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Language

Many countries in French-speaking Africa were part of the movement across sub-Saharan Africa to oust long-standing corrupt and authoritarian rulers and to demand multi-party elections. Whereas movements in English-speaking countries demanded multi-party elections (which usually required formal constitutional amendment), opposition groups in Francophone Africa often focused their protests on an initial demand for an autonomous and 'sovereign' 'national conference', composed of representatives of all important social and political groups, with power to create a new constitution – a demand that echoed the calling of the Estates General at the beginning of the French Revolution. Multi-party elections in which the opposition could seek to overthrow the president and his party through the ballot box were a second stage in the process.

The way was led by Benin, where opposition groups succeeded in calling a national conference, creating an interim government and ousting the former ruler in elections. The movements for change in the People's Republic of Congo and Niger were also (at least temporarily) successful. Oppositions in many other countries followed this model of transition, but with varying degrees of success. Three (Zaire, Togo and Gabon) achieved the holding a national conference, but did not change their rulers. Some others gained multi-party elections, but rulers blocked demands for a national conference. In the Central African Republic the President cancelled elections in October 1992 when it became obvious that he would lose, but was forced to complete the electoral process in 1993, when he was beaten in the first round. In a few cases the initiative for constitutional change came primarily from above. But in several other countries – for example the Ivory Coast and Cameroon – presidents managed to hold elections but to remain in power.

Much of the literature is in French. Specifically on the protests see:

- Bourgi, Albert ; Castern, Christian , [Le Printemps de l'Afrique](#) [1] Paris, Hachette, , 1991, pp. 187 .

But there are some useful English sources:

Clark, John F. ; Gardinier, David E., [Political Reform in Francophone Africa](#) [2], Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1997, pp. 354

Chapters on all the relevant countries, but focuses on elites, parties and institutions rather than popular movements.

Decalo, Samuel, [The Process. Prospects and Constraints of Democratization in Africa](#) [3], African Affairs, Vol. 91, issue 362 (January), 1992, pp. 7-35

Comments on parallels with ex-Soviet bloc, noting that 'the sudden coalescence of a "critical mass" of pro-democracy pressures in Africa' was equally unexpected. (Decalo contributed the chapter on Benin in Clark; Gardinier, [Political Reform in Francophone Africa](#) [2] ([E. I.2.1.b. Movements for Multi-Party Democracy in Francophone Africa 1988-93](#) [4]) .)

See also:

Jean-Germain Gros, [Democratization in Late Twentieth Century Africa: Coping with Uncertainty](#) [5], ([E. I.2.1.i. General Overviews](#) [6]), for chapters on Francophone states.



The role of National Conferences in the transition to democracy has been analysed in several articles. Conferences were held in: Benin, Congo, Gabon, Zaire, Togo, Niger and Chad. See:

- Robinson, Pearl , [The National Conference Phenomenon in Francophone Africa](#) [7] Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1994, pp. 575-610 .

Begins with the Benin Conference in February 1990.

Two articles compare the success in Benin with the failure in Togo, where General Eyadema managed to retain control of the process, discussing broader reasons for the outcomes:

- Heilbrunn, John , [Social Origins of National Conferences in Benin and Togo](#) [8] Journal of Modern African Studies, 1993, pp. 277-299 .

Stresses the role of voluntary associations in Benin.

- Nwajaku, Kathryn , [The National Conferences in Benin and Togo Revisited](#) [9] Journal of Modern African Studies, 1994, pp. 429-447 .

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