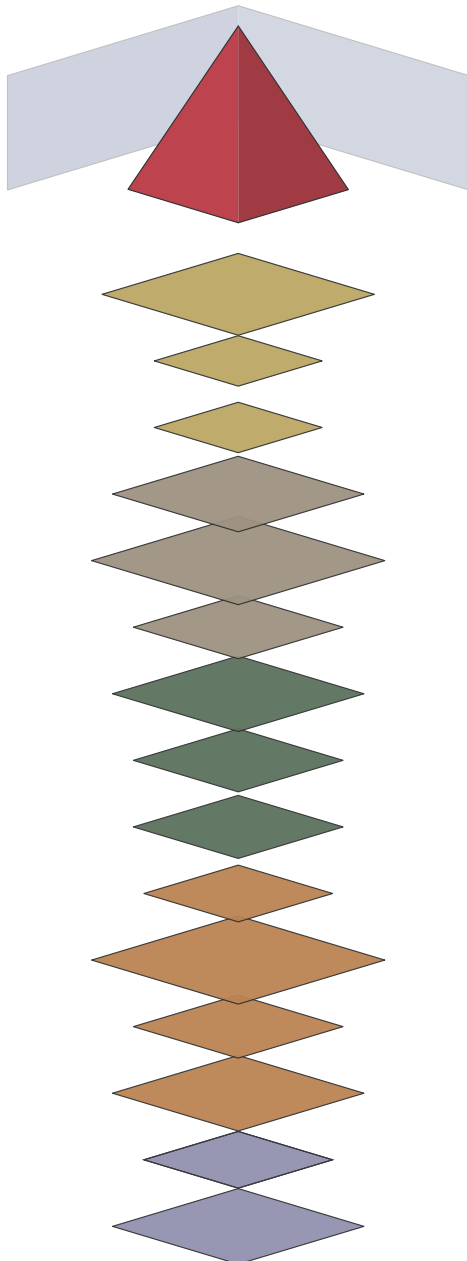


 **BENIN**



 **5.32**
CRIMINALITY SCORE

26th of 54 African countries
9th of 15 West African countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.43**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	6.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	4
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4
ARMS TRAFFICKING	6
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5
FLORA CRIMES	6
FAUNA CRIMES	5
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	5
HEROIN TRADE	4.5
COCAINE TRADE	7
CANNABIS TRADE	5
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	6
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	4.5
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **5.2**

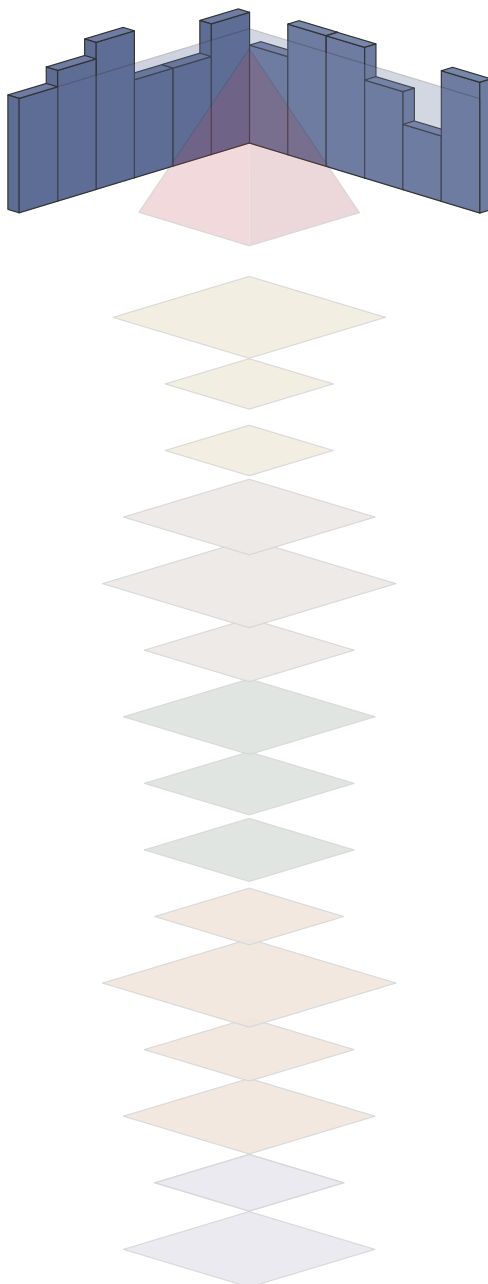
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	2
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	5.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	6
FOREIGN ACTORS	8
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	8

