

# AFRO BAROMETER

*Working Paper No. 78*

**IT'S ALL RELATIVE:  
COMPETING MODELS OF VOTE  
CHOICE IN BENIN**

by Martin Battle and Jennifer C. Seely

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## It's All Relative: Competing Models of Vote Choice in Benin

### *Abstract*

Since the Third Wave of democratization swept the African continent in the early 1990s, a sufficient number of democratic elections have taken place on the continent to begin to analyze voting patterns. Benin, for example, has successfully held several rounds of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections since 1991, but little is known about how the individual citizens of Benin cast their votes and why, or about the strategies of parties and candidates for appealing to voters. Now that Benin has been included in the third round of the Afrobarometer surveys, however, we have the opportunity to supplement census and election data with micro-level information on citizen preferences and choices. In this paper, we create a model to test what factors – social, economic, and political – impact voter support for certain parties and candidates. We use a multinomial choice model to explore contextual factors, such as concentration of ethnic group in respondent's area, by marrying census data to the Afrobarometer's individual level data. We find that different candidates appeal to voters for different reasons, and that ethnicity alone is usually not enough to explain support for a candidate. Moreover, we find that when ethnicity is a factor, having a concentration of the ethnic group in your region can enhance the effect of ethnicity on political preferences. Focusing on Benin, a stable democracy with a number of elections to consider, this study provides an in-depth analysis as part of a larger effort to understand the importance of ethnicity in African elections. It also represents an important step in understanding the micro-foundational determinants of African political outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

The democratic experiment in Benin has been a remarkable success since it began in 1990. Benin led Africa's "Third Wave" of democratic transitions after the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist regime of Mathieu Kérékou. Much has been written about the events leading up to Benin's transition, and subsequent attempts at democratic consolidation.<sup>1</sup> But given that Benin is such an important case of successful democratization on the continent, it is time to use the democratic experience in Benin to test some fundamental questions about comparative politics in the African context. For example, what role does ethnicity play in choosing democratic leaders? Is it more important than election incentives, or ideological positions, or income? The Afrobarometer surveys provide an excellent opportunity to look at responses to these questions from Africans themselves, and Benin has been included in the third round of the surveys, conducted in 2005.

Benin's recent democratic experience includes four presidential elections between 1991 and 2007. The "founding" elections in 1991 witnessed the first contest between General Kérékou as the incumbent and a host of challengers, including the transition Prime Minister Nicéphore Soglo. Soglo emerged victorious, and led the country through the immediate post-transition years with some success. Still, Kérékou returned to power via the ballot box in 1996, and was re-elected in 2001 albeit with his main opponents complaining the process was stacked in his favor. Concerns about the prospects for democratic consolidation in Benin were heightened as the 2006 presidential election approached and people waited to see whether Kérékou would respect the two term-limit provision of the constitution. Though waiting until the last minute and darkly hinting that he could derail the process if he chose, Kérékou did step aside and a political newcomer, Yayi Boni, was elected president. This election is important in turning over the leadership of the country to a new generation, but does not appear to have broken established patterns of ethno-regional support for representatives in Benin.

The Afrobarometer surveyed 1198 individuals in Benin between April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005 and May 10<sup>th</sup> 2005, a year before the first round of the 2006 presidential election. Respondents were asked about 100 questions, which related to their political views, views of democracy, and some demographic questions. Though the survey was taken too far in advance of the election for respondents to know who would be on the ballot, we can still test what factors contribute to their choices at that moment. To the Afrobarometer results we add information from the 2002 census, which recorded an ethnic breakdown for each of Benin's 77 "communes" (which also serve as electoral districts). We employ multinomial logit (MNL) to estimate what social, political, and economic factors influence vote choice. We find that ethnicity matters, though not uniformly for all candidates, and that concentration of ethnic group in a survey respondent's area can have a powerful impact on candidate preference. Other factors, including presidential performance and economic policy trends, also influence vote choice in Benin, according to these results. Finally, we use the 2006 presidential election results by Benin's 12 administrative "departments" to illustrate trends found by the Afrobarometer and census data analysis.<sup>2</sup>

### The Study of Ethnicity and Voting

Comparativists have a long history of studying why and how ethnicity matters in elections. An important starting point is how to capture salient or politicized ethnic diversity. Posner (2004) critiques the tendency to assume high ethnic fractionalization (particularly in the measure ELF),

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Decalo (1997), Adamon (1995), Seely (2001), and Boulaga (1993).

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed breakdown of election results was not available at the time of this writing, though we are indebted to José de Souza from the US Embassy in Cotonou for finding the department-level results on short notice.

or many cultural and linguistic differences in a society, tells us all we need to know about the political relevance of these groups. Scaritt and Mozaffar (1999), show that ethnic groups can be aggregated or “nested” in larger ethnic families or regional groups. Feree (2005) uses this idea to explore the potential for creating “winning coalitions” among ethnic groups and thereby reducing electoral volatility. The nature of Benin’s electoral system, an initial round followed by a run-off if no candidate wins a majority, means that not every one of the 40-odd ethnic groups in Benin will have a representative in each contest. Therefore, a great many voters must have some criteria other than pure ethnic matching on which to make their choice, especially in the second round of the vote. Knowing which ethnicities are politically relevant, and how dividing lines might fall, can help predict how voters will make their choices, once the list of candidates has been finalized. The Afrobarometer surveys ask respondents about their ethnic identification, but all but five of the nearly 1200 respondents in Benin fall in one of eight pre-named ethnic categories identified in the survey document. This is in stark contrast to Benin’s census, where respondents were allowed to self-identify and interviewers did not have pre-arranged categories, and a much more detailed ethnic picture emerges with 56 ethnic categories.<sup>3</sup> To a certain extent, therefore, the Afrobarometer ethnic data is already aggregated or “nested” into larger ethnic families, which limits our ability to explore support for some candidates whose ethnic base of support comes from some particular segment of a larger ethnic family.

Ethnicity can also impact the formation of party systems. The relationship between ethnic cleavages and party competition needs to be understood for two reasons: first, because the effectiveness of parties is often linked to the quality of democracy; and second, because many fear that electoral mobilization along ethnic lines can make ethnic conflict more likely, especially where political competition becomes a zero-sum game. Mozaffar, Scaritt, and Galaich (2003), by contrast, find that ethnic considerations shape party systems in emerging African democracies, but can be best understood in conjunction with the nature of electoral institutions. Posner (2005) finds that the relevance of ethnic support in Zambia waxes and wanes over time depending on the type of political system. In the discussion below, we focus more on ethnic candidates than parties, because most relevant political parties in Benin are strongly identified with one candidate, and it is difficult to see how they would exist without the figurehead of a prominent ethno-regional leader.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the institutional context has not changed significantly in Benin from 1991 to the present.

The logic of ethnic voting within a system of patron-client relations on the African continent helps define politics for many Africanists. Voters within a given ethnic group have an incentive to elect a politician who identifies with their group and has a certain obligation to redistribute the benefits of the office to his or her supporters (Bayart 1993). To the extent that today’s democratic institutions hark back to pre-colonial governance within the ethnic group or municipality, elections have always had an ethnic character. Certainly the colonial powers, once they allowed political parties to form, often reinforced the ethnic nature of parties and representation for their own purposes (Morgenthau 1964). Once this means of appealing to voters has been established by one group, other parties in the system have an incentive to make similar appeals to other ethnic groups, and ethnicity helps to shape the political arena from that time forward (Horowitz 1985). Certainly patterns of ethnic voting have been observed in many African countries, including other

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix Table 1 gives the ethnic breakdown of Afrobarometer respondents in Benin, as recorded in the survey. Appendix Table 2 represents a summary of ethnic categories from the 2002 census. In this particular aggregation, any group with at least 150,000 members has its own identifier, giving 16 groups.

