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PATHWAYS OF GOVERNANCE AID EFFECTIVENESS: COUNTRIES WITH LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief explores the effectiveness of democracy aid programs in two countries facing high poverty and low levels of human development. Benin overcame many of the challenges of a low human development context to become more democratic and to improve representation and economic opportunity for its citizens. Democratization in Guinea, however, has been challenged by a capacity gap in the country's civil service, reinforced by the consolidation of power in the military and the continued presence of autocratic leaders over the course of this study. What explains these divergent democratic outcomes in countries that share such similar historical and socioeconomic contexts? And what role has international aid played in contributing to these outcomes?

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The two West African countries of Benin and Guinea share important contextual features. They have similar population sizes, population growth rates that exceed the global average, and high levels of ethnic fractionalization. Having both been French colonies, they also share similar legal systems and institutions based on the civil law tradition. In 1990, Guinea and Benin were at similar points in their democratic trajectories. Both were in the process of shedding decades-long autocratic regimes, grappling with low levels of economic development and low 'human development.' This point in history reflected for both countries a moment of great opportunity to consolidate democratic openings into lasting democracies.

Today, Benin has recently completed an MCC compact that targeted key public sector reforms to consolidate this young democracy. Democracy in Benin has been punctuated by episodes of instability but the strength of the system is apparent in successfully completing its MCC compact, which requires and monitors adherence to high governance accountability and transparency standards. Guinea, conversely, suffers continuously from democratic instability. In recent years, periods of military violence—larger in scale than any previously experienced in the country—have hampered progress towards democratic consolidation. Thus while Guinea has maintained elections deemed fair by the international community and continued to work towards reducing poverty in the country, it has seen little progress in democratic development overall.

What explains these divergent democratic outcomes in countries that share so many similarities? In particular, what role has international aid

played in contributing to these outcomes? This case study explores the potential causal mechanisms through which democracy aid programs may have contributed to democratic development in Benin and Guinea.

LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the considerable challenges that democratizing states face generally, some face additional challenges due to high levels of poverty and low human development that can impede the development of effective governing institutions and the full participation of citizens in their democracy. Benin and Guinea are two such examples of countries facing high poverty and low levels of human development.

Poverty through the Governance Lens

Poverty in Africa is linked to a variety of factors. Landlocked countries are more prone to poverty than those with ports. Regional instability can cause or exacerbate economic decline for some countries. In other cases, cultural tensions and colonial heritage aggravate poverty in the region. However, the particular nature of the poverty that any country experiences—and its prospects for improvement—can be explained by the nature of that country’s institutions.

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The political economy of post-independence West Africa was a combination of political institutions inherited from colonial rulers that relied on a powerful center and lacked constraints on the exercise of power. Power was maintained at the center by dispensing patronage for support, which reduced incentives for public goods

because these cannot be targeted exclusively to political allies and supporters. Public sector employment and investment was thus transformed into a method for rewarding supporters and redistributing tax revenue to consolidate power. As a result, economic institutions meant to aid the private sector became tools to exercise power. In the case of most autocracies and partial democracies in Africa, markets remain inefficiently organized, property rights remain insecure, and states are often unable or unwilling to provide essential public goods that improve human development. Without meaningful institutional change, poverty and low human development would likely remain.¹

Governance through the Development Lens

Democratic progress and successful transitions in low-income countries are affected by a range of factors linked to their particular political economic histories, including colonial legacies and post-independence trajectories. Adam Przeworski and colleagues find that the incidence of democracy is undoubtedly related to the level of economic development and that this relationship is “tight and strong.”² They set out to determine the relative importance of economic development as compared with other factors such as political legacy, history, social structure, cultural traditions, institutional framework, and international political climate. They find that, while these other factors do a play a role, incidence of democratic regimes is most closely related to modernization and economic development.³

Their findings lead to follow-on questions about the types of economies or regimes that are most likely to be democratic. The authors confirm a positive relationship between economic development and democratic *survival*, but find no impact of economic development on democratic *transition*. The authors find that dictatorships are, on average, just as likely to breakdown regardless of the level of economic development, while democracies are more likely to breakdown only at lower levels of economic development and more likely to survive at higher levels of economic development. *Transitions* to democracy, however, occur at all levels of

economic development, and thus the level of a country's economic development is *not* related to its likelihood to experience a transition.⁴ This is a critical finding for countries and donors wishing to support democratic transitions in low-income countries.

