with an upward trend (Global Cement staff, 2022).

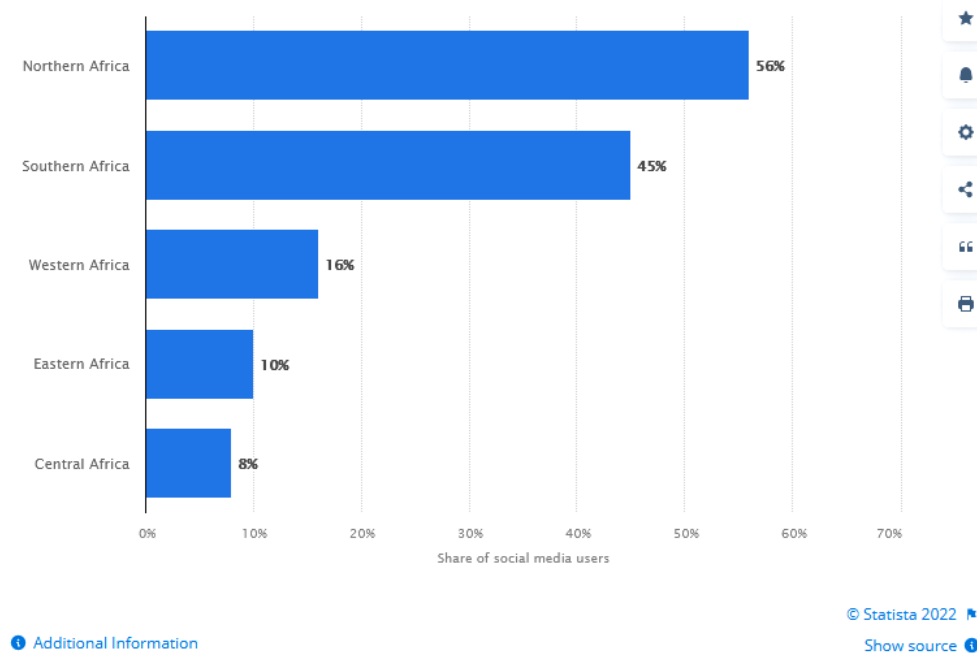
Nigeria's [Dangote Cement](#), produced among others at the [Ibese plant](#) in [Nigeria](#) just 30km from the Benin border. Yet, so far it had been restricted from supplying the Benin market. First, because [Cotonou](#) had preferred contracts with Chinese partners and second, because of widespread corruption of the Benin customs that delayed delivery (GhanaWeb, 2021). But meanwhile Dangote cement accounts for 60 % of exports to Benin (Agha, 2021). However, the import of [Dangote Cement](#) in Benin was subject to a special tax, introduced in 2019, allegedly on initiative of Talon. Dangote was at friends with another wealthy Benin businessman, [Sébastien Adjavon](#), who was Talon's fiercest political competitor. Adjavon was head of the National Employers Council of Benin (CNP-Benin) from 2012 to 2020, but could not complete his mandate. Because of political persecution he had to flee into exile in France (Preuss, 2019).

Recent empirical analysis provided evidence on a close relationship between business interests, clientelistic contracts and state capture in Benin. Evidently, the country's politicians were affiliated with enterprises. This affected the underlying structure within which clientelist contracts with political agents were concluded. As far as electoral uncertainty decreased, enterprises relied less heavily on more direct forms of government capture, including patronage or the control of local bureaucratic recruitment processes. On the other hand, this implied that an increase in electoral uncertainty, which stands c. p. for an improvement of democratic consolidation, was undermined by business interests (Ch & Hounkpe & Wantchekon, 2019).

Another tool used to consolidate Talon's autocratic power was the systematic dissemination of [fake news](#). The instrumentalization of misleading information, presented as news, has had an ignoble history in Benin. Thus, the inglorious days of "*Marxism-Beninism*" are still remembered and popularly ridiculed. The latter constituted a crude ideological sub-form of

'[Marxism-Leninism](#)', introduced by the late dictator [Mathieu Kérékou](#) in the 1970s (Ngokwey, 1994).

**Graph 6:** Social media penetration in Africa in 2022, by region



Source : [Statista.com](#)

Today, [fake news](#) has a new quality, especially since the widespread access to the internet and smartphones and the surge of social networks in Benin. It is easy to manipulate and has had already serious repercussions on peace, national cohesion and the quiescence of the population. In the past ten years, for example, elections in Benin have been marked by political and social security tension, fomented by fake news that caused population displacements and contributed to the outbreak of deadly violence (Gamai, 2022). According to the Centre for Democracy and Development ([CDD](#) -West Africa) in [Abuja](#), since about ten years a new group of social agents propagated false news. They include web activists like influencers and other internet celebrities, using social media platforms as [Facebook](#) (78 % market share in Africa in 2022 <sup>11</sup>), [YouTube](#), (11%), [Twitter](#), (6%), [Instagram](#) (3 %), [WhatsApp](#), [TikTok](#) etc. that dominated opinion making and found its echoes even offline. However, the use of internet was very uneven according to region (see Graph 7). In Benin, with an estimated population of 12.6 m, 3.8 m used internet, including 1.7 m *facebook* subscribers in April 2022, representing an [internet penetration](#) of 30 % with a growth rate of 25 % between 2000 and 2021 <sup>12</sup>.

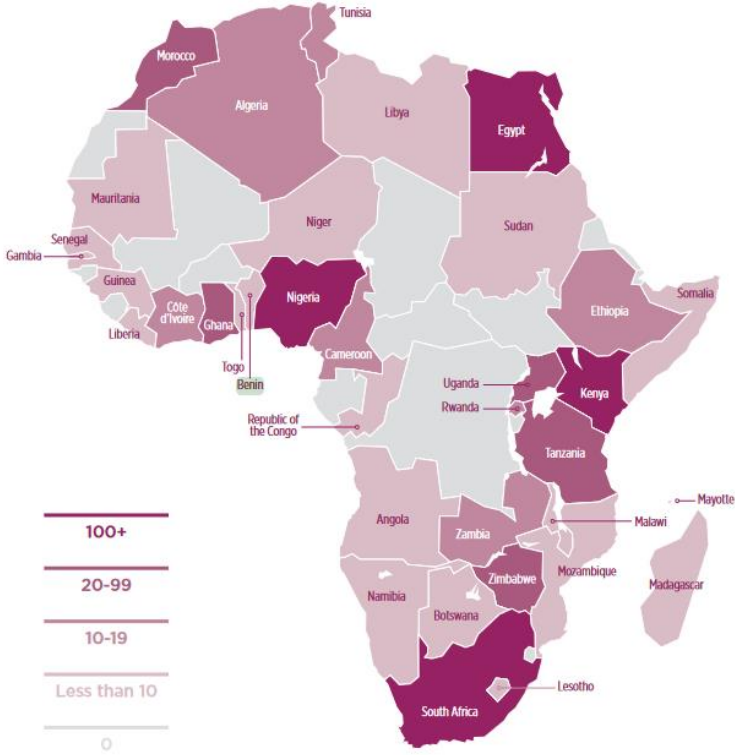
[Fake news](#) was especially virulent in times of elections and in political, health, and security crises, for example at the zenith of the [COVID-19 pandemic in Benin](#). The authors of misinformation were mainly politicians and influencers, relying on two principal channels of distribution, the social media and hearsay (Akeke, 2022). The adoption of the Digital Code in June 2017 brought new obstacles to freedom of expression, prohibiting certain opposition media and encouraging censorship practices (PPLAAF, 2022). Moreover, the growing

<sup>11</sup> Social Media Stats in Africa, [Statcounter](#) August 2022.

<sup>12</sup> [Internet Users Statistics for Africa](#). ( Africa Internet Usage, 2022 Population Stats and Facebook Subscribers). Internet World Stats.

technological dependence of Africa on foreign technological facilities like [Artificial intelligence](#) (AI) and transnational data centres had crucial negative consequences in the economic, political and social realm. This could provoke new forms of post-colonial cyber-colonization (Badaoui & Najah, 2021; Kohnert, 2022).

