



# IPSS

Institute for Peace  
& Security Studies  
Addis Ababa University

## PEACE & SECURITY REPORT

# BENIN CONFLICT INSIGHTS



AUGUST 2021

The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and recommendations to national, regional and continental decision makers in the implementation of peace and security-related instruments. The opinions expressed in this report are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

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# SITUATION ANALYSIS

**FIGURE 1. COUNTRY PROFILE AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>GDP PER CAPITA</b>
<b>15.7M</b>	<b>INDEX: 0.545</b> <b>RANK: 158/189</b>	<b>\$3,287</b>
<b>NEIGHBOURS</b>	<b>LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YRS)</b>	<b>RECS</b>
<b>BURKINA FASO</b> <b>NIGER</b> <b>NIGERIA</b> <b>TOGO</b>	<b>61.8</b>	<b>CEN-SAD</b> <b>CONSEIL DE L'ENTENTE</b> <b>ECOWAS</b> <b>UEMOA</b>

<sup>i</sup> United Nations Development Programme. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BEN>

The Republic of Benin is a coastal country located in West Africa alongside the Gulf of Guinea with a population of 15.7 million<sup>1</sup> comprised of diverse ethnicities (about 10 groups dominated by Fon-38.4% and Aja-15.1%) and religions (majorly Muslims-27.7%- and Roman Catholic-25.5% followed by 5 others).<sup>2</sup> The country achieved independence in 1960 similarly to most of the ex-French colonies in Africa. Its post-independence period was marked by political instabilities having experienced five unconstitutional changes of power<sup>3</sup> including military coups (in 1960 and 1972) and being under a dictatorial communist regime known as the *Republique Populaire du Bénin*.<sup>4</sup> However, Benin was able to overcome the political and socio-economic challenges it faced in the aftermath of the communist regime by building a democratic culture and strong institutions over 31 years. Yet, recent political

development, particularly the ruling party's attempt to muzzle political contenders through intimidation and obtuse arrests, have pushed the country's democratic advancements back. In addition, Benin is surrounded by growing security threats from its neighbours: violent extremism and transnational organised crime from Burkina Faso, Niger-in a fragile three-border region- and Nigeria. If the spill over therefrom remains with limited impacts currently, a default of proactive and coordinated response may turn the country into a conflict-prone territory.

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations' Development Programme. (2020). Country profiles-Benin. Human development indicators. Retrieved from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BEN>

<sup>2</sup> Law, R., Ronen, D., Adetovi, S., McCracken, S. & Al. (2021, March 10). "The Republic of Benin." Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Benin>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with a country security expert on March 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Cornevin, Robert, *La République Populaire du Bénin : Des Origines Dahoméennes à nos jours*, Paris, Éd. G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1981, 585 p. Retrieved from <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ei/1981-v12-n4-ei3007/701291ar.pdf>

# CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

## Benin's internal socio-political turmoil

President Talon's assumption to power in 2016, following peaceful elections, underpinned Benin's 30-year democratic culture.<sup>5</sup> He initiated a range of reforms, including an ambitious Governmental Action Plan 2016-2021 (PAG in French) and revision of the National Electoral Code as well as edition of a new Partisan Charter.<sup>6</sup> Yet these reforms resulted in a mounting tendency of the ruling party to exclude opposition parties from decisive electoral races.<sup>7</sup> For instance, both the Code and the Charter imposed on political parties to comply with the new rules within a deadline of 6 months under threat to lose their legal status.<sup>8</sup> Certificates of conformity submitted by certain major parties such as former President Yayi Boni's Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) were rejected by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>9</sup> Their lists of candidates for the legislative elections were subsequently withdrawn by the National Election Commission.<sup>10</sup> Hence, only two political parties-allied to President Talon ran for the legislative elections in 2019.<sup>11</sup> Since 2017, major political contenders were prevented from participating in presidential polls, such as Sébastien Ajavon and Komi Kouche who were intimidated by judiciary prosecutions and forced into exile.<sup>12</sup> Reckya Madougou and Joël Aïvo, the two opposition leaders, who ran for the 2021 elections were arrested while Amisétoù Affo Djobo exiled to escape arrest.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the decision of President Talon to privilege merit instead of ethno-regional equilibrium in political appointments tended to revive north-south cleavages and ethno-regional centred rhetoric in the Beninese political arena.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, persisting conflicts between herdsmen and farmers constitutes a structural nodal point of tensions in Benin.<sup>15</sup> Although these conflicts were localised in rural zones-Ouémé and Niger Valleys<sup>16</sup>-where transhumance from Niger and Nigeria is well-

grown, leaving them unresolved could nurture communal conflicts and banditry which could, in turn, facilitate the infiltration of terrorist groups spilling over from Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