Furthermore, economic development has different impacts on autocratic and democratic regimes. While economic development can destabilize dictatorships—namely those with intermediate levels of income, economic development does not destabilize democracies. In fact, democracies respond positively to economic growth at all levels of economic development.⁵ This too is a key finding for democratic development efforts in low-income countries. Once countries transition to democracy, they are more likely to survive as economic development increases.

For much of the 20th Century, Seymour Lipset was a leading authority on democratization and its requisites. Lipset produced early findings of a positive association between economic development and democratic stability—results later confirmed by a range of other scholars using varied methods.⁶ Lipset's work asserts that, in order for low-income nations to grow, it is especially important to control the government through checks and balances. Yet he also notes the impediments to achieving this: Those in control of government in low-income countries do not always have the incentives to impose these checks on themselves, as the state is the economy's engine and ceding control of any part of the state thus results in a loss of income for the ruling class.

This creates a trap for low-income countries, where a ruling class determined to maintain its power hampers the reforms necessary to increase broader participation in the economy and in politics. Lipset concludes that a change of norms and rules in impoverished countries is critical in both the political and economic spheres. Healthy economies depend on strong rule of law and norms that comply with the world order, as he notes, “a free market needs democracy and vice versa.”⁷

Responding to Lipset's focus on the role of a free market economy in democratization, Stanley Samarasinghe

finds that market-oriented reform is a generally efficient system to allocate resources for production but an independent civil society is required to strengthen the market economy. Independent civil societies provide the necessary checks to ensure an equitable distribution of resources and rebuff any negative effects caused by market forces. However, echoing other studies, Samarasinghe notes that liberal economies do not always lead to development.⁸

This highlights the critical role of inequality in democratic development. Przeworski et al. recognize that, as average income declines and inequality increases, both autocratic and democratic regimes are much more vulnerable to being disrupted than when average income increases and inequality decreases.⁹

While economic development can destabilize dictatorships, it does not destabilize democracies. Once countries transition to democracy, they are more likely to survive as economic development increases.

More recent literature confirms a clear link between political and economic reforms, but notes that the relationship is not deterministic, nor is there a fixed sequencing.¹⁰ Some Cold War political thinkers, including Samuel Huntington, found that because autocrats do not need to worry about elections, they could afford to take a longer view, promote economic liberalization, and grow their countries' economies—all while remaining autocratic.¹¹ However, in a survey of post-Cold War countries, Eva Bellin finds that it is democratizing regimes—not the autocratic ones—that adopt economic liberalization policies. In fact, she finds that countries democratizing the fastest are those that implement the most comprehensive economic reforms. Bellin reaches the conclusion that strong economies provide better educational opportunities and improve human development, which may in turn create an environment conducive to democracy.¹²

Responding to assertions that improved economic opportunities create better governance environments, Daniel Brumberg argues that improved economic opportunities in the way of job provision and widely distributed economic benefits creates political support for the government. Providing economic opportunity can thus be an alternative tool for maintaining control in autocratic societies. Because the slightest opening might deprive powerful members of the establishment of their payoffs, Brumberg argues that certain types of countries may not democratize—chief among these being countries with diverse populations and large economies.¹³

Aid in Low Human Development Contexts

Measuring the impact and effectiveness of aid is by no means easy. The fluid and often non-linear paths of democratic transitions make it difficult to measure the impact of aid in helping to promote good governance.¹⁴ Joseph Siegle analyzes the impact that aid has had in Africa in promoting democratic transitions.¹⁵ He finds that most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa suffered one episode of democratic backsliding, but continued to make incremental progress. Importantly, Siegle notes that poorer countries are at greater risk of democratic backsliding. Siegle finds that 90% of democratic backsliding occurred in countries with per capita incomes of \$2,700 or less. The African country with the highest income to show this backsliding was the Republic of the Congo, which had a per capita income of \$940 in 1997 before its civil war.¹⁶

Siegle notes that steady economic growth in democracies translates into improved living conditions for citizens. Alternately, autocratic wealth accumulation does not improve human development. In autocratic societies, resources are centralized and not invested in improving the conditions of citizens.¹⁷

Siegle thus finds that economic expansion and donor support of that expansion are important to sustaining democracy. He notes that development aid encourages democratic leaders during transition to maintain a

democratic trajectory since it enhances the belief that democracy increases personal and collective prosperity.¹⁸ Siegle discusses strategies to link economic and political development—through performance-based aid like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compacts in democratizing countries—but highlights that donors must also respond to autocracies by curtailing aid if there is no progress in democratization and providing timely and meaningful support during democratic openings.¹⁹