**Graph 7:** Number of active digital platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa (as of January 2021)



Note: includes North Africa

Source: The mobile economy: Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021, [GSMA](#)

**Graph 8:** Mobile subscriber and technology trends in [ECOWAS](#) countries, 2020 to 2025



Source: The mobile economy: Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021, [GSMA](#)



## 2.2 Perspectives of Benin's social movements

Benin made history by becoming the first African country to successfully complete the transition from dictatorship to a pluralistic political system by overthrowing a military dictator with civic democratic means. The civil society resistance to elite-led democratic backsliding resulted in February 1990 in a Sovereign National Conference supported and organized by representatives of all social classes, professions and religions (Kohnert & Preuss, 2019; Kohnert & Preuss, 1992). Like following Sovereign National Conferences in Lomé and other capitals of [francophone Africa](#) in the early 1990s, it had also been informed by the history of the French revolution (i.e. the final Etats Généraux of French Absolutism) (Kohnert, 2021). Yet, recent waves of democratic backsliding in SSA suggested that civil society's autonomy from political parties, which until then had been seen as a key factor for the ability of civil society to challenge autocratic movements, no longer worked. Nevertheless, protest movements linked to constitutional battles in Benin and Senegal revealed distinct cross-movement mobilization and a large following and agency of actors from civil society involved in the protests (Rakner, 2021).

Benin's political and social interest groups are numerous, though not all social strata are equally represented. Major players include the three student unions (FNEB, UNEB and UNSEB) and the trade [union movement](#), restricted to represent the relatively small labour force of the formal sector, that is, mostly public employees. The Cstb, led by Secretary General Kassa Mampo, is the most representative in terms of defending working class rights in the public sector. She had won for the third time. Cosi-Benin comes second. Csa-Benin ranks first in the private sector. Unions are voted for the next five years (Janviergedo, 2021).

Also, the Church and Catholic intellectuals, the private independent press and the diaspora count among the significant opinion leaders. Altogether, though relatively heterogeneous, they constitute an 'organized political alternative' (Banégas, 2003). As a consequence of the restriction of the right to strike by the government, validated by the Constitutional Court in June 2018, the bargaining position of trade unions decreased considerably. Trade union elections in January 2021 indicate that only three trade unions and confederations were still representative. Petty traders of the informal sector have associations whose representatives negotiate directly with the government (BTI-Benin, 2021). There still exists a multitude of [political parties](#). However, most of the smaller parties have a definite urban bias and often are a one-person rent-seeking show. The same applies to the numerous NGOs which are mostly dependent on development aid and vulnerable to being co-opted by political actors. Whereas civil society actors formerly used to play a watchdog role they were increasingly co-opted by the government (BTI-Benin, 2021).

Benin's social movements are active mostly in the urban centres of Benin. Notably several women's associations and movements have been also active in protesting against political and socio-economic harassment the past decades like [Thérèse Wahounwa](#), an icon of the social movements of the 1990s in Benin, still active as President of the National Committee of Resellers and Craftsmen of Benin (Conarab) and co-organizing protest marches against the Talon government (BBC, 2018).

Other examples of socio-economic protest include a court, school and hospital official's 3-day strike in early 2018. The participants called for the repeal of a law that would remove their right to strike in several sectors, including the army, police, justice and health. The law had passed Parliament, but was revoked shortly afterwards by the Constitutional Court (Bachabi, 2018). In the past, various sectors of the public administration observed general or partial

strikes, mostly successfully, which showed the strength and activity of Benin’s labour unions. In July 2018, a new tax on social networks, introduced by the government, had to be withdrawn because of strong pressure from the population, that considered the measure to be a restriction of their legitimate right of critique of the government (BTI-Benin, 2021).

### 3. Togo: the longest-lasting autocratic regime in SSA

The [Gnassingbé clan](#) established the longest-lasting autocratic regime in [Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (SSA). It has ruled the country since 1967. World-wide only [North Korea](#)’s ruling dynasty has held executive power for longer. Demands for personal and political change were a major issue between the government and its challengers. The [human rights record](#) of the government has improved but remains poor. Despite undeniable improvements to the countries’ economic structure and the framework of the regime’s key institutions, democracy remains far from complete. At best it could be considered as ‘[enlightened](#)’ dictatorship. However, the international community, notably Togo’s African peers, the [African Union](#) (AU) and Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)) and the [WAEMU](#) (UEMOA), followed a [laissez faire](#) approach in the interests of regional stability and their respective national interests in dealing with Togo.

**Cartoon 5:** Togo: Protesters demand presidential term limits <sup>13</sup>



#### 3.1 The growth of populist nationalism and state capture in Togo

A basic [patriotism](#) is observable among the vast majority of Togolese citizens for generations. For example, particular dates and events in country’s history (e.g., independence day, football championnat) are inscribed into the collective memory. The [Togolese Football Federation](#) (FTF) is the governing body of football in Togo. Togo’s national football team aroused international attention when it participated for first time in the [World Cup 2006](#) in Germany, although it lost all games in its [FIFA World Group \(G\)](#) against South Korea, Switzerland and France. Togo’s most renowned footballer, [Emmanuel Adebayor](#), who played for English clubs [Arsenal](#), Manchester City, was voted African Footballer of the Year for 2008 while playing at [Arsenal](#). He represented the Togo national team at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, the country's debut, and to date only, appearance at the World Cup.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Against the grain. Togo leader Gnassingbé resists calls for presidential term limits’. Source: Aklassou-Gana Kossi, alias [Donisen Donald](#), Togolese cartoonist, 2018. © (all rights reserved).

However, the sentiment of national belonging is often mitigated by [intra-ethnic and regional cleavages](#). Tensions between [ethnic groups](#), dating back to Togo's colonial past, still play a considerable role in limiting equal access to remunerative and strategically important public authorities, thereby abetting nepotism and compromising good governance. This holds particularly with respect to the divide between the [Kabyé](#) of northern Togo, the homeland of the [Gnassingbé clan](#), who dominate Togo's politics and security services, and the economically more powerful [Ewé](#) of southern Togo. The lack of a consensus regarding national benchmarks to date may be an indicator of the deficient consolidation of Togo as a functioning nation-state. An example of self-interested nationalism includes calls by trading elites, like the influential 'Nana-Benz', to limit market access for 'Foreigners' (notably Chinese petty traders). They are the politically influential cloth-trading women of Lomé, who during the 1970s earned more revenue than the phosphate industry. These trading elites have been increasingly critical of a growth in the 'unfair' competition they face from small-scale Chinese traders and Nigerians, who are often accused of drug dealing (Kohnert, 2021).

The appeal to alleged African traditions and a sacred common cultural heritage often served in the 1970s primarily to redefine or invent this tradition in order to create the 'nations' as 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991; see also Fardon 1996) and to secure domination of the power elites. Famous negative examples in this respect were the ideology of [authenticité](#) in the 1970s and 1980s under the dictatorship of [Mobutu](#) and [Eyadéma](#) in Zaire and Togo respectively. For the predecessors of Eyadéma, [Sylvanus Olympio](#) and Nicolas Grunitzky, the choice had been clear. Olympio, who chose more independence from the former French colonial power was murdered in January 1963 by [Gnassingbé Eyadéma](#) who usurped the Presidency in 1967. Olympio's successor and step-brother [Nicolas Grunitzky](#), labelled in the vernacular the 'man of France', just propagated a 'new Togo', keeping on to rely on France (Agbévé & Blanco 2021).

Apart from the former colonial powers, new global players like the [US](#) and the [Soviet Union](#) contributed actively to the spread of nationalism and autocratic rule within the framework of the [Cold War](#). Thereby, they undermined the nation-building project of newly independent states in sub-Saharan Africa in three ways (Kohnert, 2008): First, by fighting national leaders they did not like precisely because of their policies geared towards national autonomy. Outstanding examples were the deposition and assassination of the first freely elected Prime Minister of the Congo, [Patrice E. Lumumba](#) (1961), the first President of Togo, [Sylvanus Olympio](#) (1963) and the leader of the liberation struggle of Guinea Bissau, [Amilcar Cabral](#) (1973). Second, the creation of independent nations was restricted by promoting autocratic rule and [rentier economies](#) in the wake of great power interests in plundering Africa's resources during the Cold War. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, illegitimate political systems emerged in this respect that hindered rather than promoted nation-building. Thirdly, independent nation-building was hampered by the expansion of neo-colonial structures of [economic and cultural dependency](#), which radically restricted reflection on own [African knowledge systems](#) and creative freedom. This included decades of an unequal and unfair EU trade policy towards Africa (Kohnert, 2009a), a misguided neo-liberal [structural adjustment policy](#) of the [IMF](#) and the [World Bank](#) and, last but not least, a development policy, guided by [modernization theory](#) that justified inappropriate top-down technology transfers in the context of development aid (Bierschenk et al. 1993). All together, this reinforced the social antagonisms between poor and rich within as well as between African countries (Kohnert, 2008).