<sup>4</sup> Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 17, “Démocratie au Bénin: le point de vue de la population béninoise à partir de l’Enquête Afrobarometre 2005” of July 2005 gives a general overview of how different ethnic groups support political parties in Benin.

West African states like Nigeria (Joseph 1984) and Ghana (Chazan 1982). Where ethnic identities are not strong, as in Senegal, religious and regional ties may substitute as a basis for mobilization (Hayward and Grovogui 1987). Despite the many examples political conflict arising from ethnic competition in the past, and provisions in the new African constitutions of the 1990s intended to prevent a return to ethnic politics, electoral mobilization in the newly democratic parts of Africa is presumed to take place from an ethnic base.

Wantchekon (2003) created an election experiment to see whether voters in Benin support candidates based on clientelistic appeals or policy platforms. Controlling for ethnicity by selecting both homogenous and heterogeneous districts, Wantchekon orchestrated different messages in different places to see the impact on voter opinions. He found that national policy messages worked better when parties had a plausible national base (p. 418), and that women were more likely than men to respond to national policy messages, perhaps because they were less likely to benefit from particular clientelistic rewards, such as public sector jobs. Finally, incumbent candidates who failed to make clientelistic appeals suffered a greater loss of support than opposition candidates who gave a comparable message. Wantchekon proves that ethnic identifiers, and the clientelism which is expected based on this identification, is important, but not uniformly important across regions and populations in Benin. The decisions of voters are far more sophisticated and complex than many would have expected in a young democracy.

This tendency for candidates to style themselves as ethnic entrepreneurs, rather than national representatives of the public good, has led some to question the quality of governance in newly democratic nations. Van de Walle (2003) points out that ethnicity has shaped political cleavages in sub-Saharan African countries since the Third Wave of democratization, rather than ideological dimensions, which contributes to the illiberal nature of these democracies. The very existence of ethnically supported parties or candidates is often viewed as counter to the express goal for political “integration” (Bancole 1998). In many countries democratization prompted the formation of dozens of political parties headed by local elites with narrow bases of support, contributing to the overall weakness of party organizations (Monga 1999). Using the patron-client ties implied by ethnicity as a means of allocating government benefits may also lead to corruption and complacency among political elites (Mayrargue 1999). Many African countries, including Benin, are anxious to root out corruption with democratic transparency, but their success has been mixed, and the persistence of ethnic ties is a common explanation for this failure (Heilbrunn 1999). To the extent that it is true that voters make their decisions on ethnic criteria, and that parties make their appeals along the same lines, the power of voters to check their representatives is indeed limited in such a democratic system. Chandra (2004) is among the few who argue ethnic-based parties do not negatively impact democracy in general, and Ottaway (1999) points out that they may promote the interests of some minority groups.

Though ethnic competition has devolved into ethnic conflict in some parts of the continent, we maintain that we should understand the extent of the influence of ethnicity in African democracies before we despair that they will share the same fate. Is the ethnic influence a reflection of social reality or of manipulation by political actors? In addition to ethnic concerns, economic considerations could well matter, including the role of campaign spending or “gift-giving” on the part of candidates (Banegas 1998). We test Afrobarometer survey respondents’ experience with election incentives, their views on the state of the economy, corruption, and political performance indicators, ethnic identifiers (including region), and ethnic context, meaning concentration of groups in a respondent’s area. A broad test of Afrobarometer data using some of the same variables was carried out by Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005). They found that social structure had less impact on vote choice than other factors, and they could

not find a relationship between ethnicity and vote choice.<sup>5</sup> Much more important were performance evaluations of the current government, and we find that a closer examination of Benin supports the broader analysis on these dimensions. However, we find that ethnicity is an important factor in vote choice in Benin, though its effects are conditional upon the particular candidate under consideration and context in which an individual finds herself.

### **Presidential Contests in Benin 1991-2006**

The ethno-regional character of politics in Benin dates back to pre-colonial times. Depending on the classification of ethnic groups, there may be as many as 55 distinct ethnic groups in Benin.<sup>6</sup> No one group comprises more than 25% of the population, and most have less than 5%. With commonalities in region and language, however, there are three important ethnic areas in Benin. The southeast, which borders Nigeria, includes the Yoruba, Goun, and Ouémé (or Wémé) groups. The center, including the former kingdom of Abomey, includes the Fon, the largest group in Benin, and several others. Finally, the north comprises many different ethnic groups such as the Bariba, Peuhl (or Fulbe), and Dendi, with a population that is largely Muslim. At independence this ethnic division was personified in prominent political leaders from each of the three regions who vied with one another for political control, often forming coalitions of two against one that proved unstable. After a series of military coups d'état and counter-coups that promoted one regional representative over the others, and a vain attempt to create a rotating presidency including all three, the military leader Mathieu Kérékou took power after a 1974 coup. He banished the ex-presidents, and instated a Marxist form of government that was to subvert ethno-regional political concerns to the public good. During the period of Kérékou's rule from 1974 to democratization in 1990, national legislative representatives were chosen according to professional interests, including farmers, artisans, and the military, and these representatives cast their votes for successive Kérékou reelections. Ethnic political considerations may have been muted in this period, but they did not disappear.

The motives behind the popular demonstrations that began the democratization process in 1989 were largely economic. Kérékou's regime was financially bankrupt, civil servant salaries were unpaid, and many Beninois considered the one-party state morally bankrupt thanks to a number of corruption scandals uncovered by new, independent media outlets. The famous National Conference of February 1990 included the recently returned ex-presidents of Benin, and they also took seats on the transition legislature, which had the power to draft the new constitution. The conference's choice of transition prime minister however, appeared to be guided by economic motives rather than ethnic ones. Though the selection of Nicéphore Soglo as Prime Minister certainly satisfied some in the central region because he is from the Fon group, his primary qualification was his experience as a World Bank official, and the hope that he would facilitate structural adjustment loan negotiations and Benin's economic recovery (Seely 2001).

Political parties proliferated during the one-year transition period, including parties headed by each of the regionally based ex-presidents. The new political party charter stipulated that parties could not be formed on ethnic or other corporate principles, but must have a "national character," including members from multiple regions of the country:

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<sup>5</sup> They tested only membership in a majority ethnic group, and found it unrelated to support for the winning party (pp. 304-306).

<sup>6</sup> The 2002 census lists 55 ethnic categories that respondents used to identify themselves. Ethnographies of Benin usually estimate the number of important ethnic divisions at around 40.