Carol Lancaster approaches aid effectiveness through an institutional lens, tackling the incentives that donors have to give aid. Specifically, she finds that in the 21st Century development aid has domestic constituencies within the donor country. The donor's domestic constituencies reflect a broader public in developed countries that accept the appropriateness of developmental aid. This interest within the donor country in supporting and monitoring aid helps to counter a large challenge that countries with low human development face in that they lack the capacity to measure aid effectiveness. If rising amounts of aid are wasted or appear to fuel corruption in recipient countries, public support for aid in donor countries would erode. In Lancaster's view then, good governance is thus both a driver and a result of increased aid.²⁰

Looking specifically at Africa, Lancaster focuses on the challenges of delivering aid in poor countries versus wealthier countries. She concludes that government policies in recipient countries can impede development by allocating resources wastefully, discouraging private investment, or using public institutions for patronage. Aid can thus be effective in easing the low-capacity constraints in such countries by building institutions

Studies show that democracy aid has greater impact in countries with low human development. This has strong implications for countries with low levels of human development like Benin and Guinea, as democracy aid—dollar for dollar—could have a much larger impact.

and providing technical assistance. Lancaster likewise acknowledges the difficulty in measuring the qualitative nature of governance capacity.²¹

Analyzing U.S. aid specifically, Steven Finkel and colleagues find that, on average, between 1990 and 2004, USAID's investment in democracy promotion produced significant increases in national levels of democracy worldwide. They find that the marginal effect of one million dollars invested in democracy assistance is greater in countries that are in greater need of external assistance, particularly those with low levels of human development. They also found, however, that after a certain level of development, the effect of this assistance is statistically indistinguishable from zero.²² This has strong implications for countries with low levels of human development like Benin and Guinea, as democracy aid—dollar for dollar—could have a much larger impact in these countries during the time period when they experience low levels of human development.

Implications for Aid Interventions

Countries with low human development provide both challenges and opportunities for effective governance aid to promote the democratization process. Foremost, in countries with low human development, there are lower levels of capacity within the public sector to be able to effectively implement aid programs. Urbanization and the internal migration of the poorest within countries with low human development dilute the political strength of political constituencies since many of the poor migrate from homogenous rural strongholds to heterogeneous urban environments. The colonial heritage of countries with low human development is particularly relevant in Sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial-era centralization created a tradition of patronage that reduced transparency and created a barrier to reforming the public sector.

Despite these challenges, as Finkel et al. note, money invested in democracy assistance in countries with low human development and a greater need of external assistance can have a greater effect on democratic

development in those countries than it does in countries with higher levels of development.

Investment in countries with low human development can thus be more impactful both because aid can play a key role in improving the capacity gap and because democracy helps accelerate economic development when the poor expect more accountability from their leaders. Improving economic wellbeing in countries with low human development also creates an opportunity to help new democracies survive. Once a country has had a democratic opening, economic development can help consolidate the transition. Holistic aid programs that focus on democratic and economic development may thus have a greater impact on countries with low human development because of the interplay between democratic survival and economic development that is particularly impactful in this setting.

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SIMILAR CONTEXT, DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Benin's Democratic Trajectory

In the twelve years after independence in 1960, Benin had eleven presidents, six constitutions, and five successful coups. Shifting alliances between the political elite and the military marked the post-independence years. In 1972, with measured support from merchants and the political elite, Mathieu Kérékou took control of Benin and established a Marxist-Stalinist regime. Benin remained tightly under Kérékou's control until 1988 when a civil service strike became the catalyst to one of the most successful democratic transitions in West Africa. Large protests across the country protesting lack of wages and the Marxist-Stalinist regime resulted in a

National Conference and the beginning of a multiparty democracy in Benin.²³

Both Benin and Guinea had strong autocracies with relatively low political violence and steady economic growth in the years preceding democratic transition. The democratic openings in both countries were primarily a result of internal pressures and opposition to the autocratic leaders.

The National Conference to draft a new constitution and set up the new democratic order, held in February of 1990, included 439 participants and resulted in a model for peaceful regime change and political pluralism. A high level of existing capacity among Benin's politicized groups allowed these groups to adequately prepare for the National Conference and ensure positive outcomes.²⁴ Voluntary associations in Benin had for decades exerted political influence on the government, though under strict constraints from the government not to disrupt the political order. After 1989, however, these associations began adopting political agendas in advance of the National Conference. These associations, then—formed long before the National Conference—were a key aspect in the creation of political parties in Benin. The alliances made between civil service unions, students, and other organizations in the early days of the 1988 protests reflect the sophistication of Benin's nascent political system at the time. Further, the Beninese diaspora, familiar with bargaining in an organizational context because of their experience participating in political parties in Europe, were able to transfer expertise and experience to the national conference.