In [Togo](#), authentic, self-determined nation-building by the people was prevented by the unscrupulous despotism of the Gnassingbé family ([Eyadéma](#) and his son [Faure](#)). The recourse to nation-building served mainly as pretext to consolidate personal autocratic rule. This included the instrumentalization of African religions and occult belief systems by the ruling powers for political motivated witch-hunts, as demonstrated by the Eyadéma regime and its bizarre leadership cult (Toulabor, 1986; Kohnert, 1997). African autocrats such as Eyadéma seem to have used these instruments particularly skilful and unscrupulous (see Schatzberg 1993: 448-450; Toulabor 1986: 124-131).

The legitimation of his regime by the occult was based on well-planned propaganda campaigns to strengthen the personal charism of the autocracy. Although the claim to legitimacy was thus bound to certain leaders who were portrayed as unique, it was not limited to this person. It was inextricably linked to the clan and the regime of these leaders, i.e. the state apparatus that effectively guaranteed their rule, analogous to the fascist state of the Hitler regime. Even if the cult of personality was usually orchestrated in advance and updated periodically, it would be wrong to assume that the instrumentalization of the occult was done in a purely [Machiavellian](#) manner without its own inner concern. Potentates like [Eyadéma](#) were themselves irretrievably entangled in the logic of magic and witchcraft and acted accordingly in expanding their legitimacy-cult of personality, such as the "*Eyadémaïsme*" (see Toulabor 1986: 124-131, 133-229; Ellis 1993). Eyadéma's successor, his son [Faure Gnassingbé](#), studied economics and earned a master's degree in business administration from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Returning to Togo, he became involved in the management of the business affairs of the [Gnassingbé clan](#), serving as a financial adviser to his father up to the death of Eyadéma in 2005 ("[Faure Gnassingbé](#)". Encyclopedia Britannica).

### *The shadow state in Togo*

Under the reign of [Eyadéma](#) the traditional chiefs that still had a crucial role to play in informal politics at the local level, and trade unions were incorporated into the [Gnassingbé regime](#), whereas the administrative sector was staffed with supporters of the ruling party ([RPT](#), and its successor [UNIR](#)). The big state enterprises served for decades as reservoirs of political clientelism. The opposition was systematically excluded, and even private business was under RPT control. Although [Faure Gnassingbé](#) tried to distance himself from his father, presenting himself as a reformer, he could not risk alienating the patrons of the old regime (s. below; Osei, 2018).

A recent analysis of Togolese entrepreneurs and the reproduction of political and social hierarchies showed that these entrepreneurs favour the perpetuation of class, age, and sometimes also gender hierarchies, as well as the preservation of the political regime. In short, the entrepreneurs acted in a 'capitalism of connivance' that required proximity to political power. The phenomenon of 'crony-capitalism' was amplified by the absence of political change and by endemic corruption and nepotism over five decades (Vampo, 2021).

In April 2018 the French daily *Le Monde* revealed details about another corruption scandal. Apparently, the [Gnassingbé clan](#) was probed by the French justice in connection with the [Bolloré-affair](#). The notorious French tycoon [Vincent Bolloré](#), prominent member of [Françafrique](#), a neo-colonial network of the political and business elites in France and francophone Africa (Kohnert, 2022a), had been suspected of having secured port concessions in Lomé by undercharged services (800,000 € for merely 100,000 €) provided by the international advertising agency *Havas* (up to 2017 a 60% dependency of [Bolloré](#), then sold to

*Vivendi*) to help [Faure Gnassingbé](#) elected in 2010. On 26 February 2021, Bolloré pleaded guilty to be culpable of active corruption (Kohnert, 2021).

The elite-network of Bolloré and President Faure Gnassingbé are closely related, not least because of assistance by the three sisters that belong to the extended [Lawson family](#), a royal family from [Aného](#), formerly a major slave export port at the [Dutch slave coast](#), called ‘Petit-Popo’), in Togo. First of all, [Cina Lawson](#), a brilliant young academic with close links to the President, who appointed her in 2010 as Minister of Digital Economy and Transformation. She grew up in Paris as the daughter of Togolese immigrants who had fled Togo, because her father had been opposed to the Gnassingbé regime. As minister for the digital economy she successfully established two projects in 2018: *Eco CCP* (an interest-bearing mobile savings account, allowing anyone with a mobile phone to open a bank account in seconds) and *AgriPME* (an electronic wallet for farmers that revolutionized the disbursement of government subsidies to the most vulnerable Togolese farmers, making it possible for them to receive funds directly in their e-wallets to purchase fertilizer) (HKS, 2022). She also supervised the privatisation of [Togo telecom](#). Her sister, Cathia Lawson-Hall, is a senior executive of Bolloré’s [Vivendi](#) media concern, awarding contracts for fibre-optics and internet service provision. Moreover, she is non-executive director of the French aid agency, Agence Française de Développement ([AFD](#)), a mayor provider of development and security aid to Togo. The third sisters, Sonia Lawson, has also close links to the Gnassingbé clan and CEO of the luxury hotel Sarakawa in Lomé (Weir & Vescovacci, 2022)

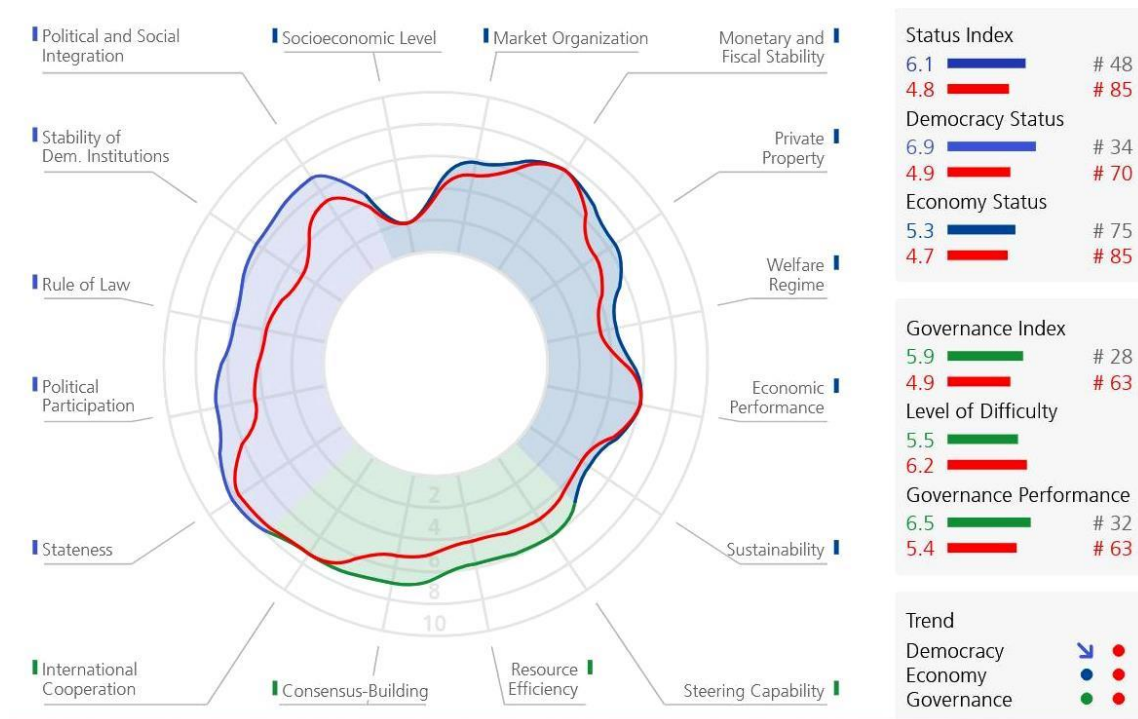
However, the deal with Vincent Bolloré was annulled by the Paris judge in 2021, who ruled that the offense was too serious to justify a guilty plea and a fine. After all, this would condone state capture by the almighty Bolloré group, its vassals and political allies like [Jacques Dupuydauby](#), an equally well-connected French tycoon of the post-colonial network [Françafrique](#). He and the notorious [Charles Debbasch](#), assisted by their local ally Charles Kokoufi Gafan, who married one of the daughters of President [Faure](#), collaborated closely to collect bribes and kickbacks from Dupuydauby's and many other’s business in Togo, for distribution to President Eyadéma, his family and entourage. Bolloré and Dupuydauby apparently considered Togo as their personal *chasse-gardée* (fief). The president and his extended family, key members of his entourage, politicians, police and military, they all benefited from all sorts of bribes, jobs, or preferential business opportunities the state could bestow (Weir & Vescovacci, 2022).