“Article 4. – The political parties must, in their platforms and in their activities, forbid intolerance, regionalism, ethno-centrism, fanaticism, racism, xenophobia... No political party can establish its creation and activity on a base whose objectives include:

- Sectarianism and nepotism;
- Membership exclusively from one religion, linguistic group, or region;
- Membership of the same sex, one ethnic group, or one specific profession.”<sup>7</sup>

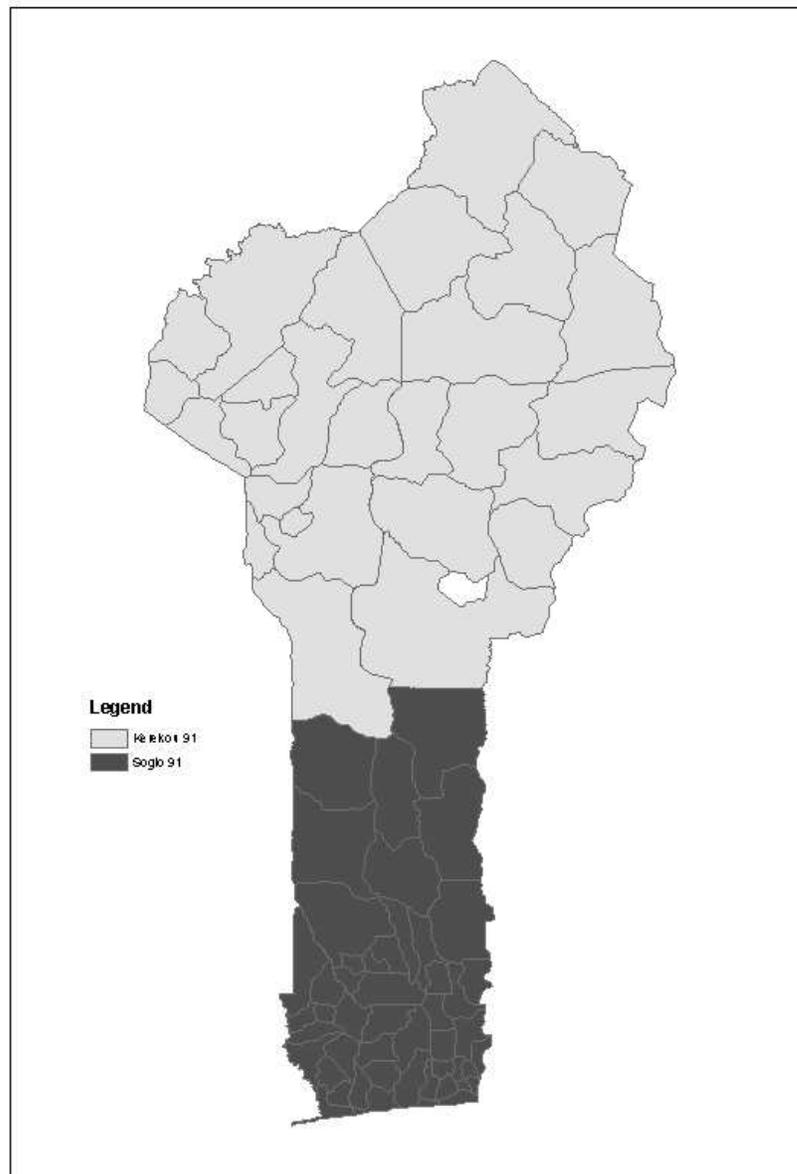
Despite this legal protection, younger generation of political elites were concerned that free electoral competition would bring about a return to the three-way divide in Beninois politics and the rivalries that had undermined stability in the past. Members of the transition legislature therefore proposed a constitutional age cap on the presidency of 70 years of age, which would exclude most of the surviving ex-presidents,<sup>8</sup> and by that means prevent old patterns of ethnic competition from being repeated. The surviving ex-presidents, in their role as members of the transition legislature, did not submit quietly to this proposal, and the question was canvassed countrywide, with the overwhelming majority of Beninois expressing their approval for an age-cap on the presidency. The question also formed part of the constitutional referendum, and the age cap was again popularly supported. The way was then clear for new candidates to contest the presidency, and thirteen ultimately met the qualifications to be placed on the ballot, including Prime Minister Soglo, and, in a last-minute decision, President Kérékou. Taking place after the constitutional referendum and legislative elections, the main suspense of this presidential contest was not whether democracy would work, but what the democratic result would be. Soglo’s victory in the election was generally viewed as the start of a new era, and a rejection of the old system. Kérékou’s surprise showing as runner-up (with 27% of the vote compared to Soglo’s 36% in the first round) was generally explained away as a result of his new “democratic” persona and his exemplary behavior as one of the few African dictators to voluntarily give up power for the sake of democracy. Still, a geographical analysis of the second-round runoff between Soglo and Kérékou (which Soglo won with 68%) shows the regional character of the vote (Map 1).

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<sup>7</sup> Law No. 90-025 of August 13 1990: Political Party Charter

<sup>8</sup> Though not President Kérékou, who few considered a viable candidate during the transition period.

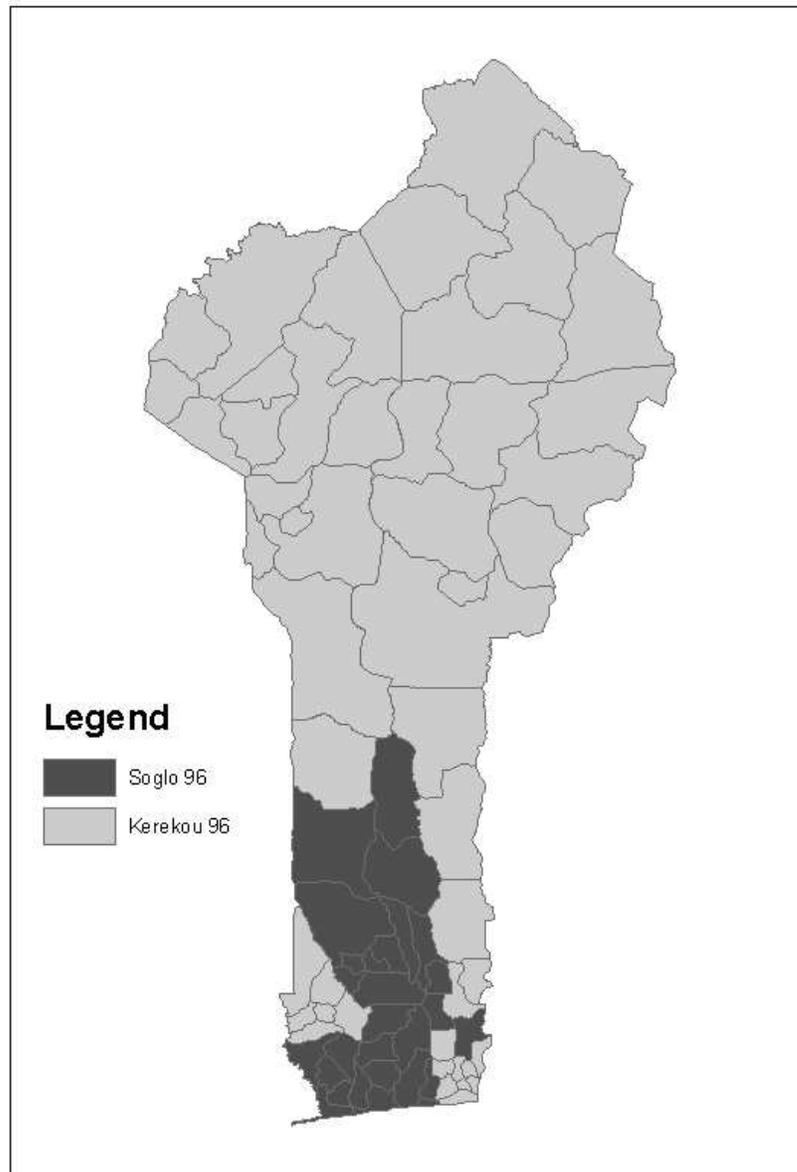
Map 1. Presidential Election 1991: Second Round  
Majority vote, by commune