## Security threats

Benin is among the most stable countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region. However, organised crime led by loose criminal networks and the recent spill over of conflicts from neighbouring countries-Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso in particular-are the major Achilles' heel of Benin's current security landscape. Organised crime in Benin is mainly characterised by contraband of licit goods such as fuel, motorbikes, medicines and fabrics in southern Benin-and wildlife trafficking in northern Benin (ivory and other forms of poaching mainly), especially in the Penjari and W parks. The illicit fuel trade for instance, dates back to the 1980s when the country faced a political crisis which begot socio-economic challenges letting few opportunities for the citizenry.<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon is fed by several factors including oil bunkering in Nigeria and a large demand in the Beninese market which it covers at 80%.<sup>18</sup> The ban of illicit fuel trade by the Beninese government in 2018 and border closures by Nigeria showed little impact as the formal sector operating with less than 500 petrol stations and higher prices failed to meet local demand. Motorbikes are means of transport as well as lucrative sources for traffickers in Benin.<sup>19</sup> Burkinabè traffickers also get fuel, motorcycles, and especially tramadol from Benin, which they buy from their Nigerian counterparts. Thereafter, the illicit items transit via Benin with the support of Beninese criminal networks and are finally sold in in the Liptako Gourma region.<sup>20</sup> Yet, illicit commerce in West Africa, in Benin peculiarly, often fuels violent extremism as Jihadi

5 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country Report — Benin. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020. Page 3.

6 Ibid.

7 Le Monde Afrique. (2021, April 28). Benin : Patrice Talon met en scène sa réélection. Retrieved from <https://mondafrique.com/benin-patrice-talon-met-en-scene-sa-reelection/>

8 Inter Parliamentary Union. (2021). Global data on national parliaments-Benin. Retrieved from [https://data.ipu.org/content/benin?chamber\\_id=13341](https://data.ipu.org/content/benin?chamber_id=13341)

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Tounkara, G. I. (2021, April 13). Bénin, les opposants réclament un dialogue national. Retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/fr/b%C3%A9nin-les-opposants-r%C3%A9clament-un-dialogue-national/a-57182542>

13 Interview with a country security expert on March 21, 2021.

14 Amnesty International. (2021, March 31). Bénin. Opposants et voix critiques en détention à l'approche de l'élection présidentielle. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2021/03/benin-opposants-et-voix-critiques-en-detention-election-presidentielle/>

15 Interview with a country security expert on March 21, 2021.

16 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Page 6.

17 Zounmenou, D. (2021, April 21). Benin's booming illicit fuel trade calls for new responses. ISS Today. Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/benins-booming-illicit-fuel-trade-calls-for-new-responses>

18 Zounmenou, D. (2021, April 21). Ibid.

19 Assanvo, W., Dakono B., Théroux-Bénoni, L-A., & Maïga, I. (2019, December). Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma. Institute for Security Studies (ISS). Africa report n°26. Page 9.