However, when Bolloré had assured his major booty, the deep-water container terminal in Lomé, he ousted Dupuydauby and remained the principal agent of worldwide logistic and media empire, [Vivendi](#) Group, investing in fibre-optics, internet service provision and other new and digital media, with GVA-Togo as its local subsidiary (Weir & Vescovacci, 2022). A similar fate happened to the half-brother of Togo’s President, [Kpatcha Gnassingbé](#). Under the reign of his father, Eyadéma, he ran the Lomé Free Port and served as defence minister and interior minister. However, when his father died in 2005 the brothers quarrelled about primacy and Kpatcha lost. He was accused under dubious conditions of a coup attempt and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. In July 2013, the [Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States](#) revealed acts of torture inflicted on Kpatcha Gnassingbé and his co-detainees. Although seriously ill, he still remains in prison.

On October 19, 2020, the President reorganized his ‘[kitchen cabinet](#)’, i.e. his team of close informal collaborators which effectively constituted a [shadow state](#). Beside his old guard of

special advisers <sup>14</sup>, [Faure Gnassingbé](#) surrounded himself with young and discreet new advisors. First, [Sandra Ablamba Johnson](#), she had the rank of minister as new Secretary General of the Presidency and replaced Patrick Daté Tévi-Benissan, who died on 2 September 2021. She also headed the civil cabinet of the Head of State since [Victoire Tomegah Dogbe](#) was promoted to the prime minister's office. Thus, she was rewarded for having contributed to the successful completion of the reforms that enabled Togo's spectacular progress in the 2019 and 2020 rankings of the World Bank's 'Doing Business' reports. Second, Kouessan Yovodevi. As new director of communication to the presidency, this journalist trained at the Higher Institute of Press, in Lomé, was to restructure government communication. Third, Komlan Adjitowou, who took over as head of the military cabinet of the Palace. He was former deputy chief of staff of the [Togolese Armed Forces](#), raised to the rank of general in 2018. The fourth new advisor was Djibril Mohaman Awalou, who acted as national coordinator for the management of the response to COVID-19. He was university professor and central director of the army health service and of the medical and surgical clinic (allegedly close to the Military) of the Sylvanus-Olympio CHU clinic in [Lomé](#) (Kohnert, 2021).

**Graph 9: BTI 2022 Togo + Benin Country Reports, compared**



Source: [Bertelsmann Transformation Index \(BTI\)](#), [BTI Transformation Atlas](#), 2022

<sup>14</sup> The 'old guard' of advisors included Faure's brother Amah Gnassingbé, former party's Second Vice-President of the oppositional UFC, who had accepted in 2006 a post in the government as Minister of State. Also the notorious French lawyer, late [Charles Debbasch](#) (1937-2022), who allegedly had played a crucial role in the 'constitutional coup d'État' by which Faure Gnassingbé succeeded his father Eyadéma, played a crucial role as well as [Barry Moussa Barqué](#) and [Koffi Sama](#). In October 2020, [Carlos Lopes](#), said to be one of the principal architects of Togo's National Development Plan (PND) joined the crew of retired senior advisors of international standing of Faure Gnassingbé, like [Tony Blair](#), [Dominique Strauss-Khan](#) and [Lionel Zinsou](#). Lopes, is a [Guinea-Bissauian](#) development economist and former executive secretary of the [United Nations Economic Commission for Africa](#) (ECA, 2012–2016). In addition, in June 2020, [Lotfi Bel Hadj](#), a French-Tunisian essayist, economist, and businessman, became Togo's communicator. Having seen part of his online political marketing operations unveiled last month by the renowned American think-tank Atlantic Council, the Franco-Tunisian communicator signed communication and influence contracts with the Togolese presidency (Kohnert, 2021).

In 2022, a new [Afrobarometer](#) survey revealed once more that the Togolese preferred alternation in power after more than 50 years of Gnassingbé autocracy. Furthermore, two out of three Togolese favoured multi-party democracy to any other form of government, and notably they rejected dictatorship. Yet, only a third of Togolese were satisfied with the way democracy worked in the country. In 2021, the revelation of the massive use of the Israeli [‘Pegasus’ spyware](#) by the security services to spy on opponents of the Gnassingbé regime who were treated like criminals showed the limits of the ‘enlightened autocracy’ in Togo (Châtelot, 2021). But the population had also had little confidence in the bitterly divided opposition (Combey, 2022). Also, the weakly developed civil society organizations were not able to present sustainable alternatives. Nevertheless, the country coped the [COVID-19 crisis](#) better than its pairs in Western Africa, not least, because of its strong regional export orientation and increasing revenues from the deep-water port of Lomé, the trading hub ranking first in West Africa (Preuss, 2022).

### 3.2 Perspectives of Togo’s social movements

With the second wind of change in Africa (1989 to 1995) (Engel et. al., 1996), triggered by the [collapse of the Soviet Union](#), the democratic renewal of African societies started in the early 1990s, when [civil society organizations](#) (CSOs) mushroomed. According to informed estimates about 41 % of the population were organized in one or other CSO<sup>15</sup>. Already in 2012, there existed about 2,000 Togolese CSOs, of which just 325 were officially registered [NGOs](#). Many, CSOs were covered job and income-generating organizations of their founders (so-called *‘ONG-valises’*). Their activities were mostly focused on the capital [Lomé](#) and Togo’s southern regions. Their target-groups, especially the poor and underprivileged, including women, were rarely allowed adequate rights of participation or self-determination. However, there exist a handful of CSOs that still are influential, viable and independent and operate nationally. These include [ACAT-Togo](#) (*Action des Chrétiens pour l’Abolition de la Torture*), which won the French Republic’s human rights prize in 1997, the Togolese League of Human Rights (*Ligue Togolaise des Droits de l’Homme* (LTDH)) and the GF2D (*Groupe de Réflexion et d’ Action Femmes, Démocratie et Développement*) managed by [Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson](#) concerned with gender rights and impunity. Some of these organizations co-operate with political parties in broad anti-government movements, such as the [Collectif Sauvons le Togo](#) (CST). However, the [COVID-19 pandemic in Togo](#) severely affected CSO activities too. The most common challenges have been the loss of funding, bringing operations to a stand-still. Reduced funding led also to major operational and structural changes and the inability to implement program activities because of the government’s preventive measures against the pandemic (Kohnert, 2021).

A study on social movements in Togo, published in 2013, identified about thirty social movements. It defined eight different types of social movements that had marked Togo’s social history between 1990 and 2013: democracy, student, women’s, migrants, journalist and environmental, carriers and trade union movements (Abi, 2013). Further on, it listed the ‘Action and Reflection Group on the Environment and Development’ (GARED), acting as intermediary between the Togolese civil society and the secretariat of the [African Social Forum](#), based in [Dakar](#)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Here and in the following the text relies heavily on Kohnert, Dirk (2021): [BTI 2021 - Togo Country Report: Togo’s Political and Socio-Economic Development \(2019-2021\)](#) [author’s enhanced version], [MPRA paper, No. 105007](#).

<sup>16</sup> Other social organizations were the ‘Solidarity Action for Sustainable Development’ (SADD), the ‘Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen Action’ – TOGO (ATTAC-TOGO), the ‘Young Volunteers for the Environment’ (JVE), ‘Friends of Earth’ – Togo, and the ‘Organization for the Support of Democracy and Local Development’ ( OADEL) (Abi, 2013).

In May 2009 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*'Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation'*, CVJR) was established to investigate human rights violations from 1958 to the bloody persecutions in the aftermath of the death of [Gnassingbé Eyadéma](#) and the illegitimate 'enthronement' of his son Faure Gnassingbé 2005. It was presided by Mgr. [Nicodème Benissan-Barrigah](#) and supported by the [UNHCR](#) office in Lomé. A High Commissioner's Office for Reconciliation (*Haut Commissariat pour la réconciliation et le renforcement de l'unité nationale*, HCRRUN) installed in March 2015 was meant to speed up the implementation of the recommendations, assisted by a CSO-platform (*Plateforme citoyenne justice et vérité*, PCJV). Nearly 35,000 people, victims of socio-political violence from 1958 to 2005, have been identified throughout Togo (Kohnert, 2021).