It is interesting, then, that the north/south divide is much weaker in a similar head-to-head contest in the second round election of 1996 (Map 2). Five years after the transition, Soglo had earned a reputation as arrogant and high-handed president, and faced allegations of nepotism. Though he remained technically independent of party politics at first, he was supported by the political party *Renaissance du Benin* (RB), which featured his wife, Rosine Soglo, among the leaders. Furthermore, the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc—a decision made in cooperation with the other CFA franc zone countries—was very unpopular at the time. In both 1991 and 1996, Soglo held sway in the central Abomey region, which is populated by fellow Fon. But areas of the southeast and southwest switch their allegiance to Kérékou by 1996, enabling him to win 52.5% in this second head-to-head contest. In one sense, this demonstrates that these broader ethno-regional tendencies are flexible, and voters must be choosing their candidate on some other criteria. But the most common explanation for this shift, particularly in the southeast, is that ethnic Goun and Ouémé supporters of the third place candidate Adrien Houngbedji, of the *Parti du Renouveau Démocratique* (PRD), changed allegiance to the candidate who could offer the greatest opportunity to their ethnic entrepreneur. Indeed, Houngbedji was rewarded by Kérékou for his loyalty with the newly created post of Prime Minister. The apparent strength of ethnic identifications in these two elections led several researchers, including Degboe (1995), to explore the ethnic connections based on reports of vote totals and ethnic makeup of different communes. Seely (2003) employed King's Ecological Inference (EI) technique, as well as focus group interviews, and found ethnicity was related to vote choice, but other considerations, including candidate attributes, played a role as well.

Democratic consolidation suffered a setback in 2001, when the main opposition candidates, including Soglo and Houngbedji, refused to participate in the second round of elections because of election irregularities. The main opponent was perennial fourth-place finisher Bruno Amoussou, of the *Parti Social Démocrate* (PSD). His power base in the south-west of Benin had yielded him about 5-8% of the first round votes from 1991 to 2001. Though not sufficient to render Amoussou a kingmaker, he has been remarkably successful in parlaying that support into cabinet positions, including Minister of Development and Planning under Kérékou 1999-2005. Kérékou defeated him soundly in the 2001 second round runoff with over 83% of the vote. By the 2003 legislative elections, Kérékou had consolidated legislative support in a “movement” rather than a party: the *Mouvance Présidentielle* (MP). Though many feared that Kérékou was positioning himself to hold the presidency in the long term, like Gnassingbé Eyadéma in Togo or Paul Biya in Cameroon, Kérékou faced more than the usual two-term limit on the presidency. Both he and Soglo would be over the age limit of 70 years by the 2006 election. That institutional “insurance” was sufficient to eliminate two contenders who had shaped Beninois politics in the post-transition era, and change the political game completely for the 2006 contest.

Map 2. Presidential Election 1996: Second Round  
Majority vote, by commune



A political newcomer, Yayi Boni, won the presidency in 2006 and his supporters are poised to control the legislature as of 2007. Rather like Soglo in 1991, Boni's background in international finance (from 1977 to 1989 he worked at the Central Bank of West African States [BCEAO]) was appealing to voters, as well as his pledge to root out corruption in Benin. Boni also has an ethnic and religious background that is decidedly mixed: his father is Nagot, a subgroup of the Yoruba, while his mother's background is both Peuhl and Bariba, ethnic groups from the north. Another element of his broad appeal was his being raised as a Muslim (the north of Benin is predominantly Muslim), but converting to Catholicism in his youth, which appealed to the more Christian southern populations. Boni led the field of 26 candidates in the first round with almost 36% of the vote, followed by Houngbedji with around 24% and Amoussou with a surprising 16%. Ex-president Nicephore Soglo's son, Lehadi Soglo, had a disappointing fourth place finish with 8.4%. In the head-to-head runoff between Boni and Houngbedji, Boni won with a crushing 74% of the vote.

**Table 1. A Comparison of First-Round Vote Totals for Top Presidential Candidates (Percent of National Vote, rounded)**

Candidate	1991	1996	2001	2006
Kérékou, Mathieu	27	34	45	
Soglo, Nicéphore	36	36	27	
Houngbedji, Adrien	5	20	13	24
Amoussou, Bruno	6	8	9	16
Boni, Yayi				36
Soglo, Lehadi				8

**Table 2. A Comparison Second-Round Vote Totals for Presidential Candidates (Percent of National Vote, rounded)**

Candidate	1991	1996	2001	2006
Kérékou, Mathieu	32	52.5	84	
Soglo, Nicéphore	68	47.5		
Houngbedji, Adrien				25
Amoussou, Bruno			16	
Boni, Yayi				75

Table 1 shows that, especially in 1991 and 1996, the electoral base of the main presidential candidates in Benin is fairly steady in the first round of voting.<sup>9</sup> The south-east vote for Adrien Houngbedji was split in 1991 between Houngbedji and Albert Tévoédjrè, who earned 14%, which is consistent with what Houngbedji earned in 1996 when Tévoédjrè decided not to run. The vote totals of 2001 were disputed by Soglo and Houngbedji, in part because they so clearly broke with past trends. The contest was considerably changed in 2006 without Kérékou and Soglo, but one may guess that Boni won a fair share of the vote that Kérékou had enjoyed in the past, and that Lehadi Soglo was disappointed to draw far short of his father's 35-36% draw in the first rounds in 1991 and 1996, and even 27% in the dubious 2001 contest. Perhaps the real surprise is Amoussou, earning a greater percent of the vote than he ever had, and apparently drawing on support outside his usual base in the southwest. This first round contest was on people's minds in 2005 when the Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Benin, and we can expect survey responses to refer to the first-round competition,

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix Tables 4-7 for more complete election results for each of the four presidential contests.

rather than more strategic second-round voting between two candidates who had not yet been named. The complete second round results for presidential contests 1991-2006 is presented in Table 2. The second round is when votes are traded and coalitions formed, but are so contingent that only a survey taken in the two-week period between the two rounds of voting could effectively inform an analysis of the second round. The next section explores how respondents to the Afrobarometer expected to make their vote choice in the first round of the 2006 presidential contest. However, the survey respondents did not yet know who would be on the ballot, nor whether Mathieu Kérékou and Nicephore Soglo would stand aside and allow younger candidates to dominate the field. Respondents therefore expressed perhaps more sincere support for their preferred candidates, rather than selecting only candidates who in the end were eligible to vote.

### **Modeling Vote Choice in Benin**

The Afrobarometer offers many advantages over aggregate analysis when testing the effects of ethnicity and other effects on support for candidates. Studies based solely on aggregate data can leave us with a number of problems. The main mistake we can make is with ecological fallacy. This is where we try to generalize to individual actions (which we normally want to explain) from behavior we observe at the aggregate level (see King 1997 for a fuller discussion). The Afrobarometer, like the American National Election Study (ANES), allows us to test our theories by looking at the behavior of individuals. However, this approach does come with some modeling problems.