20 Interview with a regional security expert on March 23, 2021.

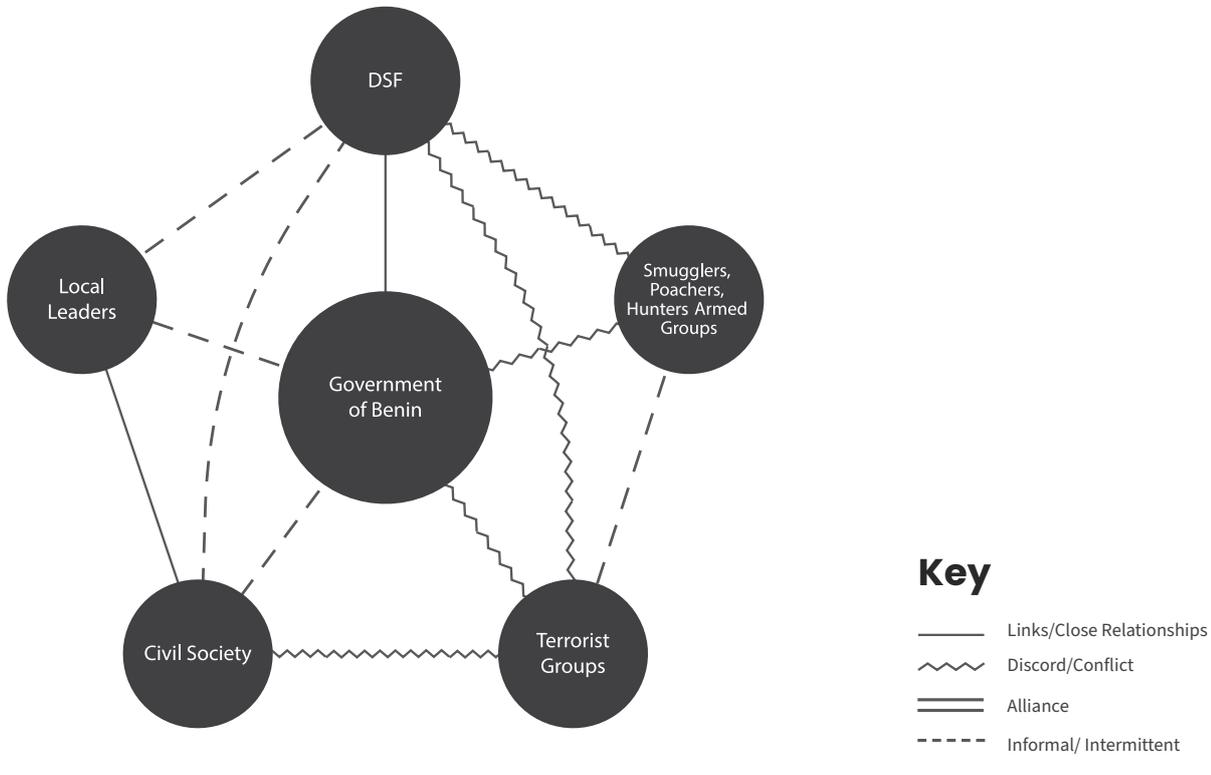
groups in the Sahel are often the end-users of illicit items or benefit the money it generates. Additionally, the country's involvement in regional counterterrorism initiatives exacerbates the risks of attacks, especially in its septentrional part where assaults against police stations were reported.<sup>21</sup> This situation prompts the revival of other prohibited or restricted activities such as gold trade and small arms and cross-border light weapons trafficking between Benin and its neighbouring countries.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Page 6.

22 Interview with a regional security expert on March 23, 2021.

**FIGURE 2. ACTORS MAPPING**



## The Government of Benin (Gov Benin) and opposition political actors

The Beninese government designates the current ruling coalition. It mainly comprises the Progressive Union (UP in French) and the Republican Bloc (BR in French). The UP itself is a coalition of 80 smaller groups. It won 47 out of the 83 parliamentary seats in the 2019 elections.<sup>23</sup> The BR, second party of the coalition, has gathered 36 seats which combination with UP's 47 seats secures an absolute parliamentary majority to the ruling coalition.<sup>24</sup> Opposition in Benin is represented by political figures rather than strong political parties. Small parties circumstantially gather to defend or achieve marginal interests and goals although FCBE could be seen as a more compact entity. Hence, among the prominent opposition figures of the current Beninese political landscape, are Sébastien Ajavon-3rd at the 2016 presidential elections–

Komi Kouche, former minister of finance under President Boni, and Reckya Madougou-Leader of the Democrats' party. The government has strained relationships with these political contenders out of 2018 exclusive reforms and obtuse prosecutions undertaken by President Talon.<sup>25</sup> Contrarily, it holds collaborative relationships with defence and security forces.<sup>26</sup>

## Defence and Security Forces (DSF)

Defence forces designate the *Forces Armées du Bénin (FAB)* which is in charge of defending the country's borders, coping with various threats. The security forces, mainly the police and the gendarmerie to some extent, are meant to handle internal security issues faced by the citizenry. The police and the gendarmerie were dismantled following the adoption of the bill n°2017-41 of December

23 Inter Parliamentary Union. (2021). Global data on national parliaments-Benin. Retrieved from [https://data.ipu.org/content/benin?chamber\\_id=13341](https://data.ipu.org/content/benin?chamber_id=13341)

24 Ibid.

25 Aljazeera. (2021, April 11). Opposition side-lined as Benin votes in presidential election. Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/11/benin-votes-in-presidential-election-opposition-sidelined>

26 WANEP and independent security experts' response to a questionnaire shared via google form on April 2, 2021.

29, 2017 to allow for further efficiency in fulfilling internal security. The subsequent creation of a paramilitary forces, under the name of Police Républicaine suggests a potential improvement in civil-military relations, particularly in rural zones where security coverage was estimated at only 12% in 2018.<sup>27</sup> Frustrations borne out of rampant corruption and low service were also expressed by 55% of citizens who requested for assistance.<sup>28</sup> Since the *Republique Populaire du Bénin* was disbanded, the military receded to the barracks and have limited influence on the political arena. However, an eventual persistence of anti-democratic actions undertaken by the ruling party might bring back the security forces into the spotlight. Indeed, the Beninese government said that two coups plot against President Talon's regime were foiled in 2020.<sup>29</sup>

## The Civil Society

Beninese civil society is a dynamic and heterogenous federation of organisations covering the entire territory in diverse sectors.<sup>30</sup> A civil society organisations' (CSOs) mapping, of formal and informal, led in 2012-2013 revealed that 12 002 CSOs were operating in Benin.<sup>31</sup> They play a significant role in holding the government accountable, struggling against corruption and impunity and protecting human rights among others.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the oversight role of the civil society is gradually undermined as their members are increasingly being co-opted by ruling parties since President Boni's rule (2006-2016).<sup>33</sup> The transformation of the Citizens' Alternative—the most vocal anti-Yayi civil society movement—into a political party and the co-option of their leaders by the current government, indicates the growing risk of the Beninese civil society's decay.<sup>34</sup>

## Local leaders

Political enclaves still exist in Benin, especially at the local level where chieftaincies, nobilities and other non-elected actors, such as religious leaders, occupy the political field.<sup>35</sup> This is more critical in rural zones facing poor service delivery and limited presence of state institutions. This deepens the disinterest of populations towards elected representatives.<sup>36</sup> Thus, local communities are keen to

turn to local leaders (customary and religious) who deliver more effective services. Leadership coexistence based on collaboration at the local level helps the Beninese government to maintain a political equilibrium at the local level. This facilitates elected representatives' mission on the ground and allows smooth interactions with local leaders. At present, the relationship between local leaders and the government can be described as intermittent as the level of trust and collaboration depends on whether elected officials are accepted or not.

## Smugglers

Smugglers in Benin are loose networks of individuals or groups who are involved in fuel, motorbikes and other licit goods' contraband.<sup>37</sup> They mainly operate alongside the porous Benin-Nigeria border. Their activities are income-driven, being focused on survival in a hardened socio-economic context. However, those networks seem to nurture relationships with individuals who collaborate with Jihadi groups in the Liptako-Gourma.<sup>38</sup> A prompt and effective reaction is needed from Beninese authorities to counter such a lucrative source that potentially sustains terrorist groups threatening Benin.

## Poachers and hunters armed groups

The hunters armed groups have played a pivotal role in 2019 and 2021 electoral violence. Originally hunters' associations, they have organised themselves into informal paramilitary groups with sophisticated weapons. During the 2019 and 2021 elections they engaged in armed confrontations with the military in several areas of northern Benin. Their motivation remains unclear as a combination of political and criminal interests might be at play.<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of jihadist groups in the area facilitates the establishment of connections with groups that have broken ranks with their states in these areas, such as Beninese poachers who have been circulating in Parc W for several years and who have taken advantage of the current situation to strengthen their territorial and economic hold on the area. Indeed, these poachers

27 Gninafon, H. (2019, May 9). Les forces de sécurité au Bénin : L'expérience et la confiance mitigée des citoyens. Afrobaromètre. Dépêche n°204. Page 3.

28 Ibid.

29 Jeune Afrique. (2020, June 29). Bénin : une nouvelle tentative de coup d'État déjouée. Retrieved from: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1008281/politique/benin-une-nouvelle-tentative-de-coup-detat-dejouee/#:~:text=Une%20nouvelle%20tentative%20de%20d%C3%A9stabilisation,du%2025%20au%2026%20juin>

30 Maison de la Société Civile. (2021). Les OSC au Bénin : De la nécessité de la cartographie fonctionnelle. Retrieved from: <https://www.mdscbenin.org/mapping/index.php>

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 The Global Initiative against Organised Crime. (2019). Africa Organised Crime Index. Retrieved from <https://ocindex.net/country/benin>

38 Assanvo, W., Dakono B., Théroux-Bénoni, L-A., & Maïga, I. (2019, December). Ibid. Page 9.

39 Interview with a regional security expert on March 23, 2021.

also benefit the Jihadi incursions, since natural parks and hunting reserves are mainly targeted by terrorist groups who might see them as suitable partners with the ability to support them strategically and constitute their sanctuaries in woody areas of northern Benin.<sup>40</sup> That said, a revival of poaching, certainly linked to the arrival of Jihadi groups, is noticed in many protected areas. Poachers from neighbouring countries (Benin, Nigeria) have even organized themselves into armed groups to confront the Beninese army and paramilitary forces dedicated to wildlife's protection.<sup>41</sup>

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40 Ibid

41 Ibid.

# CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Beninese democratic institutions have demonstrated their solidity for more than three decades. Recently, the Parliament, in particular, rejected attempts of constitutional revisions from President Talon (2017 and 2018). Both rejections were fairly accepted and the President complied with the decisions.<sup>42</sup> However, other developments showed a regression in Benin's democratic practices. The adoption of a new partisan charter accompanied by a threat for certain parties to lose their legal status upon incapacity to comply with the new rules in a 6-month deadline and the revision of the electoral code in 2018, indicate the ruling party's agenda aimed at weakening serious contenders. The circumstances of the unicoloured parliamentary elections, a direct consequence of the adoption of a new electoral policy in 2018, opaque nominations of acquaintances and friends in key institutional positions, combined with series of arrests around the presidential elections, reinforce the perception of growing authoritarianism among national and international opinions. In addition, Talon's regime withdrew Benin from the additional declaration to the African Union's Human Rights and People Charter that allowed individuals and NGOs to directly seize the African Court of Justice for human rights violations in the country.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, there is an evident conflict of interest between President's Talon's rule and his businesses. His companies are involved in several economic sectors whose markets' attributions procedures do not follow transparent bidding competitions. He recovered market shares at Cotonou's port from which he had been evicted in 2014, when he was accused of plotting against President Boni. The fact is well-known in Benin under the designation of "Talon's affair".<sup>44</sup>

Demonstrations as well as violent confrontations between protestors and Beninese security forces in some areas of central Benin, in April 2021, followed by an active boycott of the 2019 legislative elections by opposition actors illustrates the threat on Benin's stability.<sup>45</sup>

The persistence of criminal networks in Benin also constitutes another obstacle to sustain a peaceful

atmosphere in Benin. Albeit the phenomenon dates back to the 1980s, especially contraband activities such as fuel, fabric, medicines, motorbikes and wildlife trafficking, potential (indirect) collaborations with Jihadi groups in the Sahel were highlighted in 2019.<sup>46</sup> Regarding the interest demonstrated by Sahelian Jihadi groups in West African coastal countries, such collaborations could be their entry point in Benin where police stations—in North Benin, at the borders with Burkina Faso—have recently been under terrorist attacks. In addition, this constitutes an important source of logistic supply (fuel and motorbikes) for terrorist groups who can potentially sell the items to generate income that would critically support their subsistence and operations. The structures and networks of criminal activities (contraband and wildlife trafficking) has been historically used by armed groups in the region. This might be repeated by terrorist groups in Benin as well, similarly to the Liptako Gourma three-border region spanning Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Such a gearing system might also increase arms trafficking in the country as arms are multi-purpose critical instruments for those groups. Another vector of terrorist infiltration in Benin, and that could fuel existing communal herders-farmers conflicts, could be the social position of the Fulani communities in neighbouring countries (especially Togo and Ghana). In these states, the Fulani pastoral communities are, to some extent, marginalised which places it in a pattern of systematic confrontation with agricultural and agropastoral communities, with authorities generally opposed to the free pastoral movement. This marginality exposes pastoral communities in Benin, as elsewhere in the West Africa-Sahel region, to recuperation by violent groups. In Benin, in July 2018, an attack on the Fulani community left five people dead, including two children of 10 years old, and displaced more than 1,500 pastoralists.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, radical Islam remains limited in Benin and tolerance prevails amid ethnic and religious groups. The government proved proactive in combating radicalisation following information that revealed a mounting influx of Islamic clerics.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the country has hosted the African Initiative for Peace and Development Education by inter-religious dialog since 2015, being supported by the African Union (AU).<sup>49</sup> It has also established a platform to foster

42 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Ibid. Page 33.

43 Amnesty International. (2021, March 26). Bénin. Les individus et ONGs n'ont plus accès direct à la Cour africaine. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2021/03/benin-les-individus-et-ong-nont-plus-acces-direct-a-la-cour-africaine/>

44 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Page 3.

45 Interview with a country security expert on March 23, 2021.

46 Assanvo, W., Dakono B., Thérroux-Bénoni, L.-A., & Maïga, I. (2019, December). Ibid. Page 9.

47 Interview with a regional security expert on March 23, 2021.

48 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Ibid. Page 6.

49 The African Union. (2015). African initiative for education for peace and development through Muslim-Christian and inter-religious dialogue. Assembly of the union twenty-fourth ordinary session

and consolidate national inter-religious dialog.<sup>50</sup> These are critical opportunities that could help defuse growing tensions and handle current divergences, especially when the secular North-South ethno-regionalism has been brought to the public eye over the last decade.

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30 - 31 January 2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Retrieved from [https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/900/Assembly%20AU%2019%20%28XXIV%29%20Add%2010%20\\_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/900/Assembly%20AU%2019%20%28XXIV%29%20Add%2010%20_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

50 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2020 Country. Ibid. Page 7.

# ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT RESPONSES

## The Beninese government

The Beninese government has taken a series of actions to efficiently counter growing security threats. In fact, the government recently adopted a national plan focused on counterterrorism. They proceeded with the improvement of their legal framework (the criminal code mainly) and established a special court (known as la *Cour de Repression des Infractions Economiques et du Terrorisme-CRIET*) to try terrorism and financial offenses cases. Several military and police operations—operations Djidjoho<sup>51</sup> (which led to the arrest of several suspected terrorists) in 2019 and Imonlède<sup>52</sup> in 2020 (focused on intelligence)—were undertaken in areas under threat of Jihadi infiltration.

In addition, the government issued a decree on June 16, 2021, to create a high-level commission on the settlement of nomadic herders under the Presidency of the Republic.<sup>53</sup> The decree was meant to help defuse the protracted conflict between herdsman and farmers.

Yet, the impacts of the government are still limited as criminal activities, herdsman-farmers communal conflicts and terrorism persist and tend to grow in Benin currently.

## The African Union (AU) and ECOWAS

In Benin, the AU's interventions were focused on electoral and judicial issues. In 2016, 2019 and 2021 the AU Commission deployed short-term election observation (STO) missions in Benin to monitor and report on the credibility of the presidential and legislative elections. The missions particularly observed the voting, counting and announcement of elections results. The 2016 observation team comprised of 40 members drawn from the AU, the Pan-African Parliament, African election management bodies, civil society, think-tanks and independent elections experts.<sup>54</sup> The 2021 team included 16 members that only covered voting stations in Cotonou and Ouidah.<sup>55</sup> The African Court on Human and People's Rights

(ACHPR) underlined the violation of Benin's constitutional court independence, the head of State nominating acquaintances and failing to involve more consultations in initiating recent changes in the constitution.<sup>56</sup> For the ACHPR, this constituted a violation of the African Charter of People and Human Rights (ACPHR) to information, as well as the right to economic, social and cultural development.<sup>57</sup>

ECOWAS also participated in observing the elections of 2016, 2019 and 2021. While the AU and ECOWAS hailed those elections as peaceful, noting sporadic violence, they have largely stood by as essential democratic principles were dismantled or disregarded.<sup>58</sup> This inaction, especially from ECOWAS (who is supposed to be the regional lead actor as per the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) principle of subsidiarity) opens a Pandora's box for other leaders to distort democratic norms.

## The Accra Initiative

Though the Accra Initiative was launched in 2017 by Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo and Benin to prevent a spill over of violent extremism from the Sahel and counter transnational organised crime alongside member States' borderlands. However, four years since its creation, there is little known about the Initiative and its impact has been limited.<sup>59</sup> It has been set as a flexible framework to facilitate joint counterterrorism interventions and inter-state cooperation. It leans on three pillars including information and intelligence sharing; training of security and intelligence personnel; and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security.<sup>60</sup> Mali and Niger joined the Initiative as observers in 2019. It is officially funded by member countries in spite of financial constraints.

51 DOGUE, D., P. (2019, April 24). Opération « Djidjoho »: De présumés djihadistes arrêtés. La Nation. Retrieved from <https://lanationbenin.info/operation-djidjoho-de-presumes-djihadistes-arretes/>

52 Opération « Imonlède » À Ouèssè et À Kalalé: Les Forces Armées Béninoises Renforcent La Paix et La Quiétude. Retrieved from <https://matinlibre.com/2021/02/10/operation-imonlede-a-ouesse-et-a-kalale-les-forces-armees-beninoises-renforcent-la-paix-et-la-quietude/>

53 Interview with a country security expert on March 23, 2021.

54 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2020, March 6). ECOWAS Risks Its Hard-Won Reputation. Retrieved from <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/ecowas-risks-its-hard-won-reputation/>

55 Ibid.

56 Rickard, C. (2020, December 9). Benin taken to task by African court for charter failures – not even constitutional court escapes censure. African Lii. Retrieved from

<https://africanlii.org/article/20201209/benin-taken-task-african-court-charter-failures-%E2%80%93-not-even-constitutional-court>

57 Ibid.

58 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2020, March 6). Ibid.

59 Kwarkye, S., Abatan E. and Matongbada M. (2019, September 30). Can the Accra Initiative prevent terrorism in West African coastal states?

60 Ibid.

# SCENARIOS

## Worst-case scenario

An eventual failure to prevent the anchorage of terrorist groups in Benin, especially at the borderlands (with Niger and Burkina Faso), would destabilise the country. Their interactions with criminal networks would be an advantage to expand themselves beyond the Sahel and seize a strategic entry point in West African coastal countries. Regarding initiatives and counterterrorism programmes in West Africa and the Sahel, this is unlikely to happen and would be merely limited to sporadic incursions or attacks against security forces and local populations. Moreover, the persistence of the political turmoil in Benin would strain relationships between the citizenry and the State. This disillusionment may result in low voter turnout in future elections or protests among partisans of marginalised parties and civil society organisations.

## Most likely scenario

The status quo would be sustained as the governmental bloc (coalition) would maintain their exclusionary tactics. This would be manifested in assaults, blurry detentions towards political contenders, and opaque reforms of State laws (the constitution, the Electoral Code among others). In turn, frustrations would be nurtured among the citizenry and subsequently wrinkle the country's socio-political landscape. Additionally, terrorist incursions in Benin from Burkina Faso and Niger as well as transnational organised crime would continue to challenge Benin's stability due to the porousness of the country's borders.

## Best-case scenario

A cessation of authoritarian methods and further inclusion of opposition actors and parties would benefit Benin. It would help preserve the country's 30-year democratic achievements and maintain it as the vanguard of multiparty democracy in West Africa. In addition, an effective response to violent extremism threat would restore the state's legitimacy among a majority of Beninese frustrated by the current rule. The realisation of such a scenario would rely on pressure from ECOWAS, AU as well as the country's international partners—France and the European Union (EU). Their support to counterterrorism initiatives, actions or operations would also be critical.

# STRATEGIC OPTIONS

## To the Government of Benin

Rely on existing internal conflict management mechanisms to cope with the current political tensions in the country. Inclusive frameworks of dialog set by CSOs would be a starting point to foster a national socio-political dialog. In addition, dialog should be fostered among political parties and actors to defuse the current tensions. The African Charter of People and Human Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance as well as the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, would be key instruments to support such actions.

Further reinforce its national counterterrorism framework in accordance with regional and international norms. This would require the State to be more active at the national level and within regional institutions such as the Accra Initiative and ECOWAS.

## To the AU and ECOWAS

Be proactive in preventing political tensions in Benin and securing the return of Benin as signatory to the African Charter of People and Human Rights' complementary protocol allowing individuals and NGOs to directly seize the African Court in light of relevant governance, democracy and political instruments adopted at the continental and regional levels (The African Charter of People and Human Rights, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance among others).

Support Benin in their efforts in countering violent extremism and organised crime. This would be financial or technical support that would help prevent jihadi contagion in West African coastal countries.

Consider the issue of herders-farmers conflicts impartially and seriously, and resolve it without taking sides as this issue might be the hotbed of insurrections in northern Benin.

## To the Accra Initiative member countries

Communicate on the essence of the institution to allow a public comprehension of their actions and impacts on the ground.

Strengthen their actions in terms of information and intelligence sharing; training of security and intelligence personnel; and conducting frequent joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security.

## 1960-2021

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**1960** - Independence from France and admission of Dahomey (currently Benin) to the United Nations.

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**1963** - Coup d'état staged by Christophe Soglo to prevent a civil war. He overthrew Hubert Maga (first President of Dahomey) who failed to respond to the then economic crisis the Dahomey Republic (currently Benin) was facing.

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**1972** - Mathieu Kerekou (Major) seized power after a military coup. He remained in power until being voted out in 1991.

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**1975** - Renomination of Dahomey which became the People's Republic of Benin.

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**1989** - Anti-government strikes and demonstrations took place, continuing until 1990. Agreement on constitutional reform and multi-candidate presidential elections was reached following discussions between President Kerekou and dissidents.

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**1996** - Mathieu Kerekou won presidential elections.

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**2004** - Benin, Nigeria agreed to redraw their mutual border.

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**2006** - Political newcomer Yayi Boni, running as an independent, won the run-off vote in presidential elections.

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**2009** - Benin announced discovery of oil offshore at the Nigeria-Benin border.

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**2010** - In Benin Investment Consultancy and Computer Services (ICC) was forcibly closed. A majority of its employees were jailed for mounting fraudulent system based on Ponzi's scheme. At least 130 000 Beninese lost a total amount of more than \$130 million. The system was controversially endorsed by President Boni.

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**2011** - Benin opened polls for a twice-delayed presidential election after a last-minute scramble to register hundreds of thousands of eligible voters left off voter rolls. Pres. Boni Yayi sought a 2nd term against 13 candidates.

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**2012** - Benin President Thomas Boni Yayi was elected the African Union Chairman, taking over the one-year post from Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema at the AU summit meeting in the Ethiopian capital.

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**2016** - Benin held an election to choose a successor to President Thomas Boni Yayi who is stepping down after two terms, leaving 33 candidates to vie for power in the small West African country. PM Lionel Zinsou (28.4%) will face a run-off against businessman Patrice Talon (24.8%) in a second round of presidential elections.

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**2017** - Over a thousand people took to the streets of Benin's economic capital of Cotonou to protest against President Patrice Talon amid growing unease with his government's economic reforms.

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**2018** - The Burkina Faso military announced that 52 individuals were arrested in Burkina Faso, 42 in Benin, 95 in Togo and 13 in Ghana last week in a joint anti-terror and security operation in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Benin and Togo.

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**2019** - The people of Benin voted for a new parliament but without a single opposition candidate to choose from. Voters were given the choice to select their 83 members of parliament from two parties both allied to President Patrice Talon. The country's main opposition parties were effectively barred from fielding candidates by tough new eligibility rules and asked their supporters to protest by boycotting the polls.

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**2021** - President Talon won unicolour presidential polls after side-lining opposition figures.

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## Peace and Security Reports

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Although key continental and regional institutions have their own early warning reporting systems, policy making within these institutions also benefit from a number of analytical and periodic reports generated by think tanks and research institutes. The Research Unit at IPSS provides brief and critical analyses of the state of peace and security in different African countries as well as critical appraisals of interventions by various African actors. The reports will cover African countries showing positive signs as well as those undergoing negative developments.



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