In early 2017, the [CFA franc](#) debate attracted again the attention of activists in the whole of Francophone Africa. A social movement developed to demand the joint withdrawal of African nations from the post-colonial currency union (Kohnert, 2005). On 7 January, NGOs (*'SOS Pan-Africa'*, *'Urgences Panafricanistes'*) organized anti-CFA demonstrations in several African and European cities. Alongside radical economists and intellectuals, the critics of the CFA franc included also Togo's [Kako Nubukpo](#), economist and former minister for the evaluation of public politics in the cabinet of [Faure Ganssingbé](#), ex-[BCEAO](#) banker, and since 2016 director of the economic and digital Francophonie. He was an outspoken critic of the F CFA. Critics considered the CFA franc and its peg to the Euro as a neo-colonial device that continued to destroy any prospect of self-reliant economic development. According to the critics, the CFA franc served mainly the interest of a small elite of the so-called [Monsieurs Afrique](#), a term coined by Antoine Glaser and Stephen Smith in 1992, both in francophone Africa and France. Last but not least, the peg encouraged, massive capital outflows. The argument was supported also by the gradual strengthening of the [Euro](#) against the [US\\$](#) since April 2021 which favoured imports to the detriment of the Togolese export market. The volatility of the US\$ vis à vis the Euro had been the main reason for the 1994 [CFA franc](#) devaluation that had caused widespread social and political unrest in [WAEMU](#) (UEMOA) member states. In December, Nubukpo was dismissed of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie ([OIF](#)) because of his critical remarks both on the CFA Franc as well as on the French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) and the latter's alleged dishonourable remarks for African leaders (Kohnert, 2018).

Since the early 1990s the communication strategies used by social movements included leaflets, posters, clandestine meetings, political meetings and the use of the Internet and digital social networks. The latter was increasingly deployed as privileged means of mobilization (Napo, 2020). In January 2020 1.71 million Togolese were connected to the internet according to a study published by *'Hootsuite and We Are Social'* on the use of the web and social networks in Togo. An increase of 7.8% compared with 2019. The overall internet penetration rate was now 21%, including 43.1% via mobile, 56.1% by computer, 0.7% by tablet. 650,000 subscribers were active on social networks (+ 14% between April 2019 and January 2020). 580,000 users regularly access *Facebook* (95.9% by mobile), 72,000 to *Instagram*, 170,000 to *LinkedIn* ([republicoftogo.com](#), 19.02.2020). There were 3 *Instagram* macro influencers in Togo with an average following of 81 860 followers. The total reach of all Togolese *Instagram* macro influencers combined is 245 581 followers ([Hypetrace.com](#), 2020). *TikTok* is said to be used increasingly by Togo's teenagers too (Kohnert, (2021).

Influencers like the comedian influencer [#Roland\\_Tikena](#) allegedly count more than 12 Mio. views. *Twitter* and other social media networks are increasingly used both by the government and the opposition. Internet access is improving with 17% of the population with regular



access to the internet in December 2017, compared to 2.4% of the population in 2008. Nevertheless, the penetration rate is well below the African average of 21%. Furthermore, the mobile phone user penetration rate soared by 700% in the past five years from 2013 to 2018, with about 80% of the population using a mobile phone in 2018 (WB, 2018, no update available). In order to counteract the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the poor and vulnerable, the African Financier of Micro-Projects (*Financière Africaine de Micro-Projets*, FINAM), the first public limited company for microfinance, embarked on the digitalization of its services by creating “*Finam Mobile*” in response to the Covid crisis. The App allows managing ones account at home, including making deposits and withdrawals starting on September 11, 2020 (Kohnert, (2021). The mobile-based cash transfer programme for informal workers allowed for the enrolment for a state grant of at least 30% of the minimum wage, with payouts ranging from XOF 10 500 million (USD 18 million) to XOF 20 000 million (USD 34 million). As of May 5 2020, 1.3 million individuals had registered, of whom 500.000 received a NOVISSI payment. Based on program data, 65% of the beneficiaries are women. The cash transfer program was expected to last 3 months at a cost of XOF 36 billion (USD 61 million; 1.1% of GDP). The NOVISSI program was revised in late June with eligibility limited to workers in specific districts recording a high contagion rate. In total, 1.4 million individuals had registered and close to 600.000 received a NOVISSI payment at a total cost of XOF 11.4 billion (USD 19 million; 0.3% of GDP) up to end of 2020. Women received a higher allowance per month (12,250 CFA F or 18.60 €) than men (10,500 CFA F or 16 €). In total, 11.3 Mrd. CFA F (17.2 m €) were distributed, financed by Togo’s National Solidarity and Economic Recovery Fund and by aid-partners such as the French Development Agency ([AFD](#)) and private donations. It was paid twice a month and mainly intended for people living on daily earnings, without social security and affected by a decline in activity as explained by [Cina Lawson](#), the Minister for Digital Economy. The government intended to continue on this path, relying on its mobile coverage to move forward and wanted to ensure that every citizen would have three essential things: a digital biometric identity, a cell phone and a mobile bank account (Kohnert, (2021).

In early 2018, the government pushed forwards its project of institutional reforms and elections to secure the position of the [Ganssingbé clan](#) in power. It proposed a political dialogue that started in the capital on 19 February. As a confidence-building measure to facilitate the political dialogue it released 30 out of 90 imprisoned opposition demonstrators on 20 February. However, already in August 2017, a common front of the most important 14 opposition parties, the [C14](#), had been created that campaigned for a boycott of the upcoming legislative elections in December 2018 in view of the biased electoral process. The movement was harassed by the security forces. However, it nevertheless allowed for ‘public education’ which might have been ultimately the greatest success of the citizen mobilization, e.g. by discussions on economic governance and alternation in power, including the Togolese diaspora in various countries. The movement feed mainly on information transmitted to the public via social media communication channels (Abi, 2019).

In July 2022, about 40 civil society organizations and trade unions, including 11 media, discussed the legal and moral basis and the role of social movements in social, economic and political development in the context of a threatening reduction of civic space. They urged the Togolese government to involve CSOs and trade unions more in the drafting of texts to govern them and to regulate civic space by adjusting it to international standards (Société Civile Médias, 2022; 2022a).

## 4. Senegal: democratic transition immersed in muddy power-politics

Like [Benin](#), [Senegal](#) has long been sold as a showcase of democracy in Africa, including peaceful political alternance. Things changed fundamentally with the [2019 Senegalese presidential election](#) that brought new configurations. One of the major issues was political side-switching of candidates that has been elevated to the rank of religion in defiance of morality. It threatened political stability and peace. Under these conditions, it was not the established political parties, but grassroots social movements that opposed the increasing [democratic backsliding](#) of political rule. Social networks of predominantly young activists, created since 2011 in the aftermath of the [Arab Spring](#) focused on grass-roots advocacy with the electorate on good governance and democracy. They proposed a break with a political system that they considered as neo-colonialist. Moreover, they denounced Senegal's biased justice and the servility of the Constitutional Council vis à vis the government (Kohnert & Marfaing, 2019).

**Cartoon 6:** President Macky Sall hunting critics on social media <sup>17</sup>



Source: [Damien Glez](#), Twitter

### 4.1 The growth of populist nationalism and state capture in Senegal

The mother tongue plays a central role in the delimitation of a [nation state](#) and in [nation-building](#) from below. Although the official language in the former French colony remained French, the vernacular is [Wolof](#). Its spread as a national [lingua franca](#) started with the independence of the country in 1960. However, the roots of sentiments of nationalism were already laid in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by an important Muslim cleric [Limamou Laye](#) (1843-1909), the founder of the [Layene](#) Sufi order (Thomas, 2012). Furthermore, a discourse on nation-building and ethnic belonging was developed by African writers like [Ousmane Sembène](#), [Aminata Sow Fall](#), [Cheikh Hamidou Kane](#), [Ousmane Diop Socé](#), [Abdoulaye Sadj](#) and [Tita Mandeleau](#) (Diop, 2003). In the early development of Senegalese social sciences nationalism had been addressed indirectly by focussing (top-down) on the scholar's social position in relation to pre-colonial stratification and ideology, notably in relation to the descendants of

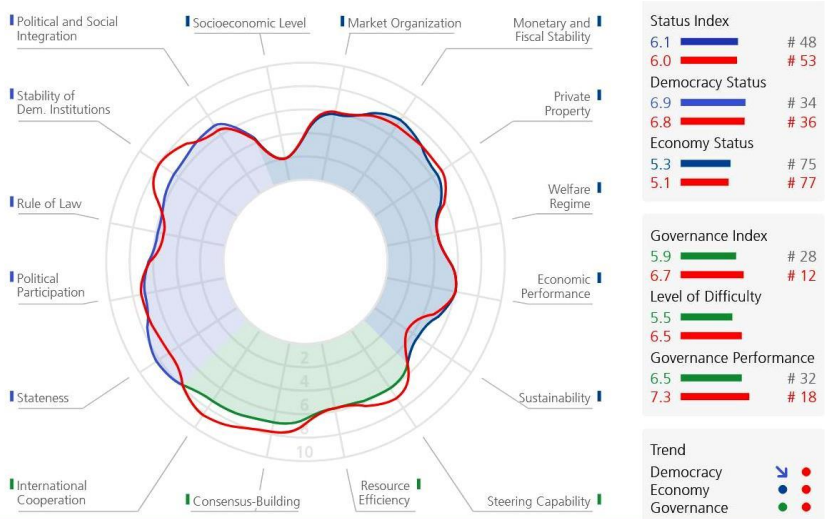
<sup>17</sup> “#Senegal: Macky Sall has called for new legislation to give the Senegalese government greater control of social media”. Cartoon by [Damien Glez](#), a Franco-Burkinabe press cartoonist. Source: Anonymous, @YourAnonStory, on Twitter. © (all rights reserved).

the traditional social organization of the *g er* or non-caste nobility that occupied the summit of the hierarchy (Copans, 1991).