The dependent variable is the question which asks respondents which candidate they intend to support in the up-coming election. However, there are a number of problems modeling this type of behavior. First we have to choose the correct technique to analyze the data. The first problem in modeling choice is that choice is often unordered. This means that normal regression methods, such as OLS regression, are not suitable, as they assume a fixed order to the outcome variable. There are a number of methods for dealing with unordered choice. Generally, social scientists have used multinomial logit (MNL), or conditional logit (CL). These models can easily deal with nominal dependent variables, and they are reasonably easily estimated in most common statistical packages. They do, however, have one drawback – they cannot deal with Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA). This problem stems from the fact that if an individual has to choose between two alternatives, they should not change their choice if another alternative is added, which they would not pick. For example, we would not expect that if an individual was in a restaurant and picked fish in a choice between fish and steak, that she would choose steak if chicken was added as an alternative. While it may seem obvious in most circumstances that irrelevant alternatives are unimportant, this may not be the case in models of political choice. The main place this problem presents itself is when we consider strategic action. A simple example of this is the 2000 US presidential election in the state of Florida. Here a voter may have supported Ralph Nader, but faced by the prospect of George Bush entering the race (a candidate she would never vote for), may have switched her support to Al Gore, as a strategic choice.

The general alternative the MNL or CL is multinomial probit (MNP). MNP models do not suffer from problems of IIA, however they are computationally difficult (and are not included in many packages). Also, while Nagler and Alvarez (2000) argue that MNP models are always superior to MNL models, this is not supported by Quinn et al. (1999) who argue that a model should be selected according to the data. In this paper, because of the computational ease, we follow Clarke et al. (2004) and Battle (2006) and use a MNL model, and check to see if IIA has been violated by the use of a Hausman test (see Long 1997, Long and Freese 2003). MNL models are hard to interpret. They report changes in log-odds, which most of us cannot really understand. To deal with this problem STATA 9 was used to simulate probabilities when variables of interest were manipulated for certain outcomes (Long and Freese 2003).

## VARIABLES

Any model that wants to examine the effect of ethnicity on vote choice must also control for other effects on vote, such as ideological and economic criteria. Luckily the Afrobarometer asks questions that we can use to estimate respondents' issue positions. First we want to test for the effects of ethnicity. The Afrobarometer asks respondents the ethnic group they identify with. The two largest ethnic groups (Fon and Adja) are included in the model. All other ethnic groups are excluded from the model. This is because including them all perfectly correlates ethnicity with the constant, which would lead them or the constant to be simply dropped by the statistical package. If that were the case, we could not interpret the model. We also checked for a regional effect, due to Kérékou's large support in the north of Benin, by creating a dummy variable for living in one of the four northern administrative departments (Alibori, Atacora, Borgou, or Donga). In addition to respondents' ethnic identity as recorded in the survey, we have also included the proportion of Fon and Adja in each district (based on the most recent census information from 2002), as well as an interaction term that accounts for the number of Fon and Adja in each district multiplied by the individual's ethnic identifier. If it is only an individual's own ethnic identity that matters we should see no effect of these variables. However, if context matters, then we should see an effect of the interaction of being Fon in a Fon district, or being Adja in an Adja district.

We also wanted to account for a respondent's position on political issues. To accomplish this we included a set of variables that account for respondents' positions on certain issues, such as the country's economic situation, their own economic situation, support for redundancies in the civil service, and views on government's economic policies. Finally, voters in many democracies base their support on recent government performance. The Afrobarometer asked respondents a set of questions about presidential performance and corruption. Finally we include a variable asking about any financial incentives offered by the candidates for support.

**Table 3: Multinomial Logit Model of Candidate Support in Benin, 2005**

	Soglo	Houngbedji	Amoussou	Kérékou	Boni
Constant	-3.243 (1.609)	-3.635 (1.251)	-2.106 (1.697)	-3.656 (1.003)	-2.076 (1.076)
Country's economic situation	.005 (.234)	-.409 (.237)*	-.323 (.338)	-.078 (.174)	-.231 (.194)
Respondents Present Living Conditions	.184 (.204)	.411 (.191)**	.353 (.29)	-.266 (.171)	.153 (.182)
Civil Service Redundancies	-.009 (.195)	.259 (.172)	-.074 (.266)	.313 (.136)**	.331 (.159)**
View of Economic Reform	-.313 (.148)**	-.196 (.152)	-.188 (.224)	-.527 (.12)**	-.244 (.14)**
President Corruption	.025 (.161)	.113 (.16)	-.253 (.21)	.095 (.137)	-.143 (.161)
Electoral Incentives Offered by Candidates	-.145 (.123)	-.205 (.126)	-.025 (.15)	-.056 (.118)	.05 (.128)
Presidential Performance	-.279 (.141)*	.131 (.137)	-.07 (.181)	.864 (.147)**	.174 (.149)
North	1.392 (1.342)	-.128 (.907)	-1.008 (1.236)	1.729 (.608)**	.837 (.604)
Fon	.598 (1.481)	1.551 (1.116)	1.664 (2.057)	-.7 (1.140)	-.986 (1.255)
Percent Fon	-.109 (2.664)	2.456 (1.914)	-2.197 (2.171)	2.283 (1.442)	1.477 (1.417)
Fon interaction	3.673	-1.132	-1.091	-.437	-.046
Fon interaction effect	3.564 (1.349)**	1.324 (1.075)	-4.394 (2.93)	1.846 (1.291)	1.431 (1.413)
Adja	2.692 (1.358)**	.93 (1.221)	3.011 (1.368)**	-1.758 (1.111)	-1.018 (1.189)
Percent Adja	3.164 (1.424)**	-.331 (1.231)	.064 (2.326)	2.853 (1.277)**	2.481 (1.352)*
Adja interaction	-4.445	-2.505	.026	.278	-2.879
Adja interaction effect	-1.281 (2.158)	-2.836 (2.788)	.09 (1.68)	3.131 (1.57)**	-.398 (1.98)
Number of Observation		858			
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>		.164			
Cragg & Uhler's R <sup>2</sup>		.396			
Prob > chi <sup>2</sup>		.000			