Initially in 1989, Kérékou showed strong resistance to stepping down and threatened military action to regain control of power. However, the threat of a civil war like the one in neighboring Togo, and pressure from influential statesmen like Archbishop de Souza, moved Kérékou to relent. Kérékou stepped down, declared elections, and supported the National Conference, laying the foundation for a multi-party democracy to be born in Benin.²⁵

As the country moved toward the National Conference, the pre-existing structure of the military proved key to the path that the National Conference would eventually take. During his tenure, Kérékou did not favor any particular ethnic group within military ranks, and he embedded a professionalism and impartiality into the military bureaucracy. The unbiased nature of the military allowed for the National Conference to proceed without military intervention and then for the military to subsequently accept civilian rule since its fortunes were not tied to one particular regime or regime type.

The military's separation from politics under Kérékou also led to the professionalization and growth of the civil service in Benin under Kérékou. The sheer number of people serving in the civil service at the time of democratic transition meant that the National Conference itself in 1990 included many members of the civil service who understood the pressures and requirements for public service and could account for this in planning for the new constitutional order. The strength of the civil service and their influence at the time of the National Conference greatly improved the chances for success in democratizing the country.

As the country moved on after the National Conference, the importance of strong political leadership in solidifying the democratic transition in Guinea cannot be understated. Kérékou—the president at the time of the transition—and Nicéphore Soglo—the prime minister at the time of transition and Kérékou's main political rival—each showed leadership and deference to democratic institutions during this time of political

At many times, the price for democratic stability in Benin's highly fractionalized society and political system has been political paralysis. Division in parliament allows it to be easily bypassed, and the national political system thus still strongly favors the executive in a highly fractionalized political system that allows many parties to be represented but little opportunity for a single party to drive change.

fragility. Neither Soglo nor Kérékou controlled the process of democratization or the constitutional commission that drew up rules of the new regime. Upon winning the presidency in 1991, Soglo willingly accepted the Constitutional Court's 1991 ruling allowing Kérékou to form an opposition party. Kérékou, despite having led an authoritarian regime and having strong connections to the military, never attempted to use military force to retain or return to the presidency. After losing to Soglo in 1991, Kérékou returned to a private life until coming back to win the presidency through democratic means in 1996. For his part, Soglo did not undermine the 1995 Assembly elections that reduced his majority, nor did he attempt to exclude Kérékou's party from power during his tenure.²⁶

Since then, the price for democratic stability within Benin's highly fractionalized society and political system has been, in many ways, political paralysis. The stalemate caused by the intense fractionalization has prevented any one group from getting too powerful—a trend that strengthens the president at the expense of parliament and builds a system where legitimacy in the eyes of citizens is based on patronage flows. The division in parliament allows it to be easily bypassed, and parliament still has relatively low technical capacity to challenge the administration given the shortage of professional staff and limited experience of most members of the legislature. The national political system thus still strongly favors the executive in a highly fractionalized political system that allows many parties to be represented but little opportunity for a single party to drive change.²⁷

Many reforms in the country since democratization began have thus occurred as a result of external influences that earmark release of funds for specific reforms. External demands have thus largely driven democratic consolidation, with reforms that are not contingent on aid funding being enacted more slowly. The civil society and the media likewise continue to rely heavily on donor and private funds to operate and thus have been criticized as focusing on priorities of funders over those of local stakeholders.²⁸

Guinea unlike Benin, had an extremely politicized military with a strong role in politics. And the tendency to militarize public administration in Guinea increased significantly after the 2008 coup.

In the twenty years examined in this study, Benin underwent a peaceful transition to democracy that has progressively consolidated. In doing so, Benin overcame many of the challenges of a low human development context to become more democratic and to improve representation and economic opportunity for its citizens. Benin's context thus provides this study with a case to explore how aid may have contributed directly to this steady progress.

Guinea's Democratic Trajectory

In 1958, the Guinean people firmly rejected participation in the French union of francophone countries. Guinea was the only former French colony to opt out of the French union and was consequently marginalized by the other francophone countries.²⁹ Guinea's unique position on the unification proposition was the result of a strong internal political struggle, which was won by the left at the last minute. Guinea's subsequent alienation and lack of government capacity that emerged after the unification vote resulted in Guinea turning away from the West and towards the Soviet Bloc for support.³⁰

The effects of colonialism linger in Guinea in the strong centralization of the Guinean state. The French legacy left a highly centralized state system in West Africa with little room for pluralism or local autonomy. In 1984, after years of speculation about his deteriorating health and age, Ahmed Sékou Touré, Guinea's only president since independence, died and Lansana Conté seized power in a bloodless coup.