The ‘Wolofisation’ of everyday life constituted a kind of ‘[banal nationalism](#)’ beyond the state monopoly. But any attempt to elevate Wolof to a higher official rank would rather endanger national cohesion because minority language groups would protest. This had been demonstrated in 2000 when President [Abdoulaye Wade](#) proposed that public servants should be required to know Wolof which provoked harsh refusal mostly from primarily [Pulaar](#)-speakers. In so far the ‘Wolofisation’ constituted an informal and undirected social movement playing a central role in nation-building (Smith, 2010; McLaughlin, 2008). All the more so since the French colonial rulers tried to implement their ‘civilization mission’ by forcing their French linguistic and cultural assimilation policy on the colonized population. Thus, they employed a language-technology of nationalism in four Communes ([Dakar](#), [Saint-Louis](#), [Gor e](#), and [Rufisque](#)). However, the [Senegambian](#) ethnic population undermined this technology and promoted the speaking of Wolof at the expense of French during the colonial period (1891–1960) (Kwang Johnson, 2004). Also, the ‘Wolofisation’ and similar forms of cultural nationalism had little to do with ideologies of ‘[n gritude](#)’ as propagated by [L opold S dar Senghor](#), the first President of Senegal. Rather it could be compared with the anti-colonial independence movements in francophone Africa, for example in Algeria (Mouralis, 1995). After independence, Senegal's national leaders even bothered in the 1960s about delineating how artists should express nationalism by their artwork, for example in weaving tissues, and enforced this definition through selective state patronage. Later-on, with the development of a powerful informal sector, independent modern weavers redefined artistic nationalism (Cochrane, 2011).

Moreover, there existed since decades a simmering conflict about separatist movements in the [Casamance region](#). Its population extends well into neighbouring [Guinea-Bissau](#). The border regions served as secluded retreat for the armed [Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance](#) (MFDC) since 1982. However, this rather enhanced feelings of nationalism by the majority of Senegalese population. It was argued that the MFDC rather an ethnic movement because African political ideology and culture does not distinct between nationalism and ethnicity (Lambert, 1998).

**Graph 10:** [BTI 2022 Benin + Senegal Country Reports](#), compared



Source: [Bertelsmann Transformation Index](#) (BTI), [BTI Transformation Atlas](#), 2022

Also, in recent years there emerged a religious motivated populism of the extreme right, called '[Islamo-nationalism](#)'. The 'old left' jumped on the bandwagon because it allowed for activating its long-standing campaigns against neo-liberalism and French as well as Western domination in general in times of endangered [sovereignty](#) (Samb, 2022).

Besides, in the past decades Senegal's contested elections contributed significantly to the growth of populist nationalism and autocratic rule. This applied also for the most recent [legislative elections of 31 July 2022](#) that elected the 165 members of parliament for the coming five years. The ruling coalition '[United in Hope](#)' of President [Macky Sall](#) won the elections. Yet, it suffered a tangible setback by losing its absolute majority that it had held since 2012. Many voters accused the President of using his power to eliminate opponents. Among others, he had usurped power by seeing to it that possible adversaries, including the popular former mayor of Dakar, [Khalifa Sall](#), and former President [Abdoulaye Wade](#)'s son [Karim Wade](#), who were targeted by the judiciary and disqualified from running for office. Also in the 2022 elections, major candidates had been barred by the [Constitutional Council](#). Thus, [Ousmane Sonko](#), who was seen by many voters as a rising opposition leader, had been banned because of accusations and subsequent arrest based on alleged rape charges. This led to violent protests of his supporters, and at least three people died in June 2022. Sonko appealed especially to Senegal's youth because of his rejection of the traditional political class, embedded in a system of endemic corruption, and his anti-colonial stance, advocating for example abandoning the CFA Franc (Sylla, 2021). Alongside Sonko, [Khalifa Sall](#) and [Karim Wade](#) remained disqualified (Aljazeera, 2022; Kohnert & Marfaing, 2019).

However, the main opposition coalitions [Liberate the People](#) (*Yewwi Askan Wi*) and Save Senegal (*Wallu Sénégal*), running in an alliance, also failed to win a majority. They won 56 and 24 seats, respectively, for a total of 80 (Roll, 2022). A victory for the opposition would have been tantamount with the rejection of a possible third candidacy for Macky Sall and a probable victory of the opposition in the next presidential election 2024. Sall had refused to publicly rule out a candidacy in 2024 which had fuelled fears he would follow in the footsteps of Ivory Coast President [Alassane Ouattara](#), Togolese President [Faure Gnassingbé](#) and former Guinea President [Alpha Conde](#). All three clinched to power and had won third terms by arguing that new constitutions had reset their two-term limits. However, the ECOWAS pro-democracy norms reinforced societal attitudes in Senegal and other West African countries against autocratization of power and legitimised corresponding strategies of the Western international donor community (Leininger & Nowack, 2022).

Electoral policy and the related political violence draw attention to a shift in focus of the electoral clientele from a largely religious affiliation to a discourse on [ethnicity](#), notably among the young activists. Both ruling power and the opposition apparently no longer hesitated to surf on [regionalism](#). This became apparent when opposition-leader [Ousmane Sonko](#) who had spent his childhood in the [Casamance](#), publicly accused President Sall of nurturing 'hate for Casamance' (Samb, 2022).

### *The shadow state in Senegal*

A shadow state in the making is also to be observed in Senegal. This became obvious when former President Wade introduced a new category of politician, the '*entrepreneur politician*' (Camara, 2019). Wade's, patronage for political companions and friends was famous. Trust in political institutions in Senegal dropped continuously (Sall, 2015). However, the roots had been laid already in the 1980 with the shift of commercial control away from the state and foreign (French and Lebanese) interests towards informal politics, away from the former

pattern of clientelist relations between Senegalese business and the old regime (Thioub & Diop & Boone, 1998). The Senegalese state impeded economic development already in the waning days of colonial rule through its manipulation of local markets. It channelled access to wealth through state-mediated 'commercial circuits' rather than by promoting production. Thus, postcolonial political elites were able to cement alliances with powerful social and economic forces thereby enhancing rent-seeking opportunities that fuel patronage politics (Kassimir, 1994; Boone, 1992).

Corruption has been endemic since decades on all levels of the administration, although the government had ratified diverse international legal instruments against corruption, notably that of [ECOWAS](#), [WAEMU](#), [AU](#) and the [UN](#). Moreover it had incorporated anti-corruption provisions into the law on the general status of public servants and established a National Commission to Combat Non-transparency, Corruption and Misappropriation. Yet, covert networks of public and private actors who accumulate unchecked powers are still virulent. Senegalese politics are riddled by corruption, both petty as well as grand corruption (Camara, 2019). Thus, in 2014, President Sall appointed his brother-in-law, [Mansour Faye](#), minister of hydraulics and sanitation, and in April 2019 he gained the juicy post as minister of community development, social and territorial equity. The President's younger brother, [Aliou Sall](#), was appointed in 2017 to the Deposits and Consignments Fund, a public-sector financial institution. He had to resign in June 2019, after allegations to have been paid kick-backs of US\$ 250,000 in 2014 by a gas company that sold its shares in Senegalese gas fields to [BP](#). Also, Macky Sall appointed for the first time in the country's history a politician to head the sensitive position of the Finance Ministry and the General Tax Authority.

The Senegalese shadow state thus developed step by step, applying grand corruption as a political project rather than an individual or collective act of greed. The state was captured by those who acted on its behalf but operated it for their own benefit, in turn, state agents were often captured by their families and patrons (Camara, 2019). This elite capture apparently worked in all sectors and levels of the economy, for example in wood charcoal production and trade with implications for forest management programs in rural Senegal. The access to charcoal-related economic opportunities enabled only a small circle of wealthy rural elites to grab and dominate the access to forest resources (Jusrut, 2022). The operational logics of the local government laid the foundation for the practices brokerage and facilitated informal privatization and the growing institutionalization of the 'informal' as a management mode of the state in everyday life (Blundo, 2006).

