

6.8.2 The Parliamentary Election in French Togoland (1958)

In 1958, for the second time ever in its long-lasting history of election observation, the United Nations was to oversee another election, and again in Togoland. The Haitian head of the mission, Max Dorsinville, left for Lomé on 28 February 1958 and was followed by his staff of 21 observers in early March. Initially, many misunderstood the role, which the Mission was to play in the elections, thinking that it was to organize the elections rather than the ruling pro-French authorities.

*Photo 32: Bureau of UN Observation Mission (25 March 1958)*⁷⁹²



Source: UN Photo.

Nonetheless, the mission not only oversaw and reported on the organisation of the elections, but also actively intervened in their conduct. One of Dorsinville's most important measures was the expansion of the electoral lists, which was virtually completed before the UN Commission arrived. Composed by the pro-French authorities, the electoral lists left out a considerable number of people, many of them were suspected supporters of the opposition who met all the electoral requirements. Accordingly, the CUT and Juvento complained to Dorsinville not to permit the use of the existing voter lists. Their request to compile a new electoral list was opposed by the pro-French Government. Since the

⁷⁹² UN Commissioner Max Dorsinville (centre, hand in pocket), meets with local leaders of the opposition parties. Third from left is Mr. Dessou (in white robe), President of the Aného district of the CUT.

whole matter was pressed for time, Dorsinville resorted as a remedy to the procedure of “emergency registration,”⁷⁹³ whereby individuals could register themselves with the local magistrate.

Photo 33: Emergency registration, Hall of Justice, Lomé (7 April 1958)



Source: UN Photo.

Thereupon, the unificationist parties conducted an effective campaign to encourage their supporters to register and vote. Amenumey has made an insightful quantitative evaluation of this process.⁷⁹⁴ A total of 79,917 applications were submitted, of which 76,624, or nearly 96%, came from the Ewe-populated south from members of the opposition parties.⁷⁹⁵ The majority of applications were from women. The total number of emergency registrations constituted about 20% of the voters already registered. Of the applications, 46,102 or about 58% were successful. Dorsinville attested that if more time had been available, many more potential voters likely would have been registered.⁷⁹⁶ As 29,322

793 TCOR, “Report of the United Nations Commissioner for the Supervision of the Elections in Togoland under French Administration” T/1392 (1958), p. 20. para. 155.

794 Amenumey, *The Ewe Unification Movement*, p. 315.

795 TCOR, “Report of the United Nations Commissioner for the Supervision of the Elections in Togoland under French Administration” (1958), p. 17. para. 133–134.

796 TCOR, “Report of the United Nations Commissioner for the Supervision of the Elections in Togoland under French Administration” (1958), para. 141–142.

or 91% of the total 32,000 rejection notices were issued in the final two weeks preceding the election, suspicions arose those officials in charge of voter registration had intentionally neglected their duties. In response, the Togolese trade union federation threatened a general strike just days before the election. The pro-French Grunitzky-Government considered the threat a maneuver by the opposition and asked Dorsinville to intervene with the Union and avert the strike. The strike was eventually called off, and 490,796 voters, or 44% of an estimated total population of 1,111,068 were registered.

The 1958 election campaign was basically fought on the same issue as the 1956 referendum. The PTP, UCPN and their ancillary parties supported the Statute, close association with France and called for an immediate termination of trusteeship, which they argued was incompatible with the regime established by the Statute. The CUT and Juvento, on the other hand, advocated for the continuation of trusteeship until full independence was achieved. Remarkably, the reunification of the Ewe or the two Togolands was not at the forefront of their campaign. The already completed incorporation of British Togoland into Ghana had given the chances of reunification a different spin, although in some of the villages, posters in favour of unification were constantly to be seen.

Nevertheless, the election campaign was vigorous, and the presence of United Nations observers has not encouraged either the ruling or opposition parties to exercise restraint. As usual, the CUT and Juvento were not able to use the same public facilities as the pro-French parties. Furthermore, they were facing the hostility of chiefs previously appointed by the French administration and subject to administrative harassment such as verification of permits by their police, the so-called *gardes-cercle*. At the request of the Togolese Government, three platoons of French West African auxiliaries were requested from the High Commissioner in Dakar. One platoon was stationed at Mango and the other two at Lomé.⁷⁹⁷

In the capital city of Lomé, an organised gang of 50–200 opposition supporters, who were armed with pocket-knives, apparently aimed to provoke disturbances and bloodshed whenever members of the PTP and UCPN organised a public meeting. The French accused the CUT of electoral intimidation: “Not content with holding conferences in major centres and tackling them not only in the Togolese Government but also in France, the CUT leaders have undertaken a real campaign of intimidation threatening to retaliate against those who would vote for Progress [PTP].”⁷⁹⁸

For the French, the elections represented a test by which world opinion would judge French politics in Africa.⁷⁹⁹ Although the French assumed that their protégés parties would win the election, they helped matters along by adopting older ploys. Already before the arrival of Max Dorsinville in February 1958, the Juvento newspaper *Denyigba* was banned.⁸⁰⁰ According to Joël Glasman, the Jacques Foccart’s archives also show how the

797 MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-13, *Élections de 1958, travaux du Conseil de Tutelle*, Borderau N° 83, April 1958, p. 4.

798 MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-13, *Élections de 1958, travaux du Conseil de Tutelle*, Minister of Overseas France to Minister of External Affairs, 9 April 1958, p. 3.

799 MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-13, *Élections de 1958, travaux du Conseil de Tutelle*, Cablegram, de la part de Kosciusko-Morizet, 14 February 1958.

800 Amenume, “The General Elections in the ‘Autonomous Republic of Togo’, April 1958,” p. 58.

French tried to rig the elections by paying money from secret funds to chiefs and notables to encourage voters to make the 'right choice.' A letter from the High Commissioner regarding the 1958 elections, which reported on the amount of money paid, stated that "it would be very desirable that this report be burned."⁸⁰¹ In an issue of newspaper *Pravda* the former Daily Telegraph correspondent, Russell Howe, quotes an UN observer that "This election [...] is so crooked you could walk along it without going in the same direction twice."⁸⁰² Furthermore, the authorities closed the border with Ghana several days before election day, so that several hundred vehicles were stuck on the Ghanaian side of the border. Especially for French-Togolese unification supporters, it was not uncommon to live on the other side of the border. Many of them were prevented from voting. On the other hand, 45 vehicles from Dahomey, transporting voters on behalf of Nicholas Grunitzky, entered the area on election day. Thus, despite the presence of UN observers, both the CUT and Juvento were critical of the way in which the pre-electoral proceedings had been conducted.

Photo 34: Line-up during election day, Agabadelogan (27 April 1958)



Source: UN Photo.

But the election turned out differently than everyone had predicted. Overall, the result was a landslide victory for CUT and Juvento. With 64% of the 311,019 votes cast, they won a total of 29 seats, or nearly two-thirds of the total 45 seats in the Legislative Assembly.

The results confirmed the CUT and Juvento's claims that they indeed represented the majority opinion in the country and not the French protégé parties. The French had hoped that the elections would confirm the results of the 1956 referendum on the Statute and the incorporation of Togoland into the French Union, but now the results called them into question. The result furthermore questioned the validity of the elections in the

⁸⁰¹ Glasman, *Les corps habillés au Togo.*, p. 228, footnote 43.

⁸⁰² MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-5, *Politique intérieure*, p. 226.

trusteeship territory of French Cameroon, and led to suspicions regarding the representativeness of Legislative Assemblies in French colonial territories in general. The Ashanti Pioneer even went as far as to consider the parliamentary election in French Togoland as the precedent in the undoing of French colonial policy at large.⁸⁰³ Furthermore, the French feared that with the help of the Ghanaian Ewes the new Togolese government could reach an agreement with Ghana of mutual, economic, and military support. An independent Togo would probably ask to join the zone of the pound sterling.

Photo 35: CUT and Juvento supporters celebrating, Lomé (1 May 1958)



Source: UN Photo.

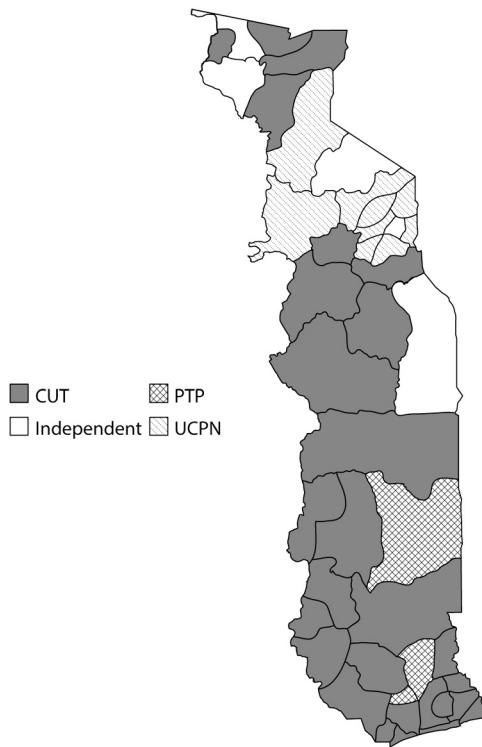
The French High Commissioner, Georges Spénale, was expressively contemplative:

“It is probably too early to fully analyse the causes of the government’s defeat and all its consequences – even considering only TOGO. First of all, it must be noted that everyone was wrong: the Government, the Heads of Constituency, the UN Observers, the mission leaders, the opposition itself.”⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰³ Ashanti Pioneer, “French Policy on Test,” 30 April 1958

⁸⁰⁴ Translation of MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-13, *Élections de 1958, travaux du Conseil de Tutelle*, Secret Letter 312/CAB, Spénale to Ministre de la France d’Outre-Mer, 28 April 1959, pp. 1–2.

Map 10: French Togoland Parliamentary Elections
(1958)



Source: Gayibor (2005), p. 656.

For the French, the result was completely incomprehensible. Not even Spénale was able to recognize that the French administration's repressive and electorally exclusionary policies of recent years were self-blinding:

"Africans – and at least Togolese – even those in the most remote parts of the bush, are now able to radically change their political feelings without any administrative, customary, governmental or opposition observers being able to take off the scale of these changes. The fact that such surprises from one end of the Territory to the other show that the phenomenon is widespread: a large number of African voters have learned to hide their political feelings to the polls."⁸⁰⁵

Ginette Kponton pointed out that one of the reasons for the surprise during the 1958 Legislative Assembly election was probably the female vote. Due to the traditional division of labour in Togoland, women engaged in a disproportionately high number of activities as market traders. Due to economic interest, female traders favoured open borders

⁸⁰⁵ MAE (La Courneuve), 77QO-13, *Élections de 1958, travaux du Conseil de Tutelle*, Secret Letter 312/CAB, Spénale to Ministre de la France d'Outre-Mer, 28 April 1959, p. 6.

with the Western neighbour or even better: unification. In a society based on orality, like Togoland, markets were hubs of slogans, where CUT and Juvento political propaganda was spread through informal conversations with neighbouring market women.⁸⁰⁶ The majority of market women, who spread political word and ideas, saw no gain from the administrative clique of the pro-French PTP or UCPN.

Photo 36: Juventists singing party song on election eve (26 April 1958)



Source: UN Photo.

The French were not aware of this development because during past elections in French Togoland a large number of female voters followed Juvento's and CUT's call for boycott. It was not until the 1958 elections that the boycott was lifted due to UN election monitoring and the floodgates of female CUT and Juvento supporters were opened.

In this present study, which is devoted to a history of silence, it should not be omitted that in the unification movement, too, it was primarily men who as petitioners, political actors, and negotiators, elbowed their way into the foreground of historiography. Nevertheless, the CUT and Sylvanus Olympio owe their rise to electoral power largely to women, who thus also set the course of Togo's historical rise to independent statehood.

6.8.3 Termination of Trusteeship & Independence

Since Olympio's conviction in May 1954, he was prohibited from running for elective office. Yet, the Statute did not stipulate that the Prime Minister must be a member of the

806 Ginette A. Kponton, "La Femme Dans La Lutte Pour La Décolonisation (1946–1960)," in Gayibor, *Les Togolais Face À La Colonisation*, Vol. pp. 218–19.