Note: Data from Afrobarometer, Benin Census 2002

\*Significant at .10 level

\*\*Significant at .05 level

## RESULTS

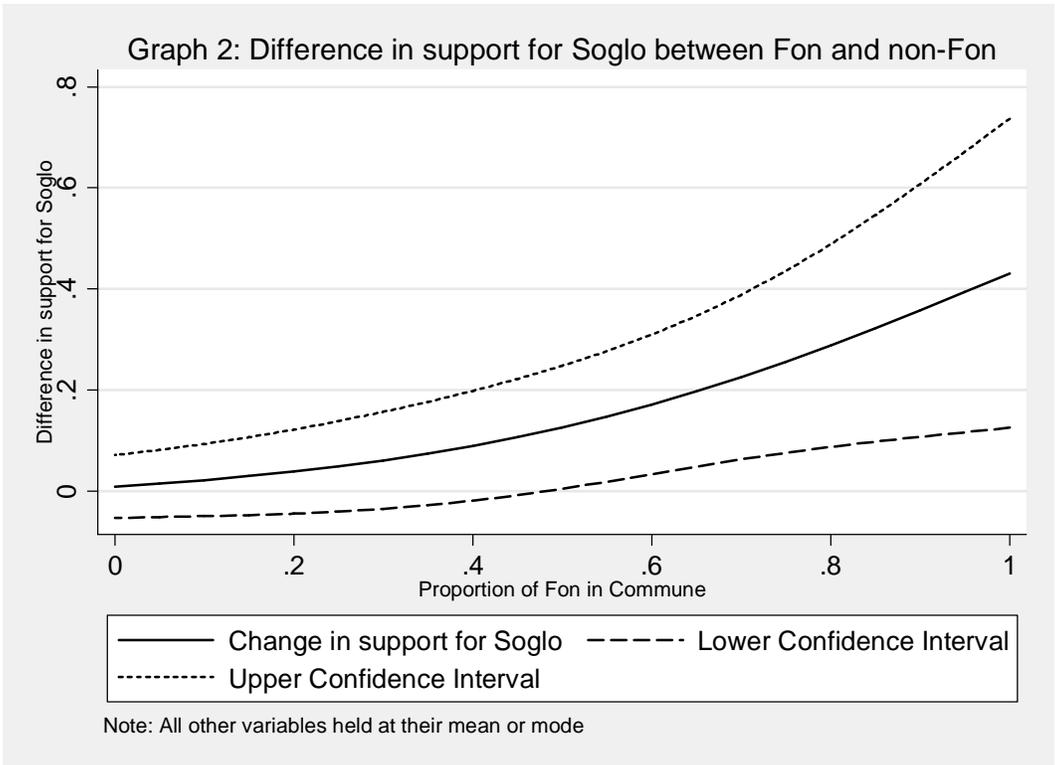
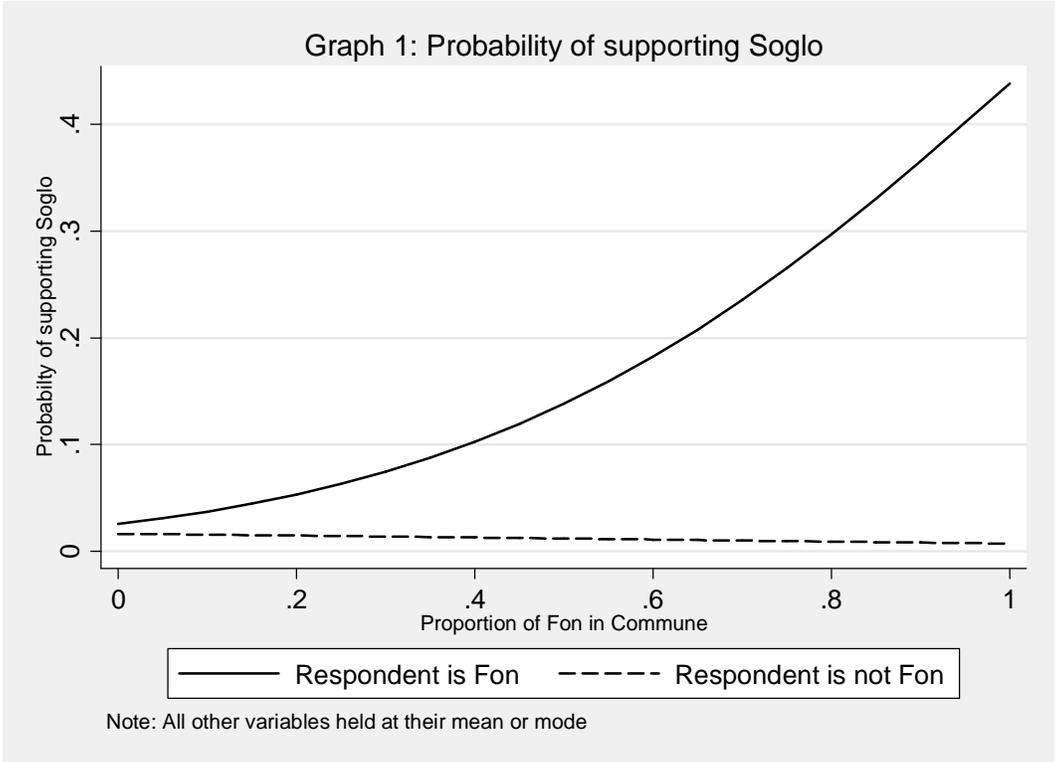
The model presented in Table 3 works reasonably well. The model is significant at normally accepted levels. The various pseudo R<sup>2</sup>'s show a reasonable amount of the variance is explained (the R<sup>2</sup> vary between .162 for McFadden's R<sup>2</sup> and .391 for Cragg & Uhler's R<sup>2</sup>). Also, the Hausman tests support the null hypothesis that IIA is not violated (Table 4).

**Table 4: Results of Hausman Test of IIA Assumptions**

Omitted	Chi <sup>2</sup>	Degrees of Freedom	Prob>Chi2	Evidence
Soglo	1.961	60	1	IIA not Violated
Houngbedji	-5.040	60	1	IIA not Violated
Amoussou	0.168	60	1	IIA not Violated
Kérékou	-4.769	59	1	IIA not Violated
Boni	-6.939	59	1	IIA not Violated
No Vote	-84.966	58	1	IIA not Violated

The results reveal a number of different factors that impact vote choice, and show that the impact is different for different candidates.

- a) Soglo. Support for Soglo is explained by views of economic reform (the more a respondent thinks that it hurts, the more supportive they are of Soglo), and a negative view of the President (if they disapprove of Kérékou, they are more likely to support Soglo). The other interesting effect is the support Soglo gets from individual Fon; however, this is not a simple relationship. Individual Fon are no more supportive of Soglo than anyone else in communes where there are few Fon. It is only in communes which are dominated by the Fon that we see greater support of Soglo by individual Fon. Graph 1 shows the probability for supporting Soglo for two types of individuals, the dashed line represents respondents who are not Fon, and the full line is respondents who are Fon. We can see from this graph that in districts that have few Fon, there is little difference between the Fon and non-Fon in the probability for supporting Soglo, and that this probability is low for both. However, as the proportion of the commune becomes more Fon, the greater the likelihood of individual Fon supporting Soglo. The same is not true for non-Fon in largely Fon districts. Graph 2 tracks the how much more the Fon are affected as a commune becomes more Fon, compared to any other respondents (plus 95% confidence intervals). From this we can see that we cannot be confident that Fon are more likely than anyone else to support Soglo in districts which are not majority Fon. However, as a district approached being completely Fon, the difference in Fon support for Soglo is over a 40% probability.



- b) Houngbedji. The only variables that reached significant levels for explaining support for Houngbedji in the model both related to economic conditions. When respondents believed that the economy was doing badly, they were more likely to support Houngbedji. Also respondents who viewed themselves as relatively well-off were more likely to support Houngbedji.
- c) Amoussou. Amoussou seems to draw most of his support based purely in ethnic terms, specifically from the Adja. This support is not contingent on the amount of Adja in a district, unlike the support that Soglo draws from individual Fon.
- d) Kérékou. Kérékou's support can be explained by a number of factors: economic, regional, ethnic, and performance related. To understand how the variables of interest effect support for Kérékou a few simple simulations were carried out. In Table 5, the effects of presidential performance for average respondent's support for Kérékou are estimated. As they more positively view the performance of the president, they are more likely to support him. A simulation was also estimated for the effect of living in a Northern region, and an individual's support for Kérékou. The difference in probability of support for Kérékou between the North and the South was just under 19%. Finally Kérékou seemed to gain support in areas with high levels of Adja, although this support was general from all in the area, not just respondents who were Adja.