## 4.2 Perspectives of Senegal's social movements

Since the events of the [Arab Spring](#) in 2011, elections and election campaigns re-coined also Senegal's social movements. Young activists protested against incumbent President [Abdoulaye Wade](#) and his entourage who tried to establish a third presidential mandate against [constitutional limitations](#) to two successive mandates and to prepare in addition his succession by his son. This triggered vehement opposition of a new non-partisan youth movement called [Y'en a mare](#) ('*I am fed up*') under the slogan '*don't touch my constitution*' (CIIP, 2018). The movement had spread-effects to the whole of [Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (Ndiaye, 2020). The movement was inspired by the heroes of West-African anti-colonial liberation struggle, notably [Amilcar Cabral](#) of neighbouring [Guinea-Bissau](#), and the [Burkinabé](#) President [Thomas Sankara](#), both murdered by their adversaries (CIIP, 2018). Although [Y'en a mare](#) was structured relatively hierarchically to enhance its vigour it tried to compensate this by regular meetings representatives of grassroots groups.

On the other hand, largely rural based social movements had been active since the 2000s to defend the land rights of family farms. Under the liberal regime of the ruling party and the continuing pressure of international donors like the [IMF](#) and the [World Bank](#) all sectors of the economy, including agriculture, had been pushed to liberalize. In addition, the [food crisis of 2007 - 2008](#), gave the government the pretext to promote investment by private Senegalese and foreign capital in agriculture. Rural communities were asked to allocate 1,000 hectares each to investors. Ministers, deputies, senior civil servants, religious men were at the forefront to obtain land and become ‘Sunday peasants’. Peasant movement tried to fight against these land grabs of the ruling oligarchy (Faye, 2017).

Meanwhile, [Y'en a marre](#) became a member and spokesperson of the [African Social Forum](#) (since 2012), and it inspired African activists to create similar youth movements in [Burkina Faso](#) (*le Balai citoyen*, 'the Citizen's broom'), in [DR Congo](#) (*Lucha* and *Filimbi*), in [Mali](#) (*Sofas*), in [Togo](#) (*Athiame*), in [Gabon](#) (*that's enough that*) (CIIP, 2018).

**Cartoon 7: [AfriqUPrising! Democracy and protest movements in Africa](#)**



Source: Ba, 2021; Heinrich-Böll Foundation, 2021. © (all rights reserved).

The 2014 revolts in Burkina Faso, when Compaoré tried to run for a third term despite the provisions of the constitution, similar to the Senegalese President Wade before, fuelled again youth protest-movements in Senegal. They understood that their own identity and their voter card could be decisive to influence their own future and that of their country, as shown by the unprecedented increase in voter turnout between 2012 and 2019 in Senegal. [Y'en a marre](#) published list of grievances for the next presidential five-year term. They demanded President [Macky Sall](#) to resign from the presidency of his party ([APR](#)) in order to organize a transparent and credible audit of the electoral lists and institutional reforms, including the independence of justice (Kohnert & Marfaing, 2019). Because the mobile telephone penetration rate had exceeded 100 % already in 2016 the movement was able to act largely independent of traditional media (CIIP, 2018).

[Y'en a marre](#) proposed a redefinition of the country’s social contract by considering new forms of consensual democracy and the institutionalization of the political role of marabouts (Veilleux, 2021). However, the leaders of the movement were economically and socially in a

privileged position, compared with their rank and file activists, and the complex and often abstract demands of the former were not entirely shared by the latter (Veilleux, 2021).

The protest-movement benefited from Senegal's socio-political history favouring conditions for collective action, such as a long history of youth activism, political openness, and media pluralism. [Y'en a marre](#) and other movements clearly expressed their opposition to President Sall's third candidature in 2024. In March 2021, the country experienced unprecedented violent riots with members of [Y'en a marre](#) at the forefront (Dimé, 2022).

The internet and social-media groups played again a crucial role in these protest. They used the [hashtag](#) *#FreeSenegal* that had been launched on 3 March 2021 as they sought reparations for the families of those shot by police during the riots. The movement became a symbol against the regime's undemocratic governance, demanding justice, democracy and jobs (Camara, 2021). It organized marches in Dakar, Diourbel, and Ziguinchor (US-HR, Senegal, 2021). *#FreeSenegal* quickly became viral with over 2 million tweets and more than 2 billion impressions (views) recorded in just a few days. Superstars (actors, artists, footballers, etc.) and political figures from many other countries subsequently used it on [Twitter](#) and thus express their support to denounce police violence and censorship, and to tell international media on attacks on democracy and human rights (Jimira, 2021). The protesters, among them increasingly women, also demanded impartial judiciary, including *vis à vis* opposition leader [Ousmane Sonko](#) who had been accused of rape (Ba, 2021).

Although Senegalese women traditionally were confined to the private sphere they protested openly during the socio-economic crisis of 2008. A breakthrough came with the law on absolute parity between men and women in all institutions totally or partially elective to the National Assembly, on May 14, 2010. Its first-time application during the legislative elections of July 2012 allowed for 43.33 % of women elected. Yet, women's organizations were not only regulated by gender relations, they were also marked by internal contradictions linked to class, culture, age, religion, region, etc. which contributed to the fragmentation of their movements. Moreover, poverty, overwork and insufficient financial resources blocked their activities who were also handicapped by their illiteracy. Besides, cleavages between educated and uneducated women, between urban and rural women, between feminist and non-feminist women handicap their actions which made for elitist tendency of the movement (Guèye, 2013; Kane & Kane, 2018). Finally, many women organizations were largely dependent on outside funding and only 18 % of groups had legal status (Chartrand, 2018). In the worst case, rural feminist social movement were only a 'staging' of peasant organisations and in reality rent-seeking, self-appointed leaders (Lachenmann, 1993).

[Y'en a marre](#) was not the only social protest movement in Senegal. Other groups focussed on issues related to exploitation by foreign firms and countries, like *France Degage* with about 100,000 followers on [Facebook](#) (FRAPP, *Front pour une Révolution Anti-impérialiste Populaire et Panafricain*, Dakar) and *Cos M23*. They had catchy demands, e.g. the withdrawal of French military and oil firms like [TotalEnergies](#). Thus, on 7 October 2022 the FRAPP protested in Gnith ([Dagana Department](#)) with victims of land-grabbing among the local population of 500 hectares. Other members demanded to prefer national fuel and other goods and services provided by Senegalese entrepreneurs, notably if company vehicles were concerned (FRAPP, *Facebook*, 8 October, 2022). *Cos M23* was a political social media organization active in domestic politics that focused on linking certain sets of behaviours to being a good citizen. It was effective in coalition formation, protest mobilization, and engagement within civil society (Alltucker, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

[‘Enlightened’ dictatorships](#) and [populist](#) policies have co-existed in [West Africa](#) since the end of colonial rule. Often they were actively promoted – openly or clandestinely – by Western powers, like in the case of the successors of murdered nationalist leaders in [DR Congo](#), [Guinea-Bissau](#) and [Togo](#). Populist policies were frequently used, both by nationalistic and ‘revolutionary’ parties that fought colonial domination. The populist demagogues blamed [neocolonialism](#), foreigners and Western countries for all possible evils, often mainly to obscure their own accountability (Chengeta, 2018). The usual [checks and balances](#) of Western [multi-party democracy](#) like the judiciary did not work in [Sub-Saharan Africa](#) because the latter was most often high jacked itself by the ruling powers, including the constitutional courts.

The [agency](#) of populists apparently changed according to their position in power. When coming to power, populist politicians typically engaged in regime change. First, they tried to introduce authoritarian practices into the framework of institutions. As soon as they gain the majority they then tended to create a distinctive populist [hybrid regime](#) that could rapidly turn into pure [dictatorship](#) when elections were held only *pro forma* and [authoritarianism](#) was consolidated by [state capture](#) (Arato & Cohen, 2021).

Populist policies are encouraged in times of socio-economic stress, notably when the middle and lower classes experience significant losses in welfare or status that call for simple and rapid answers. This comes to head in friend-enemy dichotomies, an anti-establishment- or anti-elite stance, and polemics against the *status quo*, thereby accentuating political polarization (Arato & Cohen, 2021). To safeguard the plurality of democracies it is important to allow for complementary projects in all spheres of life, in politics, economy, society and culture. [Democratic socialism](#), [patriotism](#), and cultural equality could be the outcome, which, however, would have to be shielded against populist instrumentalization (Arato & Cohen, 2021).

[Good governance](#) and sustainable development remain a challenge for post-colonial African societies as already picked out as a central theme in [Chinua Achebe](#)’s novel [‘A Man of the People’](#) (Alosse, 2014).