Conté retained his military status and formed a government with both civilian and military members. In 1990, Conté introduced a constitution that would allow for a civilian government, and in 1993 won the multiparty election and was reconfirmed as president.

However, Conté retained the blended military-civilian government structure he had created even after the transition to a multiparty civilian system in 1993.

In December 2008, Conté died after years of illness. The military, led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, promptly seized power, deposing the civilian prime minister and disrupting the constitutional order of succession. Captain Camara, a junior officer, refused to accept the constitutional succession plan. In doing so, the low-ranking military officials did not see any meaningful resistance from high-ranking military officials, which indicates that the corporate interests of the military trumped the effects of any possible fractures within the military such as ethnic rivalry, personality, and age.³¹

Guinea's greatest challenge in democratization has been overcoming a capacity gap in its civil service. This capacity deficit has been reinforced by the consolidation of power in the military and the continued presence of autocratic leaders.

The tendency to militarize public administration in Guinea increased significantly after the 2008 coup. By 2010, the territorial administration outside Conakry was led entirely by the military or former military. Military and ex-military elements controlled transportation and extracted resources. Despite signs of ethnic fractures within the military, ethnic rivalry has not been the only reason for mutiny and attempted coups. Testimony to the cohesiveness of the military is that it has never taken power from itself. The 2008 military takeover can be interpreted not as a sign of instability but rather as an instrumental approach to succession. The lack of clear succession rules at that point meant that the military saw itself as being forced to maintain stability.³²

In 2010, Alpha Condé was elected President, ending military rule in Guinea. Instability and clashes, as well as assassination attempts, followed the announcement of election results. The opposition claimed that there

was election rigging and widespread corruption. In September 2013, parliamentary elections gave Condé's party, Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen (RPG), a plurality of votes in the National Assembly despite multiple claims of election irregularities and fraud. Condé reacted by suppressing opposition.³³

Guinea's greatest challenge in democratization has been overcoming a capacity gap in its civil service. This capacity deficit has been reinforced by the consolidation of power in the military and the continued presence of autocratic leaders in Guinea throughout the study period. Guinea thus provides this study with a case to explore whether or not aid is able to overcome the strong structural barriers to effectiveness in a context of low human development and low capacity.

Common Trends

Strong and stable autocracies leading up to democratic transition. Both Guinea and Benin had strong autocracies with relatively low political violence and steady economic growth in the years preceding democratic transition. The democratic openings in both countries were primarily a result of internal pressures and opposition to autocratic leaders.

Post-independence "rentier states." The post-independence Cold War context of both countries resulted in authoritarian regimes with strong Marxist-Leninist tendencies that relied on the creation of patronage lines to maintain power. In the case of Benin, this was the creation of a large civil service, and in Guinea, a large bureaucratic military.

French colonial history of centralization followed by decentralization. Guinea and Benin were colonies on the fringes of the French colonial system, as neither served as administrative centers the colonial power, and the government systems in both countries were heavily centralized. Post-democratization, both countries confronted the centralized tradition through decentralization policies, which influenced the focus of democratization and the resulting political system.

Professional and well-trained militaries. Guinea invested heavily in the creation of a strong, centralized military capable of maintaining presidential power and regional control. Benin's military was similarly professional and well trained, yet it was not involved in the political system and thus respected the democratic transition and democratic process.

Major Differences

Civil service. Since independence, Benin has had a large and high-capacity civil service. In Guinea, however, the use of the military to administer the bureaucracy has built military strength at the expense of civil service capacity, leaving the country with very low civilian capacity capable of governing. This is perhaps the most salient difference that has influenced the stability of both countries.

Civil society. Benin had a more advanced foundation for the development of strong political parties and civil society due to its experience with volunteer associations prior to its democratic opening.

Independence trajectory. Benin was part of the French post-colonial union that allowed it to integrate closely with its neighbors and engage in a regional context. Guinea's rejection of French influence isolated the country and made it vulnerable to international aggression. This vulnerability led to further isolation and consolidation of military control as perceived threats increased.

Economic pressures. Benin's strategic geographic placement strengthens its trade-based economy. Benin has enjoyed strong economic growth since democratic transition, which has helped consolidate progress after its democratic opening. Guinea's precarious economy has weakened its democratic legitimacy by creating widespread dissatisfaction with government policies.

Politicization of the military. Guinea, unlike Benin, had an extremely politicized military with a strong role in politics. In Benin, the military played a much more

neutral role and did not intervene in politics after the beginning of the democratization process.