**Table 5: Simulated support for Kérékou based on Presidential Performance**

View of Presidential Performance	Probability
Strongly Disapprove	.03
Disapprove	.068
Approve	.146
Strongly Approve	.283

- e) Boni. Boni, like Kérékou does well in districts with a high population of Adja, but does not seem to necessarily be picking up Adja voters. Also economic factors, such as economic reform, and civil service redundancies also affect level of support. If a respondent believes that civil servant redundancies are necessary they are more likely to support Boni. Also, if a respondent thinks that economic reforms help they are more likely to support Boni.

From this model we can see, in keeping with other analyses, that a number of factors effect candidate support. However, what is new and interesting is the importance of contextual effects on the Fon. This seems to imply that ethnicity alone is not enough in some cases to affect candidate support. Rather certain ethnic groups support for candidates may only be activated when they live amongst others of the group. We will discuss this in more detail in below.

## ANALYSIS

Nicephore Soglo, had he been eligible to run, would have represented the main opposition alternative to the incumbent, Mathieu Kérékou. Respondents who viewed economic reform as generally doing more harm than good were more likely to support Soglo. Having drawn on support from the Fon in the past, we would expect that Fon respondents would support Soglo in great numbers, but we do not find that individual Fon are more likely to support Soglo than any others in Benin. Instead, our analysis shows the impact of being Fon only affects a respondent's support for Soglo when respondents live in a district with many other Fon. This finding suggests

two possibilities that are ripe for further exploration: either than friends and neighbors are more likely to impact vote choice than has generally been predicted, or political campaigns are directing their efforts at areas with a high concentration of certain ethnic groups and they are having some success in transmitting their messages there. The latter would suggest that Benin's electoral code does not provide much of an institutional constraint on parties mobilizing based on ethnicity. A further question is why Nicephore Soglo's ethnic base of support among the Fon was so poorly transmitted to his son, Lehadi Soglo, in the 2006 contest. Were the Fon simply less impressed with his credentials, or did he fail to "mobilize the base" of traditional Fon supporters in his campaign? Finally, the Adja support for Soglo is a bit surprising, given that this group has historically supported Amoussou in the first round, and Amoussou seems to have been effective at encouraging the Adja dominated areas to support Kérékou more recently – 1996 – than Soglo. Still, Adja support for Soglo is not unprecedented, as the southwest supported Soglo against Kérékou in 1991. For example, in the official 2006 presidential results in the southwest department of Mono, where the Adja are over 70% of the population, show that their electoral support was divided: Amoussou captured about 47% of the first round vote, while Boni and Hounbedji earned 28% and 15% respectively.

Hounbedji, who was on the 2006 ballot and came in second place, certainly represents an interesting case of geographically and ethnically concentrated ethnic support. Unfortunately, our model does not do a very good job of explaining why respondents supported him. As an opposition candidate he enjoys some support from respondents unhappy with the current regime, but we find no ethnic predictors of his support. However, this is not likely to be because he has none, but a relic of the Afrobarometer categories of ethnicity. Hounbedji is known to be supported by the southeast region centered on the political capital Porto-Novo, but the ethnic groups there are considered subgroups of the Fon, and therefore we cannot distinguish between "Fon" respondents who owe their ethnic allegiance to the city of Porto-Novo and those who lean toward the city of Abomey (Soglo's seat). The only one of the 12 departments Hounbedji won in 2006 was Ouémé (where Porto-Novo is located), where he captured almost 73% of the vote. According to the 2002 census, 78.5% of this department's population falls under the broad ethnic heading "Fon," but only about 34,000 of 730,000 residents identified themselves primarily as Fon. Fully 70% (or 515,960) of these identified themselves primarily as Goun, Ouémé, or Torri. Another interesting question raised is whether the effect of Fon concentration increasing support for Soglo would in fact be enhanced if we could make this finer distinction. We might then find that Abomey Fon support Soglo more clearly, once the Porto-Novo Fon are removed from consideration.

Consistent with traditional expectations of ethnic support, Amoussou draws support from those who identify themselves as ethnically Adja. Given the pragmatic considerations upon which voters in the southwest have switched their allegiances since 1991, it is perhaps not surprising that policy and performance criteria play little role in their choice in this model. However, this underlines the contingent nature of ethnic support for candidates: it may matter more to some groups than others. Even in African countries where ethnicity appears not to be a significant factor in vote choice (Bratton et al 2005, Table 12.3), there could be a significant impact of ethnicity for a particular social group or candidate, but the effect is masked by looking at the national picture alone. As a result, the broader Afrobarometer survey results that show limited impact of ethnicity on a larger scale may be showing that ethnic criteria are mixed in with others in individual countries along ethnic lines. In Amoussou's main stronghold, the department of Couffo, those who primarily identify as Adja make up more than 88% of the population (contrasted with the department of Mono, mentioned above, where the bulk of residents according to the census self-identify as Sahoue, one branch of the Adja ethnic family), and he earned 85% of the vote there in 2006.

Our model tells us a fair amount about why some survey respondents don't support Kérékou, as well as why some do. Those who think he has performed well, and who see economic reforms as helping more than they hurt are also prepared to support him electorally. Those who don't think the civil service needs to be trimmed also tend to support Kérékou. It is useful, in part because of quirks in the Afrobarometer survey's ethnic categories, to include a regional dummy for the North.<sup>10</sup> It does appear (consistent with second-round election results in 1991 and 1996 as shown in Maps 1 and 2) that living in the north of Benin is strongly correlated with support for Kérékou. Like Soglo, Kérékou did not run in 2006, but we can hypothesize that Boni won over a great many of Kérékou's supporters. Indeed, the four northern departments all voted for Boni in the first round in totals ranging from 51% (Atacora) to 71% (Borgou).

Yayi Boni, the eventual winner in 2006, positioned himself most clearly as a reform candidate, and our model suggests that voters identified him as such. The two strongest predictors of support for Boni were economic reform issues. Can we interpret his victory as a triumph for issue-driven candidates over ethnically-based ones? Or was he simply more effective at building a multiethnic coalition by correctly identifying key policy issues of interest to a broad cross-section Beninois? That a higher concentration of Adja is associated with Adja support for him again raises the question of campaign strategy – did Boni identify the Adja, as the second largest ethnic group in the country, as essential to victory and therefore worthy of targeted mobilization? Boni also won a plurality in the first round in the departments of Littoral (which encompasses the commercial capital Cotonou and its suburbs), and Atlantique (the south-central district that borders on Littoral). According to the census, the three largest ethnic families in Cotonou are the Fon with about 55%, the Adja with 21%, and the Yoruba with about 12%. Atlantique is almost evenly divided by Fon and Adja (47% and 46% of the population, respectively). These two large districts show the broad base of Boni's support, as well as the contingent nature of ethnic loyalty for vote choice.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have shown first and foremost that while ethnicity is important in explaining vote choice in Benin, we should not limit ethnic analysis by looking only at the ethnicity of the individual. Rather, we feel that research must place the individual in a social context. To put it another way, the importance of ethnicity is relative. People's ethnic identity may be felt more strongly when they are surrounded by others of the same ethnicity. It may be that their friends and neighbors reinforce ethnic identity, and so reinforce actions based on that identity.