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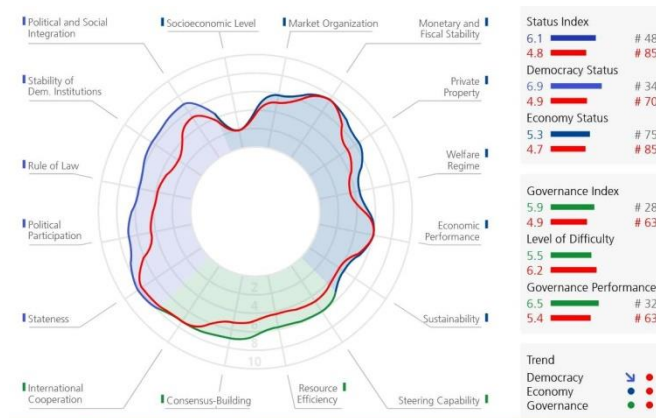
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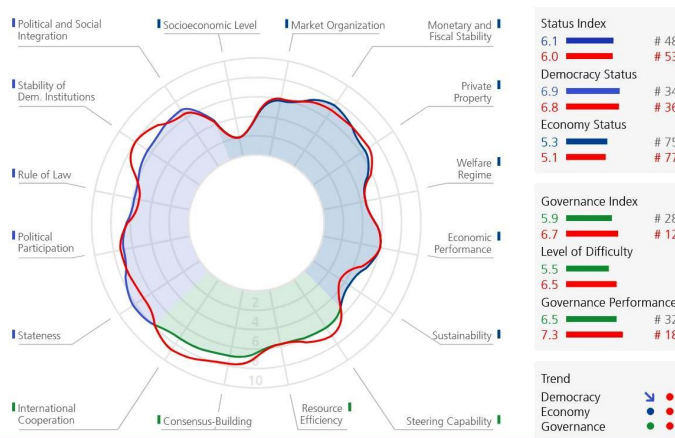
Appendix 1: Benin's development compared with its pairs

**Graph 11: BTI 2022 Benin + Togo Country Reports, compared**



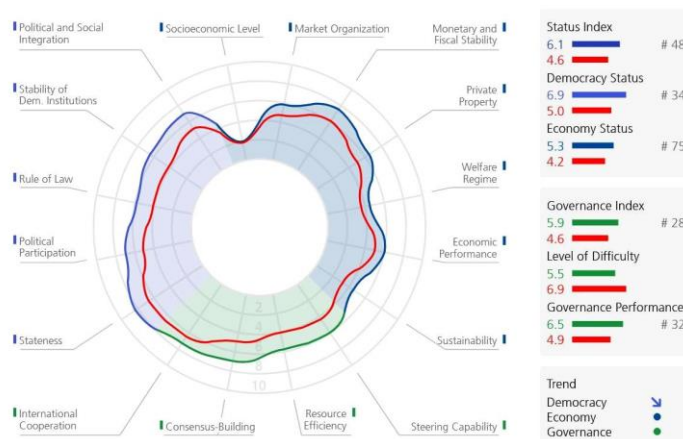
Source: [Bertelsmann Transformation Index \(BTI\)](#), [BTI Transformation Atlas](#), 2022

**Graph 12: BTI 2022 Benin + Senegal Country Reports, compared**



Source: [Bertelsmann Transformation Index \(BTI\)](#), [BTI Transformation Atlas](#), 2022

**Graph 13: BTI 2022 Benin + West- Central Africa Reports, compared**



Source: [Bertelsmann Transformation Index \(BTI\)](#), [BTI Transformation Atlas](#), 2022



**Résumé:** [*Des dictatures ouest-africaine « éclairées » contestées par la capture de l'État ? Perspectives du Bénin, du Togo et du Sénégal*] - Le nationalisme populiste est en hausse en Afrique subsaharienne. Selon l'orientation politique, elle est à la fois renforcée et confrontée par les réseaux sociaux et les mouvements sociaux. Le nationalisme cimenter également la domination de longue date des régimes autocratiques en Afrique de l'Ouest, en particulier au Togo, au Bénin et au Sénégal. Soutenus par la marchandisation du système des partis, les autocrates ont mis en place un État fantôme. Ils utilisent le populisme pour étayer leur pouvoir illégitime et déstabiliser l'opposition. Internet et les médias sociaux jouent un rôle crucial dans la diffusion de fausses nouvelles par le biais de médias principalement contrôlés par l'État. L'Église catholique tenta aussi, sans grand succès, de contrer la vague de nationalisme. Au Bénin, par exemple, en 2019, les évêques de Cotonou ont appelé à "un jeûne sur les mensonges qui inondent et empoisonnent les relations interpersonnelles et sociales". À Lomé, la conférence des évêques a condamné la persécution systématique de l'opposition et l'arrestation de son leader, candidat à la présidence et ancien Premier ministre Agbeyome Kodjo. Le Sénégal, comme le Bénin, a longtemps été présenté comme une « vitrine de la démocratie » en Afrique, y compris la transition politique pacifique. Mais les choses ont radicalement changé avec l'élection présidentielle sénégalaise de 2019, qui a apporté de nouvelles configurations. L'un des principaux problèmes était la transhumance politique, élevée au rang de religion au mépris de la morale politique. Il menaçait la stabilité politique et la paix. En réponse, les réseaux sociaux de jeunes militants pour la plupart créés en 2011 après le printemps arabe se sont concentrés sur la campagne des électeurs de base pour la bonne gouvernance et la démocratie. Ils ont proposé de rompre avec un système politique qu'ils considéraient comme néo-colonialiste. Des militants comme « Y'en a marre » (littéralement « j'en ai marre ») et d'autres mouvements sociaux dissidents profitent des conditions sociales particulières du pays, qui favorisent l'action collective. Si le président Macky Sall optait pour un troisième mandat en 2024, cela poserait à nouveau un sérieux défi à la démocratie sénégalaise.

**Zusammenfassung:** [*„Aufgeklärte“ westafrikanische Diktaturen herausgefordert durch die Entstehung eines Schattenstaates ? Einblicke aus Benin, Togo und Senegal*] -. Populistischer Nationalismus ist in Subsahara-Afrika auf dem Vormarsch. Er wird je nach politischer Ausrichtung durch soziale Medien und soziale Bewegungen sowohl verstärkt als auch konfrontiert. Der Nationalismus zementiert auch die langjährige Herrschaft autokratischer Regime in Westafrika, insbesondere in Togo, Benin und Senegal. Unterstützt durch die Kommodifizierung des Parteiensystems errichten Autokraten einen Schattenstaat. Sie nutzen den Populismus, um ihre illegitime Herrschaft zu stützen und die Opposition zu destabilisieren. Das Internet und soziale Medien spielen eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Verbreitung von Fake News durch die meist staatlich kontrollierten Medien. Auch die katholische Kirche versuchte mit wenig Erfolg, der Welle des Nationalismus entgegenzuwirken. In Benin beispielsweise riefen die Bischöfe von Cotonou 2019 zu einem „Fasten der Lügen auf, die zwischenmenschliche und soziale Beziehungen überschwemmen und vergiften“. In Lomé verurteilte die Bischofskonferenz die systematische Verfolgung der Opposition und die Verhaftung ihres Anführers, Präsidentschaftskandidaten und ehemaligen Ministerpräsidenten Agbeyome Kodjo. Senegal wurde, ebenso wie Benin, lange Zeit als 'Schaufenster der Demokratie' in Afrika verkauft, einschließlich eines friedlichen politischen Wandels. Doch die Dinge änderten sich radikal mit der senegalesischen Präsidentschaftswahl von 2019, die neue Konfigurationen mit sich brachte. Eines der Hauptprobleme war die politische Transhumanz, die unter Missachtung der politischen Moral in den Rang einer Religion erhoben wurde. Sie bedrohte die politische Stabilität und den Frieden. Als Reaktion darauf konzentrierten sich soziale Netzwerke von meist jungen Aktivisten, die 2011 nach dem Arabischen Frühling gegründet wurden, darauf, Wähler an der Basis für gute Regierungsführung und Demokratie zu werben. Sie schlugen einen Bruch mit einem politischen System vor, das sie als neokolonialistisch ansahen. Aktivisten wie 'Y'en a marre' (wörtlich „Ich habe es satt“) und andere soziale Dissidentenbewegungen profitierten von den besonderen sozialen Bedingungen im Land, die kollektives Handeln begünstigten. Sollte sich Präsident Macky Sall für eine dritte Amtszeit im Jahr 2024 entscheiden, würde dies die senegalesische Demokratie erneut vor eine ernsthafte Herausforderung stellen.