Fractionalization. The intense fractionalization of Benin's political system is a feature of societal divisions in the country as well as a history of patronage to rural areas that created multiple constituencies and political parties based on ethnic differences. Guinea has a similar level of ethnic fractionalization, but this has not translated into ethnically based political divisions. Guinea has a much more unified national identity due to its prideful rejection of French influence post-independence.

Methodology

This case comparison studies democracy aid programs implemented by the United States, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Program, World Bank, Denmark, France, and the European Union in Guinea and Benin from 1990 to 2010.

In this study, democracy aid programs are categorized into those focused on spurring democratic change through *formal government institutions* or through *informal processes and norms*.

The programs reforming *formal government institutions* are further divided into two sub categories: (1) Formal institutional reforms focused on *representation* are those that create institutional mechanisms for public participation and representation in government, thus addressing institutional barriers to full participation. The goal of these aid programs is to address unequal or low levels of representation in national or subnational government structures. (2) Formal institutional reforms focused on *checks and balances* aim to rein in institutions that are too strong by promoting other branches of government or transparency in governance.

In this study, democracy aid programs are categorized into those focused on spurring democratic change through formal government institutions versus through informal processes and norms.

The programs focused on *informal processes* seek to develop democratic norms within society and to mobilize domestic pressures for democratic reform. They include measures working with civil society and grassroots mobilizers to promote democracy from the bottom up, seeking to increase pressure coming from citizens advocating democratic reform. These reforms focused on democratic norm development work towards creating strong grassroots democratic traditions and increasing participation.

Each democracy aid program reviewed in this study is thus placed into one of these three categories: formal institutional reforms focused on representation, formal institutional reforms focused on checks and balances, or reforms to informal democratic processes and norms. It should be noted that decentralization is a process that can potentially fit in all three of these categories—as it may be used to increase the representativeness of formal institutions, build vertical checks and balances across formal institutions, and develop informal democratic norms of greater participation—so aid programs involving decentralization are categorized according to which of these three objectives is the stated motivating force behind the decentralization program.³⁴

Aid intended to increase the representativeness of formal institutions in Benin took on an added importance given the intense fractionalization of Benin's society, which has high ethnic diversity and has seen over 100 political parties during the study period.

INCREASING REPRESENTATION THROUGH FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

Much governance aid focused on reforming formal institutions in Guinea and Benin is broadly related to improving formal institutional mechanisms for public participation and representation in government. These include aid programs seeking to improve elections, create public participation mechanisms within government institutions, or further decentralization

In both countries, aid had a direct impact in improving the electoral process and, with it, democratic representation. However, election aid in Guinea came much later and with a much more limited focus.

as a means of increasing the representativeness and responsiveness of government. The purpose of these programs is to reform government institutions to make them more representative, but more importantly to make them the driving force of change within the democratic development process. As such, this study explores whether democracy aid programs that *increase the representativeness* of formal institutions lead to improvements in a country's democratic development.³⁵

In Guinea, aid focused on increasing the representativeness of formal institutions during the study period is best framed by the tenures of Guinea's two major leaders during this time period. The first period is defined as Conté's presidency until the coup in 2008, during which time aid focused primarily on decentralization as a means of increasing the representativeness and responsiveness of government. The second period is defined as the time *after* the 2008 coup, which brought Moussa Dadis Camara to power and saw aid focused on stabilizing and strengthening election systems and other processes for representing public views.

Given Benin's relative stability and early gains in democratic performance, governance aid to Benin focused on consolidating more advanced democratic structures. Aid intended to increase the representativeness of formal institutions in Benin took on an added importance given the intense fractionalization of Benin's society, which has high ethnic diversity and has seen over one hundred political parties during the study period. Aid in this category focused first and primarily on elections, followed by aid to increase public participation in government institutions at the local and national level.

In Guinea, decentralization helped improve local governments' capacity and engagement with the public, as well as national institutions' responsiveness to local demands. Despite the early and consistent aid focus on decentralization, and gains in increasing the representativeness of local government institutions, however, this did not translate to an impact on democratic development more broadly in Guinea.

In both countries, aid had a direct impact in improving the electoral process and, with it, democratic representation. However, election aid in Guinea came much later and with a much more limited focus on standing up basic capacity for elections; in Benin, election aid focused on basic election capacity as well as modernizing the electoral process and promoting broader public awareness and participation in the elections to prevent backsliding in the democratization process.

While this type of aid in Benin furthered decentralization and bolstered election systems, this type of aid makes up a relatively small proportion of Benin's aid over the study period, and thus does not provide a robust explanation for the positive democratic development Benin saw over the study period.

Aid focused on building formal institutional checks and balances in Benin explicitly aimed to, first, shore up horizontal checks and balances and, second, promote bureaucratic transparency—steps perceived as critical in Benin to allow greater oversight of a strong executive and to ensure checks on all governing institutions in a political system seen as fractionalized and highly partisan.

BUILDING CHECKS AND BALANCES ACROSS FORMAL INSTITUTIONS

Aid given to Guinea and Benin to promote checks and balances across formal government institutions is subtly different from the aid reforming formal institutions

Unlike aid to Benin, aid to Guinea in this area focused first and most extensively on creating vertical checks and balances, followed only secondarily and much later by aid focused on improving the accountability and transparency of the national bureaucracy and on creating horizontal checks on the executive.

to increase the representativeness of these institutions. The distinction made in this study is that the aid intended for checks and balances seeks to foster the capacity, accountability, transparency, and oversight of the country's formal institutions. These programs thus include aid seeking to improve horizontal checks and balances, vertical checks and balances, and bureaucratic accountability and transparency.

Benin had a comparatively stronger and more professional bureaucracy than many other West African countries at their time of democratic transition. Aid focused on building formal institutional checks and balances in Benin thus explicitly aimed to, first, shore up *horizontal* checks and balances and, second, promote bureaucratic transparency—steps perceived as critical in Benin to allow greater oversight of a strong executive and to allow greater checks on all governing institutions in a political system seen as fractionalized and heavily partisan. These programs to improve horizontal checks and bureaucratic transparency represent the bulk of the dramatic increases in external aid to Benin over this time period. In the period of study, Benin also saw aid programs focused on improving vertical checks and balances, but to a much lesser extent than in the first two areas.

As a complete set of interventions, aid directed at increasing checks and balances across formal institutions in Benin did help increase the accountability and balance across the targeted institutions.

These programs accomplished their stated objectives in Benin, providing the intended, technical assistance and trainings on legislative drafting, policymaking,

transparency, and legislative and judicial oversight of the executive. The programs also achieved their intended outcomes on the targeted institutions, for example by improving the accounting and investigative capacity of court auditors, oversight capacity of legislators generally, and external oversight of public expenditures specifically.

In Guinea aid focused on building informal democratic norms was implemented quite late, starting in earnest in 2006. In Benin, on the other hand, civil society aid began in 1991 immediately after the country's democratic opening and continued in a concerted and consistent way through the end of the study period in 2010.

Donors' bureaucratic accountability programming in Benin likewise achieved its targeted objectives and outcomes. The planned programs were implemented and accepted by the government, with donors providing intended technology transfers and exceeding the planned trainings for ministry personnel and auditors on topics such as financial management and transparency. These programs also achieved their targeted outcomes, with donors noting that ministries began creating project-based budgets and using the audit guides developed by programs, the government implemented a new budget management system, and ministries improved their internal audit systems.

Donors' aid for vertical checks and balances, though limited, also achieved its intended outputs and outcomes, providing training for local government officials in financial management, public service delivery, and oversight of national public expenditures. Aid programs in Benin targeted different levels of government from the local level up to the main branches of the national government. This focus allowed aid to address transparency and accountability issues at all levels with differing degrees of impact but in all cases increasing the accountability of these institutions and contributing to democratic development in the country.

Aid to Guinea in this area was needed to reform the authoritarian regime and stabilize the democratic system after the introduction of multi-party elections in 1993. Unlike aid to Benin, aid to Guinea in this area focused first and most extensively on creating *vertical* checks and balances to accomplish these goals, followed only secondarily and much later by aid focused on improving the accountability and transparency of the national bureaucracy and on creating horizontal checks on the executive.

In Guinea, projects focused on increasing the bureaucratic capacity and transparency in financial management were implemented in moments at which the political system had been destabilized. Such aid projects thus peak when Guinea was recovering from its 2008 coup. Aid projects operating during this time suffered from a great deal of instability and thus largely failed to impact the transparency or institutional checks and balances they sought.

In Guinea, donor documentation shows that, overall, aid flows directed towards creating vertical and horizontal checks on the executive did not effectively increase the checks and balances across formal institutions. This is evidenced by the thwarted implementation of aid programs focused on *vertical checks* in the 1990s and the late implementation of aid program focused on *horizontal checks* and *bureaucratic accountability* near the end of the study period from 2008-2010. It is also seen in the institutional dynamics that remain in Guinea, with the uncontestable strength of the executive relative to the other branches of government.

The bureaucratic transparency programs implemented in Guinea and Benin had largely similar goals and approaches. The focus in both countries was on reducing the opaqueness of the budgetary process as well as increasing the accountability of government institutions in the sphere of public expenditures. Yet the timing and constraints on these programs were very different across the two countries. These programs were implemented very late in the study period in Guinea and reveal the challenge of attempting to implement

these kinds of projects in a post-coup environment. In Benin, these transparency programs were implemented much earlier and played a key role in furthering the democratic process by encouraging more accountable executive and bureaucratic institutions. The same cannot be said for Guinea, where transparency programs failed to have concrete impact.

STRENGTHENING INFORMAL DEMOCRATIC NORMS

Democracy and governance aid also uses grassroots programs and bottom-up approaches to democratic reform, such as building the capacity of civil society organizations, increasing participation of marginalized groups, and bolstering an independent media. Such programs can help engender domestic pressure for democratic reform, foster buy-in from citizens, and accelerate the country's democratic progress. As such, the third area this study explores is whether democracy aid programs that *build informal democratic norms and democratic mobilization* lead to improvements in a country's democratic development.

In Guinea, aid focused on building informal democratic norms was not started until late in the study period, running from 2006 to 2010. While one program was not completed due to instability after the 2008 coup, donor documentation shows that on the whole these programs achieved their targeted outputs, training local civic groups to manage public funds and implement development programs, training national civic groups in advocacy, and training journalists to investigate corruption. These programs, however, were implemented quite late in the study period, and there is limited evidence that these programs increased the participation of civil society actors in the broader democratic process in a sustained way.

On the other hand, in Benin, aid focused on building informal democratic norms began in 1991 immediately after the country's democratic opening and continued in a concerted and consistent way through the end of the study period in 2010.

As a complete set of interventions in Benin, aid directed at building informal democratic norms and democratic mobilization did increase citizen engagement in the democratic process. Donors report that aid programs focused on strengthening NGOs and civic participation were broadly successful in achieving their targeted outputs and outcomes, despite some setbacks in particular programs. Following civil society trainings and technical assistance on a range of skills and topics, Benin saw increased advocacy by NGOs on key issues like poverty reduction and land reform, increased civic participation in local development strategies, and an increase in the number of civil society groups, particularly in the second half of the study period.

Donors likewise report that civil society programs in Benin focused on increasing economic opportunity and advocacy achieved their targeted goals, for example training private sector stakeholders in advocacy skills and providing job and leadership skills training for unemployed youth. Donors assert that these programs brought tangible results for development of informal norms and democratic mobilization, engaging the private sector in domestic economic reform, engaging community groups in developing poverty reduction strategy papers, and increasing advocacy by civil society groups more generally.

In both Guinea and Benin, the projects demonstrate that projects that focus on livelihoods must contain a component that increases the participation of civil society and improves grassroots institutions because they play a key role in empowering people to embrace the democratic system and its institutions.

CONCLUSION

Looking at both Guinea and Benin in the aggregate, it is hard to separate their divergent political histories from the effectiveness of aid programs. Benin was the first country on the continent in which an incumbent president willfully stepped down after losing a fair election. The precedent for stability created a political system that was almost stable to a fault where multi-

party pluralism was more important than government effectiveness. This feature of Beninese democracy has led to immobility in Benin's democratic institutions at times, challenging both domestic policymaking and donor aid programs. However, donor aid has played an important role in consolidating democracy in Benin by modernizing its public service and promoting civil society reforms that address some of the fractionalization and effectiveness challenges in Benin.

Guinea, comparatively, has suffered from an intransigent military that focused on consolidating its own power rather than promoting democratic reforms. Even when promoting democratization, the military backslid and subverted its own reforms. This has meant that Guinea's limited civil service does not have the capacity to govern or the ability to effectively use governance aid to consolidate democracy. Donors are frequently frustrated by setbacks and crises that disrupt projects. The result is thus mixed in Guinea, with tangible results

coming from some aid projects in Guinea but still not translating to an impact on broader democratic development in Guinea.

What donors can glean from the comparative experiences of Benin and Guinea is that building the accountability of the public bureaucracy, creating strong horizontal checks on the executive, and promoting civic participation have been key factors to Benin's success. This study does not wish to discourage or undermine efforts to democratization in Guinea but rather highlight which factors may be more likely to play a role in successful democratic consolidation. As such, there are still many unanswered questions. Further studies could include a deeper look into success indicators and attribution of impact to specific aid programs to pinpoint quantitatively which governance aid programs are more effective. This study may not provide all the answers but hopes to provide a backdrop from which to study these important questions. 🇳🇮

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