 **3.5**
RESILIENCE SCORE





BENIN




3.5 RESILIENCE SCORE

29th of 54 African countries
9th of 15 West African countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.5
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	4
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	4.5
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	3
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3
LAW ENFORCEMENT	4
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	3
PREVENTION	2
NON-STATE ACTORS	4



5.32 CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS **5.43**



CRIMINAL ACTORS **5.2**



CRIMINALITY

Criminal Markets

PEOPLE

Benin is a country of origin as well as a transit hub and a destination market for human trafficking. Traffickers typically target vulnerable women and children from impoverished northern areas, who are then trafficked internally to urban areas in the south. Domestic trafficking is more common than cross-border trafficking. The Dantokpa area is known to be a hotspot for child labour, with children aged five and above often hired in exchange for a monthly income derived from their work. The most vulnerable children are those without formal education or official birth records. Child marriage is also prevalent, with some families forcing girls into marriage because of generational poverty. In addition, criminal groups fraudulently recruit young Beninese women for domestic work in Lebanon, Algeria and Persian Gulf countries, subsequently exploiting them in forced labour or sex trafficking. Cross-border criminal groups traffic children and girls from Benin for domestic servitude in neighbouring countries. Togolese victims move through Benin en route to other destinations.

Benin is a host country for many workers from neighbouring countries in West Africa as well as a destination country for people fleeing armed conflicts and political crises. Its membership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) means there is freedom of movement for ECOWAS nationals across its borders, which makes human smuggling low level, low profit and broadly violence free. Moreover, although there is a steady movement of people between the ECOWAS members, without proper travel documents and facilitated by bribery, there is no evidence suggesting the significant involvement of smuggling groups in these flows. However, the country is used as an informal transit hub for people from other parts of West Africa, the Sahel, Central Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Nigerian networks reportedly smuggle and traffic Nigerian girls and women using Benin as a hub of operations, obtaining falsified travel documents that allow minors to travel alone. Internally, climate change and the lack of economic opportunities are important driving factors of rural-to-urban migration, primarily from the north to the south. Benin nationals mainly emigrate to Nigeria, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Niger and Ghana, with many trying to reach Europe and Canada.

Extortion and kidnapping for ransom are serious issues in Benin. Extortion is prevalent in the form of online sextortion and collection of funds on the streets by young people. Kidnapping for ransom carried out by criminal groups is rife particularly along the Nigerian border, whereas kidnapping incidents perpetrated by suspected violent extremist groups – which peaked in 2022 – have emerged as a significant threat in the northern regions of Atakora and Alibori.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is a relatively pervasive criminal market in Benin. The country serves as both a destination and a transit country for the illegal arms trade and both Togolese and Beninese police have intercepted several illegal shipments in recent years. In the past decade farmer-herder conflicts have become increasingly weaponized. Benin serves as a transit country for arms trafficking into Nigeria, partly on land routes moving arms from the Sahel. While the port of Cotonou is used as an import point for weapons trafficking, typically only small quantities are involved. Ongoing conflicts in Nigeria has contributed to an increased demand for arms in the region.

Trade in counterfeit goods is very common in the country, with counterfeit and falsified medical products posing an especially significant problem. The Dantokpa market in Cotonou serves as a hub for their sale and distribution. The pharmaceuticals are mainly imported from India, Pakistan, Indonesia and China, but some are manufactured in African bootleg factories. In addition to counterfeit medical products, the illicit trade in legitimate medical products is also pervasive. While the government has acted to tackle this trade, it is not clear whether the market has actually shrunk or merely become more clandestine, with most trade in pharmaceutical products taking place in back stores or private houses. Medical products continue to be trafficked throughout the country, including for consumption in the northern areas of the country and across the border into Sahelian states. Bribery is common at the Seme border, allowing smugglers to cross into Benin and large amounts of products to be smuggled in and out of the country. The illicit trade in cigarettes also continues to be a significant trafficking ecosystem in West Africa, despite the efforts being made to fight against the illegal tobacco trade.



ENVIRONMENT

The illegal trade in rosewood has severely depleted stocks in Benin, with Chinese traffickers the main actors behind this criminal market. As a result, tree cover loss in the country has increased, and only a small percentage of the original forests remain intact. Uncontrolled logging, bushfires, slash-and-burn agriculture and charcoal production are among the primary causes of deforestation. Many actors in the sector claim that most of Benin's forests are now almost devoid of trees and looting has reached a peak, leaving nothing but exposed soil. Many local companies legally operating in the wood sector have gone bankrupt.

Even though fauna crimes in Benin have decreased in the past few years, pangolin poaching and smuggling continues to be an issue because of the demand for their meat and scales. Large-scale cases of pangolin smuggling indicate that the country largely serves as a transit point for illegal trade from Central Africa to better-connected airports and seaports in West Africa. China remains the most significant destination country for pangolins. The limited amount of illicit ivory trafficked in Benin follows the same route as rosewood, which is trafficked to China. The Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a violent extremist group with significant operations across Burkina Faso, has established itself in the north of country. JNIM has taken control of the W park and has significant presence in the Pendjari and Arly parks. Although JNIM's ideological stance on poaching is ambiguous – and there have been instances of the group moving against commercial poaching in some areas of influence – poaching has increased in recent years in the W Pendjari and Arly complex, in line with the deteriorating security situation. Illustratively, the elephant population in Park W almost halved between 2015 and 2021.

The illegal trade in non-renewable resources such as fuel, and to a lesser extent gold, is a major concern. Although there is little data on the illegal gold trade there have been reports of artisanal gold mining in the National Park Complex of W-Arly-Pendjari in the tri-border area between Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger and there are concerns that armed groups may seek to profit from these sites. The illicit fuel trade, which accounts for an extremely high percentage of the national demand for gasoline, is generated by purchasing legal, traditionally subsidized, fuel in Nigeria and transporting it illegally to Benin. The illicit fuel trade is also fed from oil bunkering, where oil is either illegally diverted from official flows, or illegally extracted, and sold on the black market. The illicit fuel trade plays a significant role in resourcing armed groups,

which rely on fuel for their operations. The northeastern town of Malanville and the surrounding areas, as well as the disputed territory of Koalou/Kourou in northwest Benin, are primary storage points. Increased demand from armed groups has reportedly driven up prices in the area. Benin also serves as an important transit point for fuel smuggled from Nigeria into other littoral states and the Sahel. Fuel trafficking is coordinated on both small and large scales by individual entrepreneurs or loosely affiliated groups and more organized criminal networks, some of which appear to have affiliations to JNIM.

DRUGS

Benin is a transit hub for heroin being moved through Africa, destined for the European markets. The heroin trade in Benin is not typically associated with violence. Cotonou Airport is the main transit point for this route, with drugs being smuggled in aircraft parts. Although there is no comprehensive quantitative data on drug use, domestic use of heroin is believed to be limited.

Benin is a far more significant transit hub for the trafficking of cocaine to Europe. Most of the cocaine is brought in by sea through the port of Cotonou. Criminal networks have been using the port to bring cocaine from Latin America into West Africa for many years. Recent large seizures of the drug have led to the arrest of nationals from different countries, pointing to extensive transnational networks and corruption among Beninese security forces. Multiple indicators – including record production rates in Latin America, the expanding European consumption market, and elevated seizures in West Africa - indicate that the volume moving through West Africa may be greater than ever before, enabled by a robust protection system on the part of state-embedded actors.

The cultivation, sale, and possession of cannabis for recreational purposes is illegal in Benin. Cannabis is produced locally – though mostly on a small scale – and very low levels of violence, if any, are associated with the trade. Recent information from enforcement agencies at the Nigerian-Benin border indicates cross-border trafficking, including from Ghana to Nigeria, where more potent cannabis is now being produced. There have also been increasing reports of the seizure of cannabis resin in the capital.

There has been a decrease in recorded imports of Tramadol, which arrives primarily from India, and in increasingly higher proportion, Pakistan and China, by sea and to a lesser extent by air. There is some evidence to suggest a reduction in both supply and demand for the non-medical use of Tramadol due to a combination



of factors including rising prices and a concerted effort on the part of the state to crack down on the illicit market (however, as the market has also become more clandestine, this is difficult to evidence conclusively). Tramadol is also produced in Ghana and Nigeria and is suspected to be manufactured in clandestine laboratories elsewhere within West Africa, including, potentially, in Cotonou. Although the port's importance as an entry point for Tramadol has decreased, sporadic seizures suggest that some flows continue, and the drug is trafficked on trucks and motorcycles along the borders with Togo, Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. It is suspected that there is also methamphetamine in the country, but on a far smaller scale.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

While Benin has moderate IT capabilities, cybercrime is a growing trend in the country, with local experts referring to it as a 'hackers' hub'. Despite the adoption in 2018 of a legal framework pertaining to the crime, cybercrime still thrives within and around Cotonou and cybercriminals, locally known as 'gayman', no longer operate from internet cafés but mostly from private houses. Authorities regularly conduct successful operations targeting such criminals.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Informal foreign exchange transactions take place and money changers operate in Benin without supervision, creating opportunities for financial crimes. There is often no record of the parties involved in these transactions, making them an attractive means of illicit activities. In addition, there has been corruption in donor-funded projects, particularly those relating to water and sanitation. In some cases, high-ranking officials have been prosecuted for investing public funds in questionable entities. Tax evasion is also prevalent in the country, with a common tactic being to declare imported cargo as being in transit to Sahelian states in order to evade import taxes, while diverting the goods within the country.

Criminal Actors

Benin's proximity to Nigeria has a significant impact on illegal activities, particularly drug trafficking. Investigations into cocaine seizures have identified transnational networks involving Benin and Nigerian nationals, as well as other West African, Lebanese and European nationals.

Nigerian criminal actors are the most important players in the illicit fuel trade, purchasing fuel legally in Nigeria and selling it illegally in Benin. They also loot oil from Nigeria's facilities and sell it on the black market in Benin.

Nigerian groups are also involved in human trafficking, bringing their victims to Benin to regularize their documents and transport them to various countries in Africa and the Middle East. In addition, violent extremist groups from Burkina Faso, including JNIM and, to a lesser extent, Islamic State Sahel Province (more commonly known as IS Sahel), are increasingly operating in the north of Benin. These groups benefit from illicit supply chains, particularly fuel, and may also facilitate some smuggling and trafficking economies while taxing certain illicit flows from Benin into Burkina Faso.

Corruption is a widespread problem that erodes public trust in government and law enforcement officials. Drug trafficking investigations have repeatedly revealed complicity by state institutions, including law enforcement agencies and specialist anti-drug units. Corruption is also prevalent among customs and border officials, who facilitate cross-border smuggling through extortion and bribery. The Seme border is a notorious hotspot for corruption. Here security forces involved in extortion have turned the crossing into an unofficial private toll that facilitates smugglers.

Criminal networks are involved in drug trafficking and other contraband goods in the south, including fuel, motorbikes, medicines and fabrics. Wildlife trafficking is also a problem in the north, particularly in the Pendjari and W parks. The relationship between criminal networks and violent extremist groups is difficult to determine, but there is evidence that the latter use some of the illicit goods smuggled by criminal networks, such as fuel, Tramadol and counterfeit medicines; there are also links between the illicit cattle trade and violent extremist actors, who either purchase stolen cattle or are involved in the theft or taxation of cattle directly.

There is evidence that private sector actors have also been involved in drug trafficking in the country, particularly in cases involving cocaine. Furthermore, high-level executives have been prosecuted for financial criminal practices. Conversely, there are no notable mafia-style groups in the country, but there is evidence of violent groups, organized with a degree of hierarchy, operating in and out of the country.



RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The limited state presence in the northern regions of Benin, and lagging economic development in these areas, leaves some communities feeling marginalized. This has led to the state having little legitimacy in these areas and has created entry points for violent extremist groups. Recently, the political agenda has mainly focused on the conflict in the northern areas rather than on organized crime. Although Benin's Constitution respects separation of powers, its implementation is weak leaving public institutions open to political manipulation. The government controls the narrative around security, and public officials enjoy impunity, leading to decreasing confidence in the authorities and security services. Codes of conduct imposed on political parties put political pluralism at risk, and the physical repression of government opponents exacerbates the situation.

The current government is reportedly giving important government positions to people from the south, which might affect the ethnic balance and reignite tensions between the north and south. Although governance has improved over the years it is still a matter of concern. The Benin government operates opaquely, limiting information sharing on sensitive topics such as crime and conflict in the north. Public perceptions of corruption are high, with a significant percentage of the population having to pay bribes for public services. Corruption is perceived to have increased significantly in recent years. Historical political interference, security concerns and border disputes have resulted in Benin having strained relations with neighbouring countries, including Togo, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. However, in recent years these relationships have improved and the country claims to collaborate with its neighbors to combat illicit trade, human and drug trafficking and fuel smuggling.

Benin, which is a member of several international organizations, is working to enhance its collaboration with international actors to address organized crime and instability. However, it is still hindered by corruption and mismanagement in the state administration. Despite this, it is generally seen as a stable partner that honours its commitments.

Efforts to combat criminal activities have mainly focused on terrorism-related offences, with less attention paid to trafficking in drugs and other illegal substances. Authorities have implemented legislative measures to combat terrorism, but the country's national legal

framework against organized crime remains inadequate. The country has adopted a new National Cybersecurity Strategy to ensure a safe and secure cyberspace, promote digital trust and strengthen national coordination.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judiciary in Benin is heavily influenced by the government, with reports of politicization and executive interference in the highest courts. The country's prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary, with security forces subjecting prisoners to punitive treatment. Inmates often die because there is no medical care and poor ventilation. Since the start of the conflict in the north the number of people charged and imprisoned has increased.

The effectiveness of law enforcement is hindered by a lack of resources and widespread corruption. The specialized court against terrorism is active but is vulnerable to executive influence. Despite increased monitoring and investigations, enforcement still falls short of the minimum requirements. Investigations into significant drug seizures have repeatedly uncovered corruption by law enforcement officials. State security and law enforcement forces have been accused of using excessive force and committing arbitrary killings, particularly during electoral violence and military operations in the north. Investigations into such incidents are rare, leading to a problem of impunity as police are rarely punished for misconduct or corruption.

The porous border between Benin and Nigeria (as well as with other neighbouring states of Togo, Niger and Burkina Faso) allows criminal groups to move freely and smuggle goods, in some cases facilitated by collusion of corrupt border security forces. The W-Arly-Pendjari Complex complicates border control, with national borders within the area poorly monitored and easy to cross. Armed groups use the Pendjari River to transport supplies, and attacks by violent extremist groups have increased in recent years. The risk of terrorist attacks is greatest in the north and west of the country, with numerous incidents reported.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Benin is considered to be at high risk of money laundering and terrorist financing, with drug smuggling as an important source of these crimes. Vulnerable sectors include land and real estate, as well as the foreign exchange



sector, due to the large number of informal actors and the high volume of transactions. Although the country has a Financial Intelligence Unit, a lack of resources impedes the routine identification and targeting of significant money laundering cases. In addition, despite increased inter-agency cooperation and training, there have been few prosecutions or convictions, indicating that the different parts of the system are not functioning coherently to mitigate risks.

Illicit fuel trade is burgeoning and the government has been unsuccessful in controlling, diminishing and regulating it. This inability to tax the trade results in significant revenue shortfalls. Despite conflict and instability, the Beninois state is making efforts to strengthen its economic regulatory capacity through domestic policy and foreign technical and financial support.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Efforts to support victims of organized crime in Benin have primarily focused on child victims of human trafficking, with less attention given to adult victims. Social services have referred all child victims to a temporary shelter that offers legal, medical and psychological assistance. NGOs have worked with the government to reunite children with their families. However, there is limited information about prisoner rehabilitation and the treatment of drug addiction and recidivism appears to be linked to the lack of employment prospects. Benin has yet to institute many of the mechanisms identified as necessary to support victims of slavery.

To prevent violent extremist activity from spreading from the Sahel, the Beninese government has launched community development projects in remote border towns. The initiatives aim to reduce poverty and increase a sense of citizenship in the Alibori and Atakora departments by building infrastructure and generating income. Benin is also open to collaborating with neighboring countries such as Nigeria to combat cross-border crimes, including trafficking and smuggling. However, the porosity of borders remains a challenge. The involvement of criminal groups and Nigerian security forces in smuggling and trafficking activities has further hindered crime prevention.

The deteriorating state of civil society liberties in Benin is concerning, with the increasing repression of critical voices, including journalists reporting on crime and security developments that do not align with the government's narrative. Journalists have been imprisoned for criticizing the government and security forces have arbitrarily arrested activists and journalists during peaceful demonstrations. The penal code criminalizes 'offenses against the symbols and values of the State' and 'unarmed gatherings that could disturb public tranquility', a worrying development in terms of state coercion. Despite the active involvement of civil society organizations in setting up working groups and drafting reports on social, economic and environmental governance, recent events in Benin are counterproductive to the capacity of non-state actors to fight organized crime.