Second, we are concerned that our results may have been affected by the way ethnicity is reported in the Afrobarometer. While the surveys have given us better individual-level data, which means that we no longer face the ecological fallacy, the survey may have used too broad a categorization for ethnicity. From our point of view, and from the perspective of those interested in ethnic questions, it may be better in the future to have interviewers record whatever the respondent replies in terms of ethnicity, rather than listing a few ethnic identifiers as more common (which may influence the interviewer to interpret the respondents' answers). We feel that a more open self-identification of ethnicity in the context of the Afrobarometer will greatly help the understanding of ethnic politics in Benin and elsewhere.

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<sup>10</sup> Two of the northern ethnic groups, the Yoa and the Peuhl, are recorded by the Afrobarometer as separate, but belong to the same ethnic "family", the Yom Lokpa. Though they represent a more detailed breakdown of ethnicity, they can't be used here because we do not know that members of the other 9 branches of the Yom Lokpa "family" (as identified by the census) would have been evenly distributed between these two categories in the Afrobarometer.

Finally, this study suggests that future research could explore why some individual's ethnic identities are activated by politicians, especially when this is outlawed in Benin. We feel that studying where political actors spend their campaign time would be a fruitful avenue for research. Do they concentrate their activities where they believe they can activate ethnic support? Or do they campaign broadly, but their messages are only picked by individuals of certain ethnic groups? Political scientists have placed great faith in the power of institutions, but are they really so powerful as to mitigate ethnic ties? Political scientists also have recently interpreted ethnic electoral behavior as a rational (or cynical) calculation on behalf of individual actors to side with the winner. But where we show ethnic concentration has an effect, we can not assume that ethnic identity is relevant only to the individual. Social context, or a view of ethnicity as held by the collective, would intervene in a rational calculation and should not be ignored. Benin presents an interesting test case for the influence of both ethnicity and institutional constraints on vote choice.

## APPENDIX

**Appendix Table 1. Ethnic groups recorded by the Afrobarometer in Benin, 2005**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
Fon	500	41.9
Adja	188	15.8
Yoruba	147	12.3
Bariba	125	10.5
Ditamari	86	7.2
Peuhl	54	4.5
Yoa	54	4.5
Dendi	39	3.3

**Appendix Table 2: Ethnic composition of Benin: 1992 and 2002 Comparison**

<b>Ethnic Groups*</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>1992%</b>	<b>2002%</b>
Adja (& related)	642718	858479	0.131	0.130
Sahoue	123810	176342	0.025	0.027
Aizo	241581	292174	0.049	0.044
Fon (& related)	1133523	1412260	0.232	0.213
Goun	346221	426300	0.071	0.064
Mahi	100598	216869	0.021	0.033
Ouémé	126949	169919	0.026	0.026
Torri	123870	162816	0.025	0.025
Bariba (& related)	424827	625635	0.087	0.095
Dendi (& related)	134122	169971	0.027	0.026
Yom Lokpa (& related)	185035	274766	0.038	0.042
Peuhl	301686	476161	0.062	0.072
Otamari (& related)	301247	416383	0.062	0.063
Yoruba (& related)	246213	352642	0.050	0.053
Nagot	348563	463584	0.071	0.070
Other	110277	120748	0.023	0.018
<b>Total**</b>	<b>4,891,240</b>	<b>6,615,049</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

\*The 2002 census lists more than 55 ethnic designations grouped into 8 broad groups: 7 ethnic “families” and “other”. Where an ethnic designation had a nation-wide population of greater than 150,000 in 2002, I treat it as a distinct ethnic group. Groups with a national population under 150,000 were included in the broader “parent” grouping (e.g. “Fon & related”, while in the broadest sense, “Fon” would also include Goun, Mahi, Ouémé, and Torri).

\*\*These totals do not include foreigners living in Benin, though they were counted by the census. Therefore these totals are slightly lower than the total population nation-wide as reported by the census in both 1992 and 2002. The percentages in the table are calculated with the totals seen here.

**Appendix Table 3. Descriptive Statistics: Ethnic Populations  
(percent by commune, 2002 census)**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Adja&	12.1	98.9	0	26.4
Sahoue	3.0	90.9	0	14.1
Aizo	3.8	87.4	0	14.0
Fon&	19.9	98.7	0.14	30.3
Goun	5.2	70.6	0.03	13.9
Mahi	3.2	62.7	0	10.7
Ouémé	4.2	94.7	0	17.8
Torri	2.8	58.1	0	10.2
Bariba&	9.8	69.8	0	20.1
Dendi	2.7	68.6	0	11.1
Yom&	4.4	83.7	0	15.6
Peulh&	7.7	71.2	0	13.8
Otamari&	8.7	96.2	0	23.8
Yoruba&	4.2	45.9	0	9.9
Nagot	6.9	86.4	0	16.5
Other	1.6	22.7	.25	2.8

**Appendix Table 4. 1991 Presidential Election Results  
(First Round March 10)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>% National Vote</b>
Adjovi, Séverin	2.61
Amoussou, Bruno	5.77
Borna, Bertin	1.62
Dossou, Robert	0.84
Fassassi, Assani	0.90
Goudou, Thomas	0.70
Houngbedji, Adrien	4.54
Houngbedji, Gatien	0.89
Kérékou, Mathieu	27.19
Lemon, Idelphonse	0.99
Mensah, Moise	3.43
Soglo, Nicéphore	36.31
Tévoédjrè, Albert	14.21
<b>Second Round (April 2)</b>	
Soglo	67.73
Kérékou	32.27

Source: Noudjenoume (1999)

**Appendix Table 5. 1996 Presidential Elections  
(First Round March 3)**

Candidate	% National Vote
Agbo, Lionel	0.90
Amoussou, Bruno	7.76
Djagoue, Léandre	0.92
Fantondji, Pascal	1.08
Houngbedji, Adrien	19.71
Kérékou, Mathieu	33.94
Soglo, Nicéphore	35.69
<b>Second Round (March 18)</b>	
Soglo	47.5
Kérékou	52.5

Source: Bancole (1998), EIU (1996)

**Appendix Table 6. 2001 Presidential Election Results  
(First Round March 4)**

Candidate	% National Vote
Abimbola, Adébayo	0.61
Adbo, Lionel	0.33
Akandé, Olofindji	0.25
Alao, Sadikou	0.25
Amoussou, Bruno	8.59
Dagba, Rhétice	0.51
Dankoro, Soulé	0.63
Djagoué, Léandre	0.35
Gbèdo, Marie-Elise	0.36
Houngbedji, Adrien	12.62
Houngbedji, Gatien	0.89
Kérékou, Mathieu	45.42
Kouyami, François	0.22
Lafia, Sacca	1.20
Loko, François-Xavier	0.67
Soglo, Nicéphore	27.12
Zoumarou, Wallis	0.55
<b>Second Round (March 18)</b>	
Amoussou	16.36
Kérékou	83.64

Source: African Elections Database (<http://africanelections.tripod.com/bj.html>) Accessed April 15, 2007.

**Appendix Table 7. 2006 Presidential Election Results  
(First Round March 5)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>Votes %</b>
Yayi Boni	35.6
Adrien Houngbedji (PRD)	24.1
Bruno Amoussou (PSD)	16.2
Lehadi Soglo (RB)	8.4
Antoine Idji	3.2
Lazare Sehoueto	2.0
Severin Adjovi	1.8
Antoine Dayori	1.2
Kamarou Fassassi	1.0
Janvier Yahouedehou	0.8
Others (16)	5.2
<b>Second Round (March 19)</b>	
Yayi Boni	74.5
Adrien Houngbedji	25.4

Source: Seely (2007).

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