

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY ASSESSMENT

Integrity vulnerability and risks of violence

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BENIN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

About Democracy Reporting International

DRI is an independent organisation dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide. We believe that people are active participants in public life, not subjects of their governments. Our work centres on analysis, reporting, and capacity-building. For this, we are guided by the democratic and human rights obligations enshrined in international law. Headquartered in Berlin, DRI has offices in Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

About the AHEAD Africa project

AHEAD Africa is a pan-African project focusing on multiple facets of the electoral cycle in the continent. It aims to empower civil society across Africa, including citizen observers, in strengthening electoral systems and processes, so as to contribute to higher levels of electoral integrity in African Union member states.

The underlying methodology of the Action is the AHEAD approach – Action for a Holistic Electoral Approach for Democracy – which emphasises that follow-up to election observation recommendations can be a key driver for more inclusive electoral systems, building public trust, and preventing conflicts. By focusing on “electoral follow-up”, civil society can effectively advocate for democratic accountability and play a significant role in fostering transparent and accountable electoral processes.

The project is implemented by a consortium of election observation and democracy support networks, including: The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD); The Alliance for Finance Monitoring (ACFIM), as the secretariat of the African Election Observation Network (AfEONET); The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), as the secretariat of the Election Support Network for Southern Africa (ESN-SA); The Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO), as the secretariat of the East and Horn of Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN); The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), as the secretariat of the West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON); Africivistes; and Democracy Reporting International (DRI).

This Electoral Integrity Assessment was realised as part of AHEAD Africa’s Research component, which aims to produce large- and small-scale research outputs examining various aspects of electoral processes, including electoral reforms, the quality and credibility of elections (such as electoral preparedness), and the role of free and fair elections in fostering democratic outcomes.

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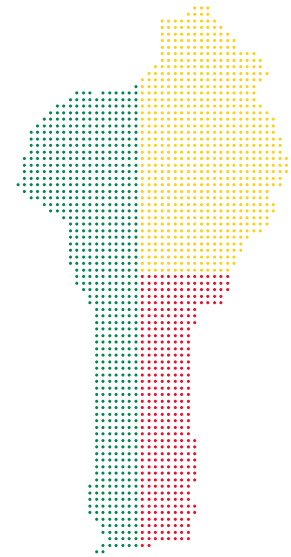
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Executive Summary

Benin has historically been considered as one of West Africa's more stable democracies since its transition to multiparty politics in 1990.¹ While recent economic and government reforms have led to economic growth, the reduction of inequalities, and an increase of public service delivery, primarily through digitalisation efforts,² recent electoral cycles and legal reforms have revealed democratic decline in political competition and civil liberties. The consolidation of executive power and concerns about democratic backsliding have heightened tensions between government supporters and opposition movements in recent years. These vulnerabilities warrant careful monitoring and mitigation strategies ahead of the 2026 presidential elections, and highlight the need to pave the way for post-election reforms.³



Recent parliamentary and local elections, held on 11 January 2026, took place under a revised legal framework, with a change to the electoral system and eligibility criteria, and illustrated the practical impact of the new threshold for seat allocation. On 8 February, the National Assembly of Benin swore in its 109 members in Porto-Novo, with 60 seats for the Progressive Union for Renewal (l'Union progressiste le renouveau, or UPR) and 49 for the Republican Bloc (Bloc républicain, or BR), all part of the ruling majority, with no opposition represented.⁴ The Democrats party (Les Démocrates, or LD) did not manage to meet the 20 per cent threshold required under the revised law, after holding 28 seats in the previous legislature, changing the political landscape of Benin ahead of the presidential elections, scheduled for April 2026. This control of the Assembly by the ruling party of President Patrice Talon and its allies, coupled with upcoming presidential elections, where there is only a moderate opposition party running, raises concerns for plurality.

1 Democracy in Action, "[Democracy on the line in Benin](#)", 2025.

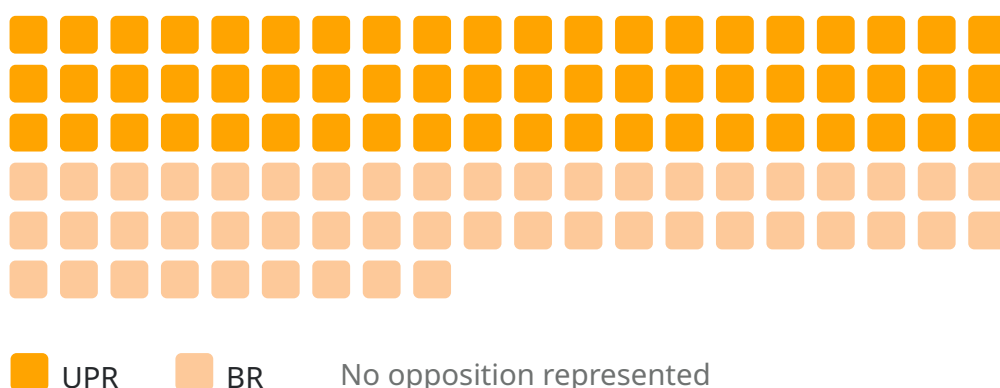
2 World bank, "[Outlook 2025 Benin](#)", 17 July 2025.

3 WANEP (Réseau Ouest Africain pour l'Édification de la Paix), "Rapport Annuel 2021 Elections", April 2022.

4 Jeune Afrique, "Au Bénin, une Assemblée entièrement acquise à Patrice Talon et son dauphin Romuald Wadagni", 13 Février 2026 : 60 sont issus des rangs de l'Union progressiste le renouveau (UPR) et 49 du Bloc républicain (BR).

National Assembly of Benin | 2026

Current seat distribution



The 7 December 2025 failed coup attempted by soldiers of the Benin Armed Forces, combined with gradual restrictions on opposition parties and Benin’s history of violence in previous election cycles, also creates a fear of revival of electoral violence. While loyalist forces quickly regained control with the support of external actors, this danger must “be taken very seriously, despite motivations that remain unclear.”⁵ Regional instability and geopolitical dynamics also elevate the risks of violence to the level of increasingly possible, rather than exceptional. Additionally, growing youth unemployment, economic pressures,⁶ and the lack of strong political opposition have created conditions where political actors may more easily mobilise frustrated populations, particularly in urban centres like Cotonou and Porto-Novo. International and domestic observers all noted a peaceful pre-election climate during the legislative and local election in January, but caution should remain ahead of the presidential poll.⁷

Despite these aggravating factors, risks are mitigated by Benin’s relatively professionalised election administration, judiciary, and security forces, as well as its robust, experienced civil society. The effects of these actors are buttressed by regional pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union to maintain democratic standards and prevent violence. Additionally, Beninese society retains deep cultural norms emphasising dialogue and social cohesion that can play a significant role in preventing violence. The National Autonomous Electoral Commission (Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome, or CENA), the High Authority for Digital and Communication (Haute Autorité de l’audiovisuel et de la communication, or HAAC),

5 IRIS, “December Coup Attempt Reveal?”, December 2025.

6 Afrobarometer, “Les Béninois ne sont pas contents de la situation économique de leur pays et de leurs conditions de vie, » 14 August 2024.

7 CAPE/COSCEP, “Pre Election Statement, Observations Benin Communal and Legislative Elections,” January 2026.

and civil society have all engaged in voter education and training of stakeholders, as well as in media engagement to prevent violence, engage in dialogue with youth, and sensitise stakeholders to the threat of violence.

This report examines vulnerabilities across four categories in Benin (state and politics, electoral and judicial authorities, media and society, and security agencies) to analyse potential risks and develop recommendations for key actors ahead of the presidential election and post-election period.

THIS REPORT WILL ASSESS THE FOLLOWING RISKS:

- ▶ Stakeholders noted a decline in the rule of law and trust in government in recent years, due to arbitrary arrests, controversial election reforms, and restrictions on political participation, affecting the population's trust in parties and institutions.
- ▶ Since 2019, critical electoral reforms have led to stricter criteria for party registration and candidacy, eroding institutional trust and leading to increased political polarisation and the exclusion of opposition parties from the 2026 elections.⁸ The controversial November constitutional reform, which extended the terms for the office of the President and created a bicameral system, with the establishment of a Senate, exacerbated this polarised political scene. While enshrined in the electoral code, the recent provisions were denounced by the opposition and civil society as measures that prevent the main opposition party from running in the local and presidential elections.
- ▶ Despite the smooth and peaceful election operations held in January, Benin's electoral authorities still face specific capacity limitations in recruiting and training polling staff, effectively monitoring campaign and party finances, countering cyber threats, and quickly detecting and preventing widespread disinformation, hate speech, or online violence. The historically low turnout in the last election also points to the need to reinforce voter education efforts ahead of the polls. Inter-institutional cooperation among electoral and governance bodies remains limited with regards to sharing of information and evidence in timely manner. While access to justice has improved in

⁸ Afrobarometer, "2025 Benin Dépêche no.1023", July 2025.

recent years, the role of judicial authorities in election dispute resolution is not well known among citizens, and would benefit from stronger engagement with stakeholders and citizens to build trust.

- ▶ The media and civic space have also shrunk in recent years, affecting the ability of journalists and activists to report, act as watchdogs, and hold the government accountable. Self-censorship by media and civil society organisations is growing. Coupled with citizens consuming more news on digital platforms, restrictive regulation, and severe sanctions under the digital code, Benin is creating openings for politicians and the government to curb freedom of expression. In parallel, the media regulator and electoral authorities lack the capacity and tools to quickly remove disinformation, violent content, and harassment online.
- ▶ Regional threats, local ethnic tensions, and the attempted coup have increased the presence of security forces in the country. The government has shared little information on post-coup arrests and detentions, and analysts report disproportionate use of violence by the police force, as well as intimidation and stricter surveillance. While our interview with CENA revealed good cooperation with police forces, the political and security context increases concerns for potential violence during and/or after the elections.

Based on Benin's political context, this assessment concludes that some electoral integrity risks can be effectively addressed prior to the elections with joint efforts by relevant institutions and electoral stakeholders. Many vulnerabilities, however, will require more sustained post-election reform efforts to turn back from democratic decline, guarantee political pluralism, and strengthen the rule of law.⁹

9 National Democratic Institute (NDI), Pre-Election Assessment Mission to Benin, Preliminary Statement, February 2026.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS TO KEY ACTORS

To mitigate risks, protect electoral integrity, and address concerns over violence, institutions and stakeholders should:

- ▶ Ensure effective coordination between government agencies, electoral oversight bodies, the judiciary, non-government actors, political parties, and citizens to encourage voters' participation, promote non-violence, and enhance efficiency in tackling threats to electoral integrity and transparency;
- ▶ Strengthen monitoring, reporting, and sanctioning of online and offline harassment, disinformation, illicit financial flows, cyberattacks or violent content;
- ▶ Bolster voter education efforts and dialogue with citizens – in particular youth and women – to increase voter participation, defuse tensions, and build trust in institutions;
- ▶ Guarantee timely access to electoral and criminal justice for citizens to seek remedies;
- ▶ Strengthen the traditional alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms for pre-election disputes, to defuse tensions at the local level, in particular in the most volatile regions with political violence, and in areas with high jihadist threats;
- ▶ Provide adequate support for civil society actors and observers to contribute to education efforts, as well as early warning and prevention efforts, in particular with women and youth; and
- ▶ Maintain professional conduct of the security forces and sanction the disproportionate use of force.

With proactive, coordinated engagement from local, national, and international stakeholders, the risk of threats to electoral integrity and election violence can be reduced. Without deliberate efforts to reduce fear and build confidence, however, the absence of opposition in the election, combined with the shadow of the coup attempt and regional instability could undermine the electoral process.

ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES



The National and Autonomous Electoral Commission (Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome, or CENA), and the High Authority for Digital and Communication (Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication, or HAAC), should:

Promote voter education, digital literacy and violence prevention. CENA, in cooperation with the HAAC and civil society organisations (CSOs), must actively engage in voter participation campaigns to increase turnout, and continue to engage in violence prevention, both on- and offline. These campaigns should aim to equip voters with the necessary skills to critically evaluate the information they encounter online, and to report abuses such as violent content, discrimination, and hate speech, in particular where these target women or minorities;

Strengthen oversight and training in specific areas. CENA should enhance their operations to limit the delayed delivery of material, improve disciplinary control over staff, and bolster their monitoring capabilities to counter potential hybrid threats to the elections, including by:

- Conducting targeted training for electoral officials to monitor and immediately report violence, hate speech, disinformation, cyberthreats and illicit financing in elections;
- Adopting a communication strategy to prevent or react to attacks against the institution or against election officials; and
- Conducting briefings of election officials and law enforcement agencies on electoral offences and crimes, as well as on potential security risks in the elections;

Develop effective cooperation mechanisms. CENA should work with relevant government bodies, including law enforcement, the HAAC, the cybersecurity agency and the judiciary. CENA could consider adopting security protocols, ensuring interoperability of data when sharing evidence and information with prosecutors or the courts, and conducting joint training for prosecutors and digital information regulators;

Map digital threats: In cooperation with the HAAC and relevant digital regulation bodies and security agencies, CENA should map threats and adopt tools and cooperation

protocols to counter potential hybrid threats to the elections, in particular ,online disinformation, illicit election finance, or cyberthreats against ICT infrastructure;

Build on existing traditional alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (MARC) to prevent violence and mediate rising tensions in local communities, especially in the North or areas more likely to see ethnic tensions or security threats;

Map and develop mitigation plans in hotspot zones. As part of an electoral risk assessment, CENA should map hotspots where violence is likely to erupt and design mitigation plans in coordination with security agencies and in consultation with local CSOs to prevent and intervene quickly in cases of violence, in particular against women and minorities; and

Institutionalise existing practices with CSOs, for instance, by adopting a CSO strategy and embedding consultation with CSOs during post-election reviews, legal reforms, regulation, and policy development and voter education campaigns.

JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES



Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, prosecutors, and criminal courts:

Strengthen capacity and exchanges among judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, prosecutors, and CENA. The Training School for Legal Professions (EFPJ) in Benin could institutionalise its preparation for election dispute resolution for courts, magistrates, clerks, prosecutors, and court staff for future elections. The existing seminar could be completed with add-on sessions to address access to evidence in elections, new hybrid threats to elections (illicit financial flows, cyberattacks, or disinformation), procedural and open justice, communication in electoral justice, and judicial remedies and sanctions in line with the new electoral code;

Develop a clear strategic communication plan for stakeholders to understand and trust **the dispute-resolution process**, the role and powers of the courts in elections, and what to expect;

Build on existing transparency and digital measures to promote public hearings and publish election judgements in a timely manner alongside summary judgements for the media;

Coordinate access to evidence with police and relevant institutions. Judicial authorities should establish clear cooperation mechanisms with police, security agencies, CENA, and the HAAC to quickly share evidence and information on alleged violence, offline or online. Judicial authorities should investigate in a timely manner to prevent further violence and to counter impunity; and

Collect and publish data on police cases and prosecutions on election crimes, including vote-buying, intimidation, threats, and post-election violence, to draw lessons and formulate recommendations for future reforms and to enhance transparency.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND ELECTION OBSERVERS

Continue voter engagement. CSOs should continue efforts to develop targeted campaign messaging to encourage citizens to vote, to warn of potential risks of disinformation in the digital space, and to help prevent violence. These should include creating frameworks that can effectively alert and address these challenges at the community level. CSOs should continue to engage with the public in rural and urban areas through media literacy programmes that teach how to identify dis- and misinformation or violent content, and to understand its impact on democracy;

Pursue efforts to monitor election violence-related acts. CSOs should closely monitor arrests and prosecutions during the election period, to assess the use of force by security agencies, impartial investigation of acts of election violence, and the application of proportionate sanctions by the courts, in particular against women and youth;

Bolster capacity-building for youth in digital space. Ahead of elections and beyond, CSOs should pursue efforts to engage youth in local community dialogues and sensitise them to the threats that exist in the digital space and elections. Projects to co-design radio

scripts or social media campaigns on electoral process, political integrity, or access to electoral justice could be considered; and

Engage in research and advocacy for the post-election period. Post-elections, CSOs could conduct in-depth research on the effects of offline and online risks drawing from the three election cycles and the coup attempt, focused on disinformation and violence prevention. Practitioners and academics could conduct research on the use of existing alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms in the local areas and how to best engage with local and religious leaders that can be used to resolve conflict prior to the elections.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Political parties, presidential candidates, and campaign teams should continue efforts to encourage voter participation, prevent violence, and call for calm during campaign activities; and

Political parties should establish internal mechanisms to promote the participation of youth and women in the party beyond the quota, for instance, by setting up gender units or specific funds for post-election youth or women civic and political engagement projects.

MEDIA

Provide support to media professionals to improve their knowledge of the electoral process, campaign regulations, and potential risks to electoral integrity, to adequately improve reporting during the elections while adopting a “do no harm” approach in order not to face sanctions;

Continue to educate journalists and citizens on the laws on communication, the Digital Code, and the code of ethics for the media, and advocate for the government and state agencies to focus on prevention and warnings, rather than sanctions, to avoid unreasonably curtailing the freedoms of the press and expression;

Pursue peer exchanges to identify good practices on the promotion of peaceful digital spaces and to effectively detect and mitigate disinformation, hate speech, and violent content; and

Consult with media organisations, digital platforms, and CSOs on the revision of the code of ethics and the Digital Code, and make proposals for post-election legislative reform.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Enhance content moderation to prevent violence. In cooperation with the HAAC and CENA, platforms should employ content moderation (including with the use of artificial intelligence tools to strengthen content moderation) to identify and mitigate violent content, hate speech, disinformation, and polarising content. To maintain public trust, regular transparency reports detailing content moderation practices and outcomes should be published;

Ensure timely access to information or evidence. Platforms should, in a timely manner, address requests from electoral authorities or judicial authorities during the elections to take down or provide evidence relating to online content portraying violence or calling for violent acts; and

Adjust labelling and algorithms. Platforms should also provide transparency reports on labelling political ads, to assess the impact of paid content during elections. Algorithms should be adjusted to reduce the visibility of misleading or harmful content, while promoting diverse viewpoints and reputable news sources.

STATE AND SECURITY AGENCIES

Co-design training for police and security agencies with CENA on the electoral process, with specific instructions during campaign rallies, on polling day, and on the post-election environment, in particular to refrain from the unreasonable use of force and to avoid criminalising the election process and media space by government authorities, political parties or malign actors;

Develop transparent security protocols between CENA and law enforcement, to ensure the smooth deployment of materials and security around polling stations to protect voters, rather than to intimidate;

Connect with grassroots CSOs, religious leaders, and traditional alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms, to promote mediation and conciliation during the pre-election period to defuse tensions, in particular in the North and other conflict areas; and

Focus on confidence-building and prevention measures, to more effectively counter public fear and intimidation ahead of the polls. Immediately release data on arrests, detentions, criminal prosecutions, and imposed sanctions relating to the December attempted military coup, as well as on campaign-related and polling station activities for the three election cycles.

PARLIAMENT

Initiate a comprehensive post-election review of the election framework based on lessons learned from the 2026 legislative, local and presidential elections, focusing on candidacy eligibility criteria, political party registration, freedom of expression and of the media, political finance, and the election system. The review should not be limited to the Electoral Code, but also cover the Digital Code and the Criminal Code, to refine provisions to avoid abuses and arbitrariness in limitations on free speech and the freedom of assembly;

Guarantee a transparent and inclusive reform process. Adopt a specific policy and action

plan to engage with CSOs and experts to institutionalise the collection of input in draft reform proposals beyond the post-election review event;

Recommit to the voluntary declaration of jurisdiction of the African Court of Human and People's Rights, to allow CSOs and citizens to seek effective remedy for victims in case of abuses of the Charter;¹⁰ and

Engage in peer exchanges in the region to bolster democratic resilience and guarantee the separation of powers and protection of human rights defenders, in line with African Union conventions and declarations.

REGIONAL BODIES AND DONORS

Contribute to clear messaging around the democratic process, media freedoms, and civil liberties, and the prevention of violence, while carefully navigating potential mis/perception of foreign interference;

Continue to support Benin's security forces and the military in countering terrorist attacks and local conflicts in the region, including by sharing tools and innovative practices; and

Bolster diplomatic efforts to call for a commitment to the rule of law and democratic values, and to support comprehensive and inclusive post-election legislative reform efforts.

10 Benin [withdrew](#) from the voluntary declaration of jurisdiction to the African Court of Human and People's Rights in 2020.

Methodology

This assessment focused on evaluating the susceptibility of elections to integrity and election violence risks and utilised the DRI Digital Democracy Risk Assessment tool.¹¹ This methodology helped researchers map vulnerabilities in the Benin elections, with a focus on electoral violence, and formulate recommendations for key actors to prevent, investigate, and sanction threats to electoral integrity and electoral violence. DRI's conceptual framework identifies four dimensions to assess how countries and their elections become vulnerable to election violence: state, politics, institutions, media and society. Each dimension is broken down into attributes, which have been chosen based on their proven relationship to electoral integrity and electoral violence. The original four pillars were revised to include an additional focus on the role of electoral justice in the process and the role of security forces in Benin. The guiding questions for the interviews were also revised to cover a wider range of issues that may arise in the electoral process beyond digital threats. The assessment covered a wide range of actors involved in the electoral process, including electoral and judicial authorities, civil society, security agencies, and social media platforms operating in the country.

After conducting in-depth research and analysis, and formulating preliminary observations, the DRI expert interviewed civil society representatives and the electoral authorities. This dialogue with electoral actors provided DRI with insights into and analysis of the political and electoral context, and complemented the desk research. The conduct of the legislative and local elections in early January also provided an opportunity to draw lessons learned on election operations and the election environment, and to map risks for the presidential election. DRI would like to thank the representatives of a diverse group of partner CSOs, in particular the AHEAD Africa partners, and of CENA for sharing their expertise and helping shape our short- and long-term recommendations for the Benin electoral process.

11 Democracy Reporting International, "Risk Assessment – Digital Democracy Monitor."

The Political and Electoral Context for the 2026 Elections

Benin has been among the more stable and promising democracies in sub-Saharan Africa since 1990, when the country joined the third wave of democracy, following its renowned National Conference. Since then, Benin has experienced a gradual weakening of its democratic safeguards, with shrinking civic and political spaces and a weakening of the institutions providing checks and balances. According to the Afrobarometer polls, 44 per cent of Beninese were satisfied with democracy in 2021/2023, compared to 60 per cent in 2011/2013.¹²

Presidential elections are scheduled to be held in Benin on 12 April 2026, following parliamentary and local elections that were held jointly for the first time on 11 January, in line with the Election Code. The recent failed coup, in December, coupled with tighter conditions to register as candidates, changes in the election systems, and the last-minute constitutional reform increasing presidential terms, have created concerns in a country once regarded as a model of democracy in the region. In the legislative elections, the Democrats party did not reach the 20 percent threshold required to win a seat according to the law. The electoral commission announced that ,of the five parties running in the January 11 vote, only the Progressive Union for Renewal (UPR) and the Republican Bloc (BR), both aligned with President Patrice Talon, won seats in the assembly. The absence of the main opposition in parliament raises concerns over pluralism and the effectiveness of oversight of government activities in the future. Additionally, in October, the Constitutional Court of Benin rejected the nominated candidate of the main opposition party for the presidential elections. With the absence of the opposition in the National Assembly, these elections will reshape the political landscape of Benin.

The electoral context is also characterised by a progressive closing of political and civic space. Reports revealed that CSOs have criticised the lack of transparency and consultation during the reform process,¹³ and media organisations report intimidation and self-

12 See the most recent "African insight 2024: Democracy at risk – The people's perspective" published by Afrobarometer in 2024

13 EUSEE global report on Benin, July. 2025.

ensorship. While traditional and social media are regulated by the digital code, some provisions are restrictive of free speech, providing for broad wording that criminalises the dissemination of false information. The law also provides for severe penalties, which have led to disproportionate sanctions banning newspaper or media online by relevant institutions, or leading to self-censorship. Moreover, CENA (Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome) lacks the capacity and resources to effectively monitor election campaign activities or prevent abuses. The Commission did launch campaign and educational tools, however, to prevent violent discourse and warn about disinformation prior to the elections. The HAAC (Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et Communication), which is responsible for the regulation and oversight of the media sector, including press, radio, television, and audiovisual communication, has developed a specific strategy during the elections. The HAAC conducted an education campaign to prevent violence and disinformation and conduct monitoring during the election. Insufficient resources and tools, however, as well as a lack of cooperation with social media platforms, left posts and videos containing disinformation, online hate speech, and violent content largely unchecked. Moreover, Benin citizens and candidates are not immune to online violence against parties, candidates or voters, in particular against vulnerable groups, which can trigger offline violence. Institutions and CSOs should cooperate to increase the impact of their initiatives to counter disinformation and prevent violence in the upcoming elections.

Benin also witnessed increased protests during the 2019 legislative elections and the 2021 presidential election, which resulted in several casualties. Those arrested during the protests of 2021 have not been released from detention to date. The December coup attempt revived fear of violence in the country, leading to the heavy deployment of security ahead of the January 11 polls. The recent legislative and communal elections, however, were held in a serene and calm environment.

Election violence is not the only concern. More than 50 different ethnic groups live in Benin, with the Fon being the largest (38.4 per cent of the population). Interethnic and communal violence have been a concern, particularly in the North, where there are disputes over land ownership and tensions within local communities.¹⁴ The risks of violence are also exacerbated by the presence of al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin along Benin's northern border.¹⁵ While the legislative and local elections were held peacefully, these risks require monitoring, and local institutions should continue calling for an inclusive and transparent election processes, the prevention of violence, and a commitment to peaceful elections.

14 Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Adapting Benin's Battle with violent militant groups," January 26, 2026.

15 International IDEA, "Democracy Tracker, Benin," June 2025.

Pillar I

State and Politics

Rule of law • Legislative Framework •
Election system • Political Competition •
Trust in government • Regional dynamics and
foreign interference • Recommendations

Rule of Law



Legal and Institutional Framework

Benin's legal and constitutional framework provides a generally solid foundation for the rule of law and elections, with established checks and balances, functioning institutions, and courts responsible for regulating governance and electoral processes. In recent years, reforms such as improvements to tax collection systems and the digitalisation of government services have strengthened public administration, enhanced service delivery, and helped curb tax fraud and corruption. Significant challenges remain, however, in ensuring that these gains benefit the entire population, particularly in rural areas, where access to public services and justice remains limited.

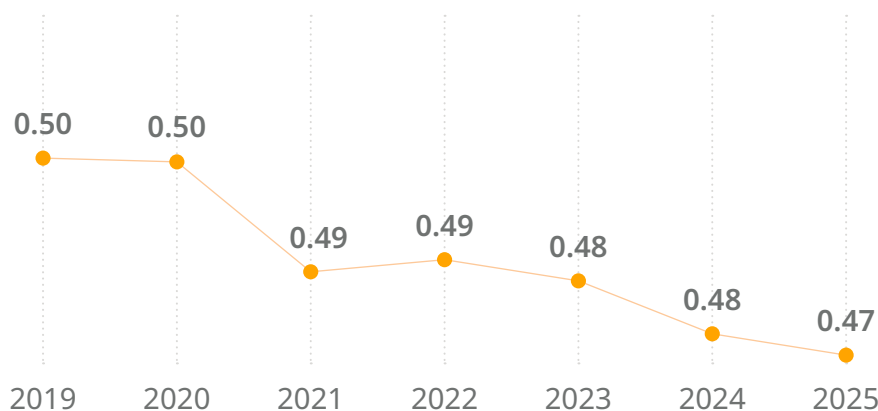
Perceptions of the Rule of Law

In recent years, respect for the rule of law has come under increasing strain. Reports of shrinking civic space, barriers to access to justice, and cases of arbitrary detention – including arrests of political opposition figures, media actors, and protesters – have raised concerns about the uneven application of legal protections. The 2025 Rule of Law Index¹⁶ from the World Justice Project indicates a continued decline in the rule of law in Benin since 2019. This index was published prior to the recent controversial constitutional changes, which extended the term of the presidency and introduced a new bicameral legislative structure, with the creation of a Senate, composed of appointed members. Combined with controversial restrictions on candidacy and party registration and higher electoral thresholds, these reforms raise concerns about the future effectiveness of checks and balances in the country.

16 World Justice Project, "Rule of Law Index Report, Benin," 2025.

Benin overall Rule of law score over time | 2019-2025

Scores are graphed to their unrounded values to demonstrate change over time.



The Judiciary

In the past few years, the judiciary has improved its infrastructure and digitalised its service, and has also strengthened its legal aid mechanisms since the 2024 Decree n°2024-1275. In line with people-centred justice standards, the judiciary has also increased its communication with citizens, notably through the creation of a local hub, the Bureaux d'orientation des Usagers (BOU), in some rural areas to guide citizens on how to access justice, and the launch of a web-based application. Interviewees noted progress towards access to justice and did not raise an issue of specific barriers to electoral justice, except for in remote areas, and mentioned a good level of trust in the courts. But the recent rulings of the courts on the restrictive reforms on political participation have raised some concerns among the opposition and civil society.

Civic Space

Since the attempted coup in December, security forces have increased their presence, curbed peaceful protests, and carried out arbitrary arrests, demonstrating a worrying trend towards shrinking civic space. There are ongoing calls from human rights groups for investigations into the alleged excessive use of force, arbitrary detentions of and sanctions against political opponents, human rights defenders, and the press. Restrictions on media and civic actors are highlighted as part of a broader context, in which dissenting voices face pressure and could impact the electoral process, as described in subsequent sections of this report.

Legislative Framework



Constitutional and Legislative Cadre for Elections

The constitutional and legal framework governing elections in Benin is primarily established by the Constitution of Benin and the Electoral Code of Benin, most recently amended by Law No. 2024-13, of 15 March 2024. Additional legislation, such as the law on communication, the digital communications framework, and provisions of the penal code, also plays an important role in regulating the broader electoral environment, particularly with regard to media conduct, online expression, and electoral offences.

Overall, the Electoral Code provides a structured framework for the administration of elections, including voter registration procedures. Constitutional amendments adopted in 2024 and 2025, however, introduced provisions that may restrict political participation. In particular, the requirements governing the creation and continued operation of political parties, as well as the criteria for contesting and obtaining parliamentary representation, have become more stringent. These changes include strengthened requirements for regional representation and an increased number of endorsement signatures for candidates and political parties.

These reforms have had a tangible impact on the political landscape. In particular, the application of the revised requirements contributed to the exclusion of the main opposition party, Les Démocrates, from competing in the presidential election. The candidacy of its proposed presidential candidate was rejected by the electoral authorities, and the decision was subsequently upheld by the Constitutional Court of Benin in October. These developments raise concerns among some stakeholders regarding the inclusiveness of the electoral framework and its impact on political pluralism.

At the international level, Benin has ratified the main regional and international conventions relating to democratic governance and fundamental rights, including the rights to vote and to stand for election, as well as freedoms of movement, association, and assembly. These commitments include instruments adopted within the African Union and other international frameworks. In 2021, however, Benin withdrew from the declaration under Article 34(6) of the protocol establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which had previously allowed individuals and non-governmental organisations to directly file cases before the Court. The government justified this decision by citing

concerns over potential interference in domestic affairs and the need to preserve the stability of the national legal framework.

Constitutional Reform

On 14 and 15 November 2025, significant amendments were adopted to the Constitution of Benin, only a few weeks before the start of a major electoral cycle. The legislature extended the presidential term from five to seven years, while maintaining the existing two-term limit. The mandates of local and national deputies were also extended to seven years, also renewable once.¹⁷

The timing of these amendments, adopted shortly before the upcoming elections, has raised concerns among several stakeholders regarding the stability and predictability of the legal framework governing elections. International good practice generally discourages modifications to key elements of the electoral framework in the period immediately preceding an election. In particular, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters recommends that fundamental aspects of electoral law should not be amended less than one year before an election, in order to ensure legal certainty and maintain public confidence in the electoral process. Given the proximity of these constitutional changes to the electoral cycle, some interlocutors expressed concern that further amendments could emerge in response to the current political context, and further undermine checks and balances and the rule of law.

The amended Constitution also created a bicameral system, with appointed members in the newly created Senate.¹⁸ The amendments also contained broad provisions on the regulation and sanction of political life, including sanctions for the intentional spread of disinformation or breach of the six-year political silence period "political truce." The Senate is empowered to sanction politicians for statements that might "undermine national unity, the development of the nation, [...] democracy, human rights, peace[...] the political stability of the country." The law also provides sanctions for intentionally spreading false information with the intent to tarnish the country's reputation. This sanction should be imposed by a judicial body, to ensure right to a defence and due process, and not by the Senate, as this could lead to arbitrariness or political sanction, and deprive elected

17 Benin has also ratified international treaties and conventions, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance; Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance supplementing the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

18 International IDEA, [Democracy Tracker: Benin](#), 2025–2026.

officials of their political rights. These last-minute reforms have a major impact on electoral integrity, curb the opposition, and raise concerns of systemic manipulation of the legal framework for political gains. These changes call for a comprehensive post-election reform to remedy these shortcomings, in line with the democratic tradition of Benin and international standards.

Regulation of Political Parties and Pluralism

Since 2019, amendments to the electoral code have led to stricter requirements for the establishment of political parties, while a new charter for political parties made it more costly to establish a political party.¹⁹ Once established, parties are required to open offices in all the regions of the country in order to compete in parliamentary elections, or face deregistration. Parties must also have a minimum of 1,555 members, increased from 120 previously, to attend the founding general assembly of the party. These reforms severely constrain political competition, and the new 2024 reforms significantly raised barriers to running for office. Political parties have thus been substantially reduced in number over the years.

Political parties are regulated under the Law n°2018-23 of 17 September 2018, stipulating obligations regarding their organisation and transparency of their activities. But interviews indicated that parties still lack capacity to conduct effective outreach to voters across the country, to manage and report financing, and to promote women's participation. Moreover, their decision-making procedures or those for the nomination of candidates remain opaque. CENA is responsible for regulating parties' activities outside of the election period, and conducts visits on a yearly basis to inquire about certain aspects of the party's functions, to ensure compliance with the law.

Consultation with CSOs

Interviews with CSOs also revealed a lack of consultation with civil society organisations in the development of election reform proposals. CENA was asked by parliament to provide its opinion on the electoral code bill prior to its adoption in 2024; while some of its proposals were taken into consideration, other concerns were not addressed. Though CSOs and parties submitted analysis and recommendations, and continue ad hoc meetings with

19 Democratic Paradox, "Democratic Deficiencies Come to Define Benin," 2023.

CENA and other actors, the absence of institutionalised dialogue with parliament could exacerbate a lack of trust in the electoral process and institutions. These engagements are positive, but should be institutionalised after the presidential election, for instance through the establishment of a parliamentary committee on election reform, where the CENA and electoral stakeholders could provide expertise and feedback on proposals.

Election system



The Election System for the Presidential Election

The presidential election will take place under universal direct suffrage, in a two-round format should no candidate attain an absolute majority in the first round. Early 2024, the National Assembly of Benin passed an amendment to the electoral law to require a candidate for the presidency to be sponsored by at least 15 percent (up from 10) of the representatives and mayors across the country. Additionally, the conditions for candidature have been toughened (such as a substantial increase in the required financial deposits and number of sponsors required), and some of these (e.g., fiscal clearance) could open the door for instrumentalisation by the government. The November constitutional reform also extended the term for presidential office. In line with the law, the Constitutional Court announced the list of presidential candidates in November, confirming the exclusion of the main opposition party candidate from the race.

The Election System for the National Assembly

In the legislative elections held in January, 109 members of the National Assembly were elected by proportional representation in 24 multi-member constituencies. In 2024, the electoral law amendments raised the threshold that parties must surpass in order to gain representation in the parliament from 10 to 20 percent of the votes in an electoral district (unless the parties form a coalition). The introduction of the threshold made it more difficult for competing parties to win seats in the parliament. Civil society, opposition parties, and international organisations criticised the change, stating that it would

give an advantage to the ruling party.²⁰ The January legislative elections were the first elections held under this new framework, and resulted in dominance by the majority parties, leaving no seat for the opposition. Such results will continue to fuel debate over the inclusiveness of Benin's political system.

Women's Representation

In line with the article 26 of the Constitution and 144 of the Electoral Code, 24 seats are reserved for women in Benin's National Assembly. Interviews noted progress, with several women holding ministerial positions, and 28 of the 109 seats in the parliament held by women. It is worth noting that the ruling party included a woman as vice president for the presidential elections. But parties made little effort to nominate women beyond the provisions for seats reserved for women. Research revealed insufficient efforts by CENA and political parties to promote women's participation as candidates. The period after the election would offer an opportunity to carefully review the legal and regulatory framework and promote support for women to enhance their participation in political life and enhance training of newly elected women.

Political Competition



Pluralism

The changes to the electoral system and candidacy requirements have led to increasing constraints on the opposition's political activity. The main opposition party, the Democrats, was barred from running in the local elections. In the legislative elections held in January, five political parties participated in the elections, and the main opposition parties did not meet the new threshold to win any seats.²¹ A total of 1,090 candidates ran in the elections. But, as noted in the NDI preliminary statement, in the January 2026 parliamentary and

20 African Court of Human and People Rights', [Letter of withdrawal from the Government of Benin Republic \(2020\)](#)

21 Le Bloc Républicain (BR), l'Union Progressiste le Renouveau (UPR), Les Démocrates (LD), les Forces Cauris pour un Bénin Emergent (FCBE), and le Mouvement des Elites Engagées pour l'Emancipation du Bénin (MOELE-Bénin).

local elections, “the ruling coalition now occupies all 109 seats in the National Assembly, all 77 town halls and all 1,815 local council seats throughout the country.”²²

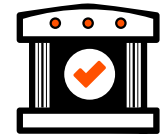
For the April presidential election, potential opposition candidate Renaud Agbodjo’s participation was rejected by the electoral commission on the grounds of an insufficient number of sponsors. His disqualification was confirmed by the Constitutional Court in a ruling in October 2025. This disqualification limits the competition against the candidate endorsed by the ruling party. In the context of increased concentration of political power, the National Assembly will have to demonstrate that it can remain a space for debate, oversight, and accountability of executive actions, beyond partisan affiliations.

Restrictions on Political Parties

The attempted coup led to the arrests of opposition figures, restrictions on demonstrations, and the limitation of media access for opposition voices. The arrests of opposition figures created a climate where opposition candidates curtailed their political activities, out of fear for their safety or freedom. The elections led to the victory of two parties out of five, with no opposition seating in the Assembly, which marks the opening of a delicate phase for Benin’s democracy and concerns for pluralism. Moreover, as denounced by the opposition and CSOs, the constitutional change adopted in November also introduces a new chamber, the Senate, composed solely of nominated, unelected members, and a six-year “political truce”, which some consider an attempt to silence opposition or civil society criticism of the government’s actions outside of the election period. Such provisions would provide more opportunities for the ruling party to control political space and lawmaking, and thus curtail criticism in the future. The legal restrictions and intimidation against political opponents could limit voters’ abilities to hear diverse political perspectives and make informed choices in the elections.

22 National Democratic Institute (NDI), [NDI deploys pre-election assessment mission to Benin, 2026](#).

Trust in government



Trust in Elections and Government

Survey data indicates a gradual decline in public confidence in democratic institutions and electoral processes in Benin. According to the [Afrobarometer](#) survey, the share of Beninese citizens satisfied with the functioning of democracy decreased from 60 per cent in 2011/2013 to 44 per cent in 2021/2023.²³ Perceptions of electoral integrity have also worsened. In 2013, 52 per cent of respondents considered elections in Benin to be completely free; ten years later, this figure had fallen to 35.8 per cent.

International indices similarly reveal a deterioration in democratic governance indicators. Freedom House classified Benin as “free” in 2016, with a score of 82, but currently categorises the country as “partly free”, with a score of 61. In addition, Benin fell from 78th place in 2016 to 89th place in 2024 in the press freedom ranking published by Reporters Without Borders. The low turnout in the local and legislative elections of January also raises concerns related to trust in government and electoral process. This data shows a worrisome trend in elections in Benin. In 2019, where only two parties competed in the legislative elections, turnout was 23 per cent, and in the 2021 presidential election, the Commission reported a turnout of 50.17 per cent, as noted by the African Union observation mission.²⁴

Interviews with electoral stakeholders confirmed this decline, but highlighted continued dialogue and collaboration of civil society with institutions. Despite progress in the fight against corruption in the last few years, the newly released 2025 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index confirms that progress has stalled. Transparency International's key findings also note that, in the context of shrinking civic space, “it is harder for independent journalists, civil society organisations and whistleblowers to speak out against corruption and more likely that corrupt officials can continue misusing their power.”²⁵

The International Francophonie Organization, after election day in 2021, was already calling for exploring ways and means of renewing dialogue in order to create and

23 Afrobarometer, [African Insights 2024: Democracy at Risk – The People's Perspective](#), 2024.

24 Jeune Afrique, “[Faible mobilisation dans les urnes](#)”, 2021; Democracy in Africa, « [Democracy on the line in Benin](#),” 2025. African Union, “[Preliminary Statement 2021 Benin elections](#)”, 2021.

25 Transparency International, “[2025 Anti-Corruption Perception Index](#)”, 10 February 2026.

strengthen a climate of trust and to ensure the understanding and acceptance of the electoral rules by all political forces.²⁶ While stakeholders confirmed regular engagements among parties, CSOs, media, and institutions ahead of the polls, greater efforts should be made to revitalise this trust in government and include stakeholders in decision-making and reform process, rather than merely convening for the sharing of information.

Regional Dynamics and Foreign Interference



Regional Instability

Regional geopolitical considerations must be considered when analysing the political context in Benin ahead of the presidential election. These risks are compounded by Benin's existing democratic vulnerabilities and the broader regional context of military takeovers across West Africa. The coup attempt by military officers was reportedly inspired by Sahel juntas, with coup leader Tigri using rhetoric echoing Burkina Faso's military government. Benin now sits between Russian-aligned Sahel Alliance states and the remaining democratic West African nations, creating potential external pressures on governance and in the upcoming electoral process.²⁷ Reports warned of regional terrorist-related activities, which could destabilise the region.²⁸ Following the U.S. and French militaries' departure from the Sahel, Benin is one of the main options for relocation of their military bases. This may explain the limited public statements of diplomatic representations against decline in democracy and human rights in Benin. The terrorist threat continues to exist ahead of the presidential polls.²⁹ CENA is facing an important security situation in localised areas, due to terrorist attacks or local tensions in parts of the country, but expressed satisfaction with productive cooperation with the police in these areas. No major incident was reported related to the electoral process during the January elections.

26 OIF (Francophonie), "Declaration préliminaire scrutin", 2021.

27 Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Spotlight Benin 2026", 13 January 2026.

28 Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Spotlight Benin 2026", 13 January 2026; WANEP, 2021 election security report.

29 BBC, "Benin admits that 54 soldiers killed in attack by al-Qaeda group," 24 April 2025.

Foreign Interference

Benin does not have a history of significant foreign interference in its elections, as can sometimes be seen in other countries in the region. But suspicions of external influence surround the 2025 coup attempt, which preceded the legislative and local elections in January. Media reported support for the December coup attempt from pro-Russian bloggers.³⁰ The prominent role Nigerian military forces played in crushing the coup, while internationally praised, creates a precedent for regional intervention that could extend to the electoral period, potentially compromising Benin's sovereignty and impacting its democratic processes. Furthermore, analysts also mentioned bilateral tensions in the region, notably with Togo, Niger, and Mali, and warned of an increasing risk of foreign influence³¹ in further undermining the region's democratic governments to enhance influence on the continent.

"Its 2026 presidential election will be a bellwether for the region – shaping not only Benin's democratic trajectory but also the reach of politicised militaries in coastal West Africa, the momentum of the militant Islamist threat, and the influence of Russia in further undermining the region's democratic governments to enhance its influence on the continent."

Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Spotlight Benin 2026

Enhanced cooperation and monitoring of law enforcement, military forces, and CENA is crucial, in addition to monitoring of online content to counter potential hybrid threats in elections, widespread disinformation, or illicit foreign financing of elections.

30 IRIS, "[What does the 7 December coup attempt reveal?](#)," 17 December 2025.

31 BBC, "[Neither Russia nor France: One West African country walks a diplomatic tightrope](#)," 21 December 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parliament should initiate a comprehensive review of the election framework, based on lessons learned from the past three elections, focusing on candidacy rights, political party registration, freedom of the media, and the election system. The review should not be limited to the electoral code, but should also cover the digital and criminal codes to refine provisions to prevent abuses and arbitrary limitations on the rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

Parliament, along with government and political party representatives, should guarantee a transparent and inclusive reform process, adopting a specific policy and action plan to engage with CSOs and experts to institutionalise the collection of input in draft reform proposals beyond the conduct of a post-election review event.

Parliament should design programmes to support elected women in the National

MAIN INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN BENIN

- National Autonomous Electoral Commission (CENA)
- High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC)
- The Agency for National Identification of People
- The Constitutional Court
- The Supreme Court and lower courts
- The Court of Account
- Police and prosecution office

Assembly with capacity-building, for instance, on leadership and communication, advocacy and legislative drafting, electoral processes, and political finance.

Political parties, CSOs and the media should continue demanding transparency in government and law enforcement actions, calling for the right to peacefully protest and restraint in the use of force by law enforcement, and for election reforms following the presidential election.

Political parties, presidential candidates and campaign teams should continue efforts to encourage voter participation, prevent violence, and call for calm during campaign activities.

Political parties should establish internal mechanisms to promote the participation of youth and women in the party beyond the quota, for instance, by setting up gender units or specific funds for youth or women civic and political engagement projects.

Regional bodies and diplomatic missions should engage in clear messaging around the democratic process, media freedoms, civic liberties, and the prevention of violence, and carefully navigate fear of foreign interference. They should continue to call for Benin to rejoin the African Court of Human and People's Right's declaration, so as to allow NGOs and citizens to seek effective remedy.

Pillar II

Electoral Administration and Justice

Administration of Elections in Benin • Voters
and Candidacy Rights • Campaign and
Campaign Finance • Election Disputes and
Litigation • Trust in Electoral Institutions •
Recommendations

Administration of Elections in Benin



The Role and Performance of the Electoral Authority

According to the Constitution of Benin and the Electoral Code of Benin, CENA is constitutionally mandated to conduct elections, and serves as an independent oversight body. For the recently held legislative and local elections, CENA demonstrated professionalism in electoral operations, with timely preparation and deployment of electoral materials, training of polling agents, and proactive outreach to stakeholders during the pre-election period. Polling was conducted across 17,350 stations nationwide. Out of more than 7.8 million registered voters, only 2.8 million cast their ballots, resulting in a historically low voter turnout of 36.73 per cent. Observers from CAPE and COSCEP noted the smooth conduct of the elections and the maintenance of an orderly voting environment, but also recommended the tightening of some of its election operations and training of election officials. In their pre-election statement for the legislative and local elections, observers noted that sensitive election materials had not been delivered on time in Apahoué (Couffo), Cotonou (Littoral) et Adja-Ouéré (Plateau). Following the elections, CENA organised a lessons-learned event with its staff, during which operational and logistical challenges, particularly those arising from holding legislative and local elections simultaneously, were acknowledged. Staff also identified areas for strengthening the credibility and integrity of the upcoming presidential election.

N°	ACTIVITÉS / TÂCHES	DATES		RÉFÉRENCES LÉGALES
		DÉBUT	FIN	
1	Élaboration, arbitrage et validation du budget des élections générales de 2026	10/12/2024	14/03/2025	Art. 13 et 19 du Code électoral
2	Élaboration, validation et adoption du chronogramme des activités	06/01/2025	06/04/2025	Art. 8, 15 et 19 du Code électoral et Art. 133-3 de la Constitution
3	Publication du chronogramme des activités	06/04/2025	06/04/2025	Art. 19 du Code électoral
4	Publication de la décision portant modalités d'application du parrainage	02/07/2025	02/07/2025	Art. 16, 19, 41 et 132 du Code électoral
5	Mise à la disposition des députés et des maires des formulaires nominatifs de parrainage de candidature	25/07/2025	25/08/2025	Art. 41 et 132 du Code électoral
6	Publication de la décision portant liste des pièces à fournir et modalités de dépôt des déclarations par les candidats à l'élection	27/07/2025	27/07/2025	Art. 38, 41, 132 et 136 du Code électoral
7	Rencontre avec les partis politiques (présentation du calendrier électoral)	04/08/2025	04/08/2025	Art. 19 du Code électoral
8	Rencontre avec les Ministères et Institutions impliqués dans l'organisation du scrutin	03/08/2025	03/08/2025	Art. 19 du Code électoral

DATE DU SCRUTIN : DIMANCHE 12 AVRIL 2026

Chronogramme des activités de l'élection du duo président et vice-président de la République

Figure 1. CENA Electoral Calendar Timeline

Election Operations

CENA immediately launched its preparations for the presidential elections, right after it held simultaneous local and legislative elections. CENA confirmed that the government has disbursed funds for the elections to CENA and relevant government bodies on time. CENA acknowledged that there was room to improve the recruitment and training of polling staff in some polling locations, to deploy materials on time to all locations, and to adopt stronger strategic communications to respond to disinformation attacks.³² Interviews with CENA representatives reported issues of late opening of polling stations, and noted that polling centres are to be moved due to security concerns in only one locality, in the North. Research also showed that CENA could bolster effective cooperation with other institutions, including with the HAAC, the digital communication regulatory agencies, the police, and the courts.

Training and Voter Education

CENA has developed positive resources over the years, including a series of e-learning platforms, including modules on the role of institutions and actors (CENA, parties, social media, and voters), on the voter list, and on candidacy, as well as a specific module on prevention of electoral violence. To strengthen the impact of these resources, CENA should widely disseminate these products with the support of radio/television networks and CSOs to sensitise voters to and identify and prevent electoral violence, promoting a serene electoral environment. CENA has also designed and conducted a series of voter education campaigns on the prevention of violence, involving schools and religious leaders, and including mediation initiatives. Voter education activities have also targeted youth, women and persons with disabilities.³³ But the low participation in the recent elections shows the need for additional efforts from CENA to bolster voter participation; such efforts could be made in coordination with parties and CSOs.

³² National Democratic Institute (NDI), Pre-Election Assessment Mission to Benin, Preliminary Statement, February 2026.

³³ Cadre d'Appui aux Processus Electoraux (CAPE) et de la Coalition des Organisations de la Société civile pour les Élections et la Paix (COSCEP), "Déclaration préélectorale du sur les élections législatives et communales du Bénin de 2026," 10 Janvier 2026.

Voters and Candidacy Rights



In Benin, the voter list is extracted from the population/civil registry.³⁴ The permanent Computerised Electoral List (LEPI) is the result of in-depth national electoral registration operations and automated processing of personal and biometric information obtained from citizens. In September, the Agency for National Identification of People (ANIP - Nationale d'Identification des Personnes) officially handed over the preliminary voter list to local elected officials. Voters could consult their registration status in all the polling centres across the country. Claims, errors, or additions/deletions could be filed online, through an app or a hotline. ANIP agents were also deployed to support engagement with the public or incorporate changes at the local level. More than 7.8 million voters were registered on the voter lists for the elections.

As mentioned in the first part of the report, the law was amended to change the rules around candidacy, affecting their eligibility. Per Article 41 of Electoral Code, presidential candidates must submit their candidacy application 180 days prior to the elections. In October, the Constitutional Court confirmed the ineligibility of the opposition leader Renaud Agbodjo, the leader of Benin's largest opposition party, Les Démocrates. Les Démocrates are, therefore, excluded from participating in the 2026 presidential election.³⁵ The Court found that the party failed meet requirements for sufficient sponsorship and payment of the registration fee. This exclusion deepens concerns about fairness and political openness of the electoral process. The Court confirmed the eligibility of Mr. Wadagni and Mariam Chabi Talata Zimé Yérima from the Presidential Bloc and Paul Hounkpè and

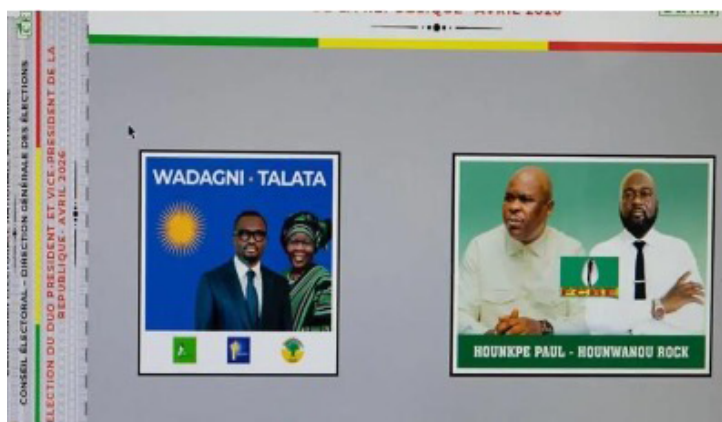


Figure 2. Presidential Ballot Design for 2026

Judicaël Hounwanou, from the Cowrie Force for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) party will be the candidates running in the election. On 9 February 2026, CENA presented the ballot design to the presidential and vice president candidates to comment on and approve the ballot design, ahead of the 12 April election.

³⁴ Benin, [Electoral Code](#), as revised 2024.

³⁵ Benin, Constitutional Court, Decision, 27 October 2025.

Campaign and Campaign Finance



The campaign for the first round will officially start on 27 March, per Articles 44-46 and a [CENA organogram](#) published on its website. The campaign is regulated by the Electoral Code, as well as by the rules regarding peaceful assembly, the Code of Information and Communication,³⁶ the Digital Code, and data protection laws in Benin. The following section on Media will cover media regulation and the mandate and role of the HAAC in more depth.

CENA has a mandate to hear claims and correct irregularities relating to the pre-election period, but any illegal acts must be reported to the courts; CENA does not have an adjudicatory function to hear complaints during the elections. The penal code also regulates and provides sanctions for illegal campaign related activities and demonstrations (Articles 255-256).³⁷ The wording refers to “threatening crowd, clamour or protest.” Ahead of the legislative elections, CSOs claimed that the government continue to disproportionately restrict the right to protest. Amnesty International noted in an article that (the legislature) “must guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by revising the Penal Code, which prohibits ‘any unarmed gathering that could disturb public peace, allowing for the prohibition of peaceful assemblies on vague grounds.’”³⁸ In the past few months, several international CSO reports criticised the government for unreasonable restrictions of peaceful assemblies in Benin.

In their preliminary statement before election day, observers from CAPE/COSCEP noted intensive education efforts by CENA and “an increase in field campaigns by political parties and candidates, mainly through public meetings, meetings, door-to-door canvassing, caravans, radio, television and WhatsApp”. No widespread or severe violations in campaigning were reported in observer reports. CENA noted no incidents with political parties or candidates or election violence during the legislative election, and raised few concerns about possible election violence in the presidential round. CENA noted that no additional resources were allocated to bolster education or prevention of violence after the coup attempt in December.

³⁶ [Loi n° 2015-07 portant code de l'information et de la communication en République du Bénin](#), 2015.

³⁷ Penal Code, Article 255 : Ceux qui, par attroupement, clameur ou démonstrations menaçantes, ont troublé les opérations de vote, porté atteinte à l'exercice du droit électoral ou à la liberté du vote, seront punis d'un emprisonnement de un (01) an à deux (02) ans et d'une amende de cinq cent mille (500.000) à un million (1.000.000) de francs CFA et /ou d'une peine d'inéligibilité de trois (03) ans à cinq (05) ans.

³⁸ Amnesty International, “[Benin elections](#)”, 8 January 2026.

Regarding disinformation, cyber security measures, and campaign finance, CENA does not have a robust action plan to monitor or address these threats to electoral integrity. CENA has organised training for its personnel on disinformation, but these measures remain insufficient. CENA did not mention any specific tools to collect evidence or to quickly refer potential violations during the campaign to relevant bodies. Interviews revealed that a disinformation campaign targeted the election process this past year, with fake dates of polling days or false notifications of early closure of the candidate nomination period. CENA noted its lack of resources and time to tackle these sources of disinformation. CENA needs to bolster its ability to communicate more strategically with electoral stakeholders, to encourage youth voters, and to increase education to curb the number of invalid ballots, and how to include persons living with disabilities and prison inmates.

While party financing for elections is under the mandate of the Court of Account, CENA has a role in monitoring party activities, the internal functioning of parties, and financing. CENA's annual visit to political parties and collection of information before sharing with the Court of Account shows a weak monitoring and enforcement mechanism.

Election Disputes and Litigation



Election Disputes

For presidential elections, the Constitutional Court is the primary arbiter of electoral disputes. The Court is responsible for registering candidacies and certifying the final results after provisional results are announced by CENA. The Court also adjudicates challenges to candidacy, acts of the election administration during the campaign or election operations, and election outcomes within specific deadlines according to its rules of procedures. In previous elections, the Court has adjudicated cases within the legal deadlines, and interviews revealed a good level of trust in the Court's ability to adjudicate election cases fairly and efficiently. Interviewees did not mention specific barriers to electoral justice, except for in rural areas. Research revealed that a comprehensive

training seminar for judges was held on electoral dispute resolution in October 2025. An expert and former general secretary of the Court³⁹ published a comprehensive report from the training seminar, which provides in-depth information and jurisprudence on the adjudication of elections cases in the pre-election period, along with the jurisprudence of the court.

Election Offences and Crimes

The Supreme Court of Benin has jurisdiction over criminal electoral offenses (e.g., fraud, vote buying, violence, campaign violations), which proceed through ordinary judicial channels. Recent rulings by the courts on constitutional reforms and candidacies have raised questions about the politicisation of the judiciary, undermining confidence in legal remedies for electoral disputes. Worth noting is that the Supreme Court is also competent to hear local election disputes, and has received around 30 such challenges. CENA is currently preparing the required evidence and documentation to respond to the legal challenges in courts.

While the websites of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts provide for a compilation of jurisprudence (which includes some election cases), it is not user friendly or easily accessible. Moreover, our research reveals that the judiciary has had limited engagement with election stakeholders during the preparation period for the election. Limited cooperation mechanisms exist within CENA in terms of access to evidence, or for journalists to access the court hearings, or for voters to understand the court's procedure for litigation around elections. Crucial information from the seminar report mentioned above could be turned into user-friendly materials to better explain the role of the Court in the election adjudication process to increase accessibility for voters, candidates, and parties. Increasing transparency measures of the Court, as the last arbiter of election disputes, appear to be crucial at a time of shrinking civic space, political tensions, and low confidence in institutions in Benin. On 5 February 2026, the Constitutional Court started its hearing of four election cases filed relating to the 11 January legislative elections. The challenges allege irregularities in the conduct of the elections and an incorrect formula for seat attribution to political parties.⁴⁰ The transparency and fairness of these court hearings should be scrutinised to ensure the protection of electoral integrity by the court in the upcoming election.

39 Gilles BADET, Droit et Politique en Afrique, « [Contentieux pre-electoraux, Le régime juridique des contentieux préélectoraux de 2025 et 2026 devant la Cour constitutionnelle du Bénin](#) », Octobre 2025.

40 While two petitioners seek the invalidation of the elections in the constituency, the other two seek a correction in the seat allocation.

Inter-Institutional Cooperation

In interviews, inter-institution cooperation seems to be weak among CENA and the relevant courts, the court of account, or other institutions, such as the HAAC. Cooperation appears to be limited to formal engagement during legislative processes or seminars on interpretation of the law following the electoral reform. A more robust cooperation mechanism could benefit the institutions in preparation for elections to strengthen their expertise in relevant areas of the election process through training, clearly delineating respective mandate through the consulting of regulations, or sharing evidence and decisions imposed during the election process.

Trust in Electoral Institutions



Interviews reveal that the Electoral Commission, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and the Media Regulatory Body still enjoy good levels of trust from civil society actors and parties. Due to the recent controversial reforms adopted and actions by the government, however, political competition has been undermined. While in accordance with the new legal provisions, CENA decisions have led to the exclusion of the opposition party, perceived by many as decisions made in favour of the ruling party. The historic low turn-out in the legislative and local elections also raise concerns for trust in the electoral process and the institutions ahead of the presidential poll. All stakeholders interviewed, however, noted continuous dialogue and communication with these institutions. The CENA organogram from both elections shows a series of consultations and regular meetings with parties and candidates held since the start of the electoral process for all three elections. During the electoral period, CENA mentioned that they hold monthly meetings to explain progress made and the preparation for the elections, which is a positive initiative. Consultation with civil society actors, however, should be further institutionalised, in particular post-election, to prepare for reforms.

Post-Election Review and Reforms

Per Article 19 of the electoral code and in line with its practice, CENA will convene all stakeholders for a post-election workshop to identify lessons learned and prepare its report on the presidential elections. This workshop will be an opportunity to collect proposals from stakeholders and make joint proposals for reforms for parliamentary consideration. CENA must continue to strengthen engagement with all electoral stakeholders – particularly political parties and CSOs – to regain trust. In the previous reform of 2024, the parliament consulted CENA for its opinion of the draft bill, which is positive, even though some elements of CENA's feedback were rejected. As a technical administrator of elections in Benin, CENA could be more proactive in submitting legislative reform proposals to the government or parliament after the election, to further protect electoral integrity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PRE-ELECTION

CENA should strengthen its outreach to voters, in particular young voters, to increase participation in presidential elections, in cooperation with CSOs;

CENA and HAAC should enhance cooperation protocols with security agencies, to ensure peaceful campaigning and polls, and timely deployment of sensitive materials in elections;

CENA should strengthen cooperation mechanisms with prosecutor's offices and criminal courts, to collect and share accessible evidence and sanctions on election-related crimes, including electoral corruption, intimidation, and violence;

CENA should develop a communication strategy and action plan to rebuke disinformation attacks on social media and in the media, and provide credible information to the public;

CENA should map threats, adopt tools and cooperation protocols with relevant media, cyberspace regulators, and security agencies, to detect and counter potential hybrid threats in the elections, particularly disinformation or illicit finance;

CSOs should continue efforts to encourage participation of voters and to engage with CENA, continue efforts to inform citizens of the election process and where to find relevant information, and to prevent violence and call for calm during voting;

The courts must coordinate access to evidence with the police and relevant institutions. Judicial authorities must establish clear cooperation mechanisms with the police, security agencies, CENA, and the HAAC to quickly share evidence and information on alleged violence, offline or online. Judicial authorities should investigate in a timely manner, to prevent further violence and counter impunity;

The courts and prosecutors must collect and publish data on police cases and prosecutions of election crimes, including vote-buying, intimidation, threats, and violence post-election, to draw lessons and formulate recommendations for future reforms and to enhance transparency; and

The courts should provide support and access to CSOs to monitor the adjudication of election cases, including election crimes and prosecutions post-election.

POST-ELECTION

CENA should convene a post-election review with all relevant institutions and actors, with emphasis on election systems, political parties and candidates' eligibility, digital space regulations, disinformation, and illicit financing in elections. It should develop draft amendments to pieces of legislation and regulations to electoral laws and related digital laws and regulations;

CENA should institutionalise cooperation with CSOs by adopting a CSO strategy and regularly collecting input from CSOs on draft bills or draft regulations, and bolster coordination on voter education outreach efforts;

In cooperation with relevant institutions, **CENA** should bolster the capacity of its officers to tackle hybrid threats in elections, including ICT capacity on cybersecurity risks, the monitoring of party and campaign finance, and disinformation. Joint training could be conducted with the Court of Account, the HAAC, cyber security agencies, and the relevant courts;

The Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court should strengthen their capacities and exchanges among judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, prosecutors, and CENA. The Training School for Legal Professions (EFPJ) could institutionalise its preparation for election dispute resolution for courts, magistrates, clerks, and prosecutors for future elections. Existing seminars could be completed with add-on sessions to address access to evidence in elections, new hybrid threats to elections (illicit financial flows, cyberattacks or disinformation), procedural and open justice, and communication in electoral justice, as well as judicial remedies and sanctions, in line with the new Electoral Code;

The Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court should develop a clear strategic communications plan for stakeholders to understand and trust the dispute-resolution process, the role and powers of the courts in elections, and what to expect. They should build on existing transparency and digital measures to promote public hearings and publish election judgements in a timely manner, alongside summary judgements for the media;

CENA and the courts should explore the use of alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms to mediate and defuse tensions during the pre-election period, in coordination with traditional and religious leaders;

Police, prosecutors, and criminal courts should coordinate to compile and share evidence and data to make recommendations post-election; and

Political parties should continue education efforts for inclusive political participation, and collect data on party membership, disaggregated by age, sex, and location.

Pillar III

Media and Civic Space

Media Pluralism, Regulation, and Freedom

- Consumption And Connectivity
- Digital Space
- Civic Space and Civil Liberties
- Trust In Media and Government

Recommendations

Media Pluralism, Regulation, and Freedom



Media Pluralism

The media landscape is diversified in Benin, but is marked by the absence of large, viable news organisations. At least 70 radio stations are operating in the country, where they are the most popular news sources. Some 15 privately owned television channels operate alongside the state-owned broadcasters, grouped within the Radio and Television Office of Benin (ORTB). In the run-up to the presidential election, the digital media landscape is becoming a central battleground for information, public opinion, and regulatory control. Online platforms and social networks like Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp are increasingly used by citizens and political actors to share news and viewpoints. Though they fall under existing electoral and communication laws once content touches on the campaign and public debate, no dialogue has taken place between Benin’s institutions and the big platforms to address vulnerabilities ahead of elections.

Regulation

Articles 23 and 24 of the Constitution of Benin guarantee freedom of expression and of the press, and the parliament has adopted the Information and Communication Code, in 2015, the organic law on the HAAC, and the Digital Code.⁴¹ Analysis of the legal framework relating to freedom of expression and the press notes that, while Benin currently has no specific legislation to counter misinformation, two laws provide for strict restrictions on broadcasting false information – the Digital Code and the Information and Communication Code . The vague provisions of these laws allow for a broad margin of interpretation by the authorities to restrict a wide range of freedom of the press, contrary to the ICCPR Article 19 (2, 3).⁴² Moreover, the laws provide for unreasonable sanctions that could have a chilling effect on press freedom.⁴³ While there is not sufficient time to

41 Law No. 2017-20 of 20 April 2018 on the Digital Code in Republic of Benin and Law No. 2015-07 of 20 March 2015 on the Information Code and Communication in the Republic of Benin.

42 Article 19 (2, 3), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted 16 December 1966, General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), 6 December 1966: “(...) . 3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary: (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.”

43 Lexota database, “Benin”, July 2022.

review laws prior to the presidential election, democratic actors should consider a review of existing laws and regulations, to align this framework with international standards.

In Benin, the HAAC is responsible for regulating media, per its organic law.⁴⁴ The HAAC is a constitutional body, and its nine members are appointed by different state institutions,⁴⁵ which limits control by a single authority. Other agencies also have a role in regulation of digital space and cybersecurity threats, however, such as the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communication and Post office, the National Agency for the Security of Information Systems, and the Central Office for the Suppression of Cybercrime. As part of its regulatory powers, the HAAC recently released its approved list of media who comply with regulations and are therefore allowed to air or print. In preparation for the 2026 elections, the HAAC posted the [electoral calendar](#) and launched a series of activities relating to the elections, which include a seminar on the Electoral Code for journalists, communication plans, training of regional directors of HAAC to provide training for online media, and regulation of campaign posters. The HAAC also adopted a code of ethics for media for the election (“Reporter’s Guide”; “Code or a charter of good conduct”) in October.

In February 2025, the HAAC issued the suspension of a privately owned news site following allegations of providing false information and seriously undermining the institutions’ credibility.⁴⁶ In November, the HAAC also cancelled the accreditation of journalists and banned media who failed to comply with the regulation and requests from the HAAC. While regulatory oversight and the need to maintain high professional standards is important, the scale and timing of these sanctions raises concerns. These restrictions may create a chilling effect in the media space and are considered disproportionate. More gradual sanctions – warnings, suspensions – could be considered, rather than immediate bans. The HAAC should also provide for the opportunity to correct or challenge these decisions for journalists and media outlets. The HAAC has intensified the regulation of digital media, identifying dozens of unlicensed online outlets accused of spreading illicit or manipulative content, reflecting official concerns about misinformation and cohesion during this sensitive period.

The HAAC’s efforts to organise and train accredited media, including both traditional and digital outlets, have drawn the Economic Community of West African States’ (ECOWAS) attention and engagement, highlighting the regional stake in a balanced and peaceful

44 [Organic law on HAAC](#), 21 August 1992.

45 Article 16, [Organic law on HAAC](#), 21 August 1992. See Open Society Foundation, “[Enquete Projet Etude Audiovisual public au Benin](#),” 2023.

46 International IDEA, “[Democracy Tracker Report Benin](#),” March 2025.

information environment. A mission of media regulators from the region observed the regulation of media space during the legislative elections.⁴⁷ Such peer exchanges in the region should be pursued to identify good practices to curb false news and disinformation, while ensuring adequate balance with free speech and free press.

Media Freedoms

In 2025, media and civil society operate under growing pressure, surveillance, and restrictions. Media freedom issues persist, with international observers such as Reporters Without Borders denouncing editorial interference in public broadcasting, illustrating tensions between state power and independent journalism as the election approaches.⁴⁸ The media sector is confronting a multitude of challenges, including restrictive legislation and disproportionate measures by state institutions and government against their rights to broadcast and disseminate information, through a list of banned media or individual sanctions against journalists. The media also need additional training on the content of the Code of Ethics and its role during election time. Media can play a strong role in the fight against disinformation, and should be familiarised with electoral integrity risks, such as online disinformation, the abuse of state resources in elections, and electoral corruption, to provide quality reporting. The restrictive media environment has led many journalists to avoid providing critical coverage, out of fear of arrest or harassment, limiting the information available to voters. Interviews with CSOs reported self-censorship for both media and CSOs themselves, especially after the failed December coup. Such an environment could harm quality reporting on electoral issues or security matters, reducing accountability for bad actors in the electoral process.

47 La Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication, "Élections couplées législatives et communales du 11 janvier 2026 au Bénin", January 11 2026: la délégation du RIARC observe le déroulement du scrutin dans le département de l'Ouémè, (Janvier 2026) : « La délégation des Présidents des instances africaines de régulation des médias, membres du Réseau des Instances Africaines de Régulation de la Communication (RIARC), a effectué, ce dimanche 11 janvier 2026, une mission d'observation dans certains bureaux de vote à Porto-Novo, dans le cadre de la tenue des élections couplées législatives et communales. »

48 Reporters without Borders, "Benin 2025", 2025.

Consumption And Connectivity



Connectivity

Since 2016, Benin has invested in its digital transformation, a commitment that stands out in West Africa for both its speed and its ambition. Benin developed a sophisticated institutional framework to implement its digital transformation agenda and make public services available to citizens and government employees online. While connectivity and access to the internet and digital literacy have improved, however, the digital divide continues to increase inequalities, in particular in rural areas. A 2025 study on social media noted that only 34 per cent of rural areas have optimal connectivity, compared to 82 per cent in urban areas, limiting access to relevant content.⁴⁹ This digital divide can have an important impact during elections, with limited access to voter education materials, political ads, or debates around elections. There is no available data on consumption of news in Benin, but interlocutors noted that citizens mainly rely on radio and television. Print media is not a mainstream source of information.

Use of Social Media or Messaging Apps in Benin

Social media has become one of the main spaces where ideas, dialogue, and debates take place today. While there is no specific data, interlocutors noted that Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp are regularly used by the public for political debate or campaigning, especially to reach the urban population. Interlocutors noted that, in a country where media used to be owned and controlled entirely by the state, social media provides an opportunity to connect and freely share news. But it is also on social media that disinformation, misleading speech, and rights abuses spread quickly, including among youth. Finally, the restrictive regulation of digital space also applies to social media, and thus may create fear of surveillance or sanction by the authorities. Such an environment may curb free speech and create self-censorship by citizens, similarly to what was observed for the media.

49 Revue Mu Kara Sani, "Algorithmes de TikTok au Benin : disparités éducatives, enjeux d'équité et pistes d'action pour une éducation sociale adaptée", Juin 2025.

The transition of some services to being available online only creates new challenges for citizens, who find themselves digitally excluded to access public services and exercise their civil rights, an issue raised by the country's Ombudsman.

“Transformation numérique et accès aux droits...”, 2021

In 2019, Benin shut down access to social media and internet access on election day during the country's parliamentary elections. The elections were taking place in a highly tense environment, with no opposition running, wide protests and arbitrary arrests. At the start of the election day, access to social media was blocked in the country and, a few hours later, the government imposed a complete internet blackout. While no justification for the decision was provided at the time, the government likely took this measure to control access to information and prevent the coordination of protests on and after election day.⁵⁰ Social media were, indeed, already largely used by journalists and CSOs to report on the polls and the protests. Many international and domestic CSOs called for the immediate lifting of restrictions and also denounced the arbitrary arrests of political activists and journalists, and the crackdown on peaceful protests. Risks persist of a repeat of such arbitrary measures by the government and of continued erosion of fundamental rights to freedom of expression in the presidential election. It is paramount to prevent such measures, as previously seen in other countries on the continent, in Ethiopia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.⁵¹ Such actions would create concerns over repression of the media or political opposition, and would prevent online reporting by media and observers.

50 Reporters Without Borders, “[Benin's citizens deprived of Internet on election day](#),” 1 May 2019.

51 The Conversation, “Internet shutdowns are increasing dramatically in Africa – a new book explains why”, 16 Décembre 2025. “Between 2016 and 2024 there were 193 internet shutdowns imposed in 41 African countries.”

Digital Space



Digital Regulations

As part of its digital transformation and modernisation of its legal cadre, the government adopted a **Digital Code**, enacted in April 2018 (Loi n° 2017-20).⁵² The Code was amended in 2021, which provided for the establishment of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communication and Post Office (**ARCEP**).⁵³ The emergence of the Digital Code has anticipated the future uses of personal data, regulates the criminal law applicable to crimes and offences committed online, and creates a National Agency for the Security of Information Systems, as well as a Central Office for the Suppression of Cybercrime and a National Center for Digital Investigations (CNIN). Several additional institutions may have roles in regulating or monitoring digital space, hence, coordination is crucial.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, the Digital Code suffers from vague provisions, providing a wide margin for interpretation by the authorities to restrict digital communication. These unreasonable restrictions should be amended to find an adequate balance with guarantees of free speech post-elections.

All CSOs interviewed acknowledged the presence and nuisance of disinformation and false news online, which threaten electoral integrity.⁵⁵ Disinformation in the electoral process is not new. During the previous election cycle, Benin experienced fake videos announcing the election results. In November 2025, the HAAC released an alert on illegal media online and

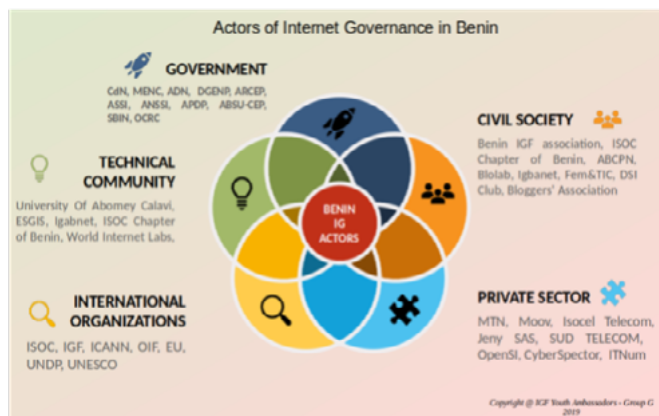


Figure 3. Benin Internet Society, « Internet Governance Actors »

52 Article 2 : « The purpose of the Digital Code is to govern the activities that fall within the scope of electronic communications service networks, electronic tools, trust services in the digital economy, electronic commerce, the protection of personal data, cybercrime and cybersecurity”.

53 [Loi n° 2020-35 du 06 Janvier 2021](#) modifiant la loi n°2017 du 20 Avril 2018 portant code du numérique en République du Bénin. The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Post Office (ARCEP) is responsible for defining standards and regulations for telecommunications producers, granting licenses and permits to operators, and arbitrating disputes between consumers and operators.

54 Benin Internet Society, « [Internet Governance Actors](#) » See Graph above.

55 Association des bloggeurs du Benin, “[Fake news et élections : pourquoi vérifier, c'est protéger la démocratie](#)”, 2025 : Au Bénin, plusieurs épisodes récents ont illustré ce phénomène. Lors des scrutins de 2019, 2021 et 2023, des contenus falsifiés ont circulé sur les réseaux : faux communiqués attribués à la Commission électorale nationale autonome (CENA), rumeurs sur des fraudes imaginaires, ou encore fausses déclarations de candidats. Ces intoxications, bien que rapidement démenties par les médias de vérification, ont semé le doute et parfois alimenté des tensions sociales.

the spread of disinformation,⁵⁶ and, in preparation for elections it has trained media and officers on disinformation. Unfortunately, there is insufficient coordination between CENA, the HAAC and other regulatory agencies to map their respective mandates and conduct joint initiatives to prevent, detect, or counter disinformation threats. As mentioned in the section 2 on Electoral Authorities, CENA still lacks a robust strategy on disinformation for the elections. Interviewees did not mention specific engagement with big platforms by CENA, parties or CSOs ahead of the elections. This is a missed opportunity, as recent elections on the continent and globally have shown the potential risks of widespread disinformation campaigns, hate speech and online violence for election integrity.

Positive initiatives led by CSOs should continue to be supported. To counter disinformation, factcheckers' platforms have been established, such as Banouto/Badona, Bénin Web TV Check, and citizen digital literacy initiatives.⁵⁷ As part of the [Digitalise Youth Project launched in 2025](#),⁵⁸ CSOs and networks in Benin aim to address the shrinking civic space and rampant disinformation, by empowering local youth activists and CSOs. The project, led by the AfricTivistes citizen lab⁵⁹ in Benin, conducted advocacy, an awareness campaign on digital threats, and dialogue with youth to prevent disinformation and call for a peaceful process. Several digital civic projects also aim to bolster the capacity of youth and raise awareness and open a space for dialogue for youth in the digital space, including the "Know Your Rights" campaign (Campagne digitale "Connais tes droits") by the Association des blogueurs du Bénin.⁶⁰ Articles, visuals, and educational content covered issues relating to freedom of expression, disinformation, citizen participation, the protection of personal data, electoral integrity, and civic engagement in the digital age. AfricTiviste citizen lab and democracy and governance experts recently called for increased training of youth.⁶¹ There is a need to continue to support initiatives to counter disinformation, hate speech, and online violence in election time, in particular to quickly detect and remove illegal content ahead of the presidential elections.

56 24HauBenin, "Le-Benin-s-active-dans-la-lutte-contre-la-desinformation" 24 Juillet 2025.

57 Association des blogueurs du Benin, "Fake news et élections : pourquoi vérifier, c'est protéger la démocratie", 2025.

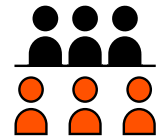
58 [Digital Democracy initiatives](#).

59 AfricTivistes is a pan-African organisation that promotes and defends democratic values, human rights and good governance through civic tech. bloggers.

60 [L'Association des blogueurs du Benin](#): A community of passionate bloggers promoting free expression and online awareness.

61 [Citizen Lab Benin](#), "Engagement des jeunes et activisme responsable au Benin : l'urgence de la formation", 2 February 2026.

Civic Space and Civil Liberties



Civic Space and Civil Liberties

The International IDEA Global State of Democracy Report in 2025⁶² stated that Benin experienced “declines in Civic Engagement but has improved in Absence of Corruption, reflecting recent efforts to crack down on graft.” Through interviews and desk research, it emerged clearly that the positions of most of the non-institutional stakeholders have progressively been weakened. Civil society, including by CSOs themselves, are perceived as fragmented, and some as self-censoring. Interviews revealed that some CSOs are taking additional steps to avoid becoming targets of the government. They are also aware of the need to improve their engagements with electoral institutions (including EMBs), especially regarding voter education work, and also their contributions to the restoration of social cohesion and of the reduction of tensions nationwide.

“Training young people makes it possible to reduce these abuses, but above all to transform activism into a tool of positive influence based on rigour, competence and ethics.”

Citizen Lab Benin, Article de blog, Engagement des jeunes et activisme responsable au Benin: l’urgence de la formation

The government’s broad security crackdown in response to the failed coup may eventually extend to CSOs, election monitors, and media outlets, limiting their ability to provide independent oversight during the electoral period. Despite this shrinking space, CSOs and youth activists are bolstering their engagements, holding webinars, analysing the electoral context, and engaging in youth projects to counter disinformation, preventing violence at the local level, encouraging women’s participation, and alerting to instances of violence against women.⁶³

⁶² International IDEA, “Global state of democracy, Benin,” June 2025.

⁶³ Déclaration préélectorale du Cadre d’Appui aux Processus Electoraux (CAPE) et de la Coalition des Organisations de la Société civile pour les Élections et la Paix (COSCEP).

Election Observation

In the recent legislative and local elections, CSOs were able to deploy both long-term and short-term observers throughout the electoral process. Observers from the Electoral Platform of Civil Society Organizations welcomed the digitalisation of the accreditation process, which enabled the use of a streamlined online system for observer registration and badge allocation. At the invitation of the government, both the African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS/CEDEAO) deployed observation missions for the 11 January legislative elections, and are expected to deploy similar missions for the upcoming presidential election. For the presidential polls, the [accreditation](#) process for observers was launched on 23 January, and will remain open until 11 April, the eve of election day.

Observers from the Cadre des Organisations de la Société Civile pour le Suivi du Processus Électoral and the Plateforme Électorale des Organisations (CAPE/COSCEP) de la Société Civile reported that they were able to conduct comprehensive observation of the legislative and communal elections. Their monitoring covered the pre-election environment, voter education initiatives, preparatory activities of CENA, campaign activities, the use or misuse of state resources, and the occurrence of critical incidents. Several CSOs deployed both long-term and short-term observers, ensuring coverage across all constituencies on election day. In its pre-election statement, CAPE/COSCEP described the overall environment as “a peaceful pre-election climate,” noting that campaign activities among political parties were generally characterised by courtesy and an absence of hostility. In the absence of participation by the main opposition party, heightened tensions during campaign rallies were not anticipated.

The West Africa Regional Office Platform for Women’s Rights in Benin worked with the CAPE Electoral Process Support Framework to train and deploy 12 observers – one in each of the country’s 12 departments – to monitor incidents related to violence during the electoral period. During the pre-election phase of the legislative elections, CAPE/COSCEP observers reported instances of the misuse of state resources by certain government officials, as well as cases of hate speech during the pre-election period in November.⁶⁴ Observer groups also documented instances of verbal and psychological violence in several electoral districts, which were publicly denounced.

Overall, observer statements assessed the electoral process positively, highlighting a

⁶⁴ Déclaration préélectorale du Cadre d’Appui aux Processus Electoraux (CAPE) et de la Coalition des Organisations de la Société civile pour les Élections et la Paix (COSCEP) ; CAPE/COSCEP, « Observation report of for the legislative elections », 01 Octobre au 28 novembre 2025.

calm, peaceful, and generally well-organised polling process. Observers demonstrated professionalism in their deployment, operational procedures, and reporting. However, reports on the legislative elections contained limited data and analysis on issues such as illicit financial flows in elections, electoral corruption, online disinformation, and the functioning of dispute resolution mechanisms before the courts. This suggests the need to further strengthen observation methodologies and enhance the formulation of more evidence-based and actionable recommendations for future electoral cycles.

However, some interviews following the attempted coup revealed that the heavy presence of police and military in the country, plus reports of arrests and surveillance, have led to a climate of intimidation and self-censorship by media and observer groups. Some civil society actors noted that, as a result, they refrained from publishing their monthly observer reports or analysis online in December as a result. The preliminary statement from the [NDI Observation Mission](#) also confirmed potential limitations on some CSOs in publishing their reports, due to the 2025 law on association.⁶⁵ Moreover, if security conditions deteriorate in some areas of the country, election observers could reduce their presence or avoid certain areas altogether, creating gaps in observation that is crucial for preventing electoral manipulation or violence. In the context of shrinking civic space and restrictions on the media, the role of observers is crucial to ensuring independent documentation of the electoral process. Unfortunately, interviews revealed that some CSOs had still not received funding for the observation of the presidential elections just two months before the polls, which could limit their ability to observe, collect evidence, and denounce or prevent violations, including election violence.

Trust In Media and Government



[Reporters without Borders](#) noted that the freedom of expression of journalists in Benin has declined in recent years. Data from 2024 [Afrobarometer](#) also revealed that the majority of Beninese want the media to be able to publish all ideas and opinions without

65 NDI Observation Mission, "Preliminary Statement", 20 February 2025.

government control. “More than two-thirds of respondents believe that the media should constantly investigate and publish on government corruption and mistakes. Yet, more than half of Benin’s citizens say that the media is not truly free to broadcast and comment on news without censorship or interference from their government.” Interviews conducted acknowledged efforts since 2016 to regulate the media and recent actions taken by HAAC to enforce the code of ethics. As explored in this section, such regulations have also led to self-censorship by the media and intimidation and convictions of online journalists through the use of the Digital Code, under the provision on “electronic dissemination of false information affecting public tranquillity, and complicity in dissemination”. This decline in trust in government by media and CSOs is of concern as Benin approaches presidential elections with increased restrictions on media and civic space, and in absence of the main opposition party on the ballot to channel disagreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

AVANT LES ÉLECTIONS

La CENA, la HAAC et les OSC devraient renforcer les efforts de sensibilisation et se connecter avec les organisations de terrain dans les communautés locales en amont des élections, pour promouvoir la participation des jeunes, les alerter sur les risques de désinformation et de manipulation, et planifier la prévention de la violence;

La CENA et la HAAC devraient engager le dialogue avec les médias et les partis politiques pour sensibiliser les médias au code de déontologie, à la nécessité de couvrir les campagnes de manière équitable, d’encourager la participation des femmes aux élections et de prévenir la propagation de la désinformation, des discours de haine ou de la violence, y compris en ligne et en personne, et en particulier contre les femmes;

La CENA et la HAAC devraient collaborer avec les autres autorités réglementaires — l'ARCEP et l'Agence nationale de sécurité des systèmes d'information et l'Office central de répression de la cybercriminalité — pour coordonner la détection et les réponses raisonnables aux contenus illégaux en ligne et prévenir les cyberattaques contre leur infrastructure TIC pendant la campagne et le jour du scrutin ;

La CENA et la HAAC devraient engager un dialogue avec les plateformes de médias sociaux pour promouvoir l'intégrité de l'information, détecter les fausses nouvelles et demander qu'elles partagent rapidement les preuves et retirent les contenus illégaux ;

La CENA, la HAAC et les forces de l'ordre devraient s'abstenir de toute restriction déraisonnable comme moyen de combattre la propagation de la désinformation en ligne, car celles-ci peuvent conduire à la censure. Ils devraient se concentrer sur une approche préventive, en investissant dans la formation et l'éducation à la culture médiatique, plutôt que dans les sanctions et les restrictions ;

Les donateurs devraient fournir un financement aux observateurs pour pouvoir se déployer et continuer la coordination des OSC afin d'assurer une large couverture des bureaux de vote et renforcer la méthodologie de suivi des observateurs, en particulier sur la désinformation, les flux financiers illicites dans les élections et les processus de règlement des différends électoraux ; et

Le gouvernement devrait s'engager à s'abstenir de coupures d'internet, d'interdictions de médias sociaux et de sanctions déraisonnables contre les médias et les acteurs de la société civile pendant l'élection présidentielle.

APRÈS LES ÉLECTIONS

Le parlement devrait initier une réforme législative pour amender le Code électoral, le Code du numérique et les réglementations connexes en matière de communication afin de supprimer les dispositions larges qui peuvent restreindre de manière déraisonnable la liberté d'expression, en raison d'une formulation large laissant place à un usage abusif et à des sanctions disproportionnées ;

Les associations de médias et les OSC devraient formuler des recommandations pour amender la législation relative au numérique et les réglementations électorales, et appeler à l'institutionnalisation de la consultation au sein de la HAAC, de la CENA et du parlement ;

Les institutions, les partis politiques et les OSC devraient collecter des données ventilées par genre et préparer des études fondées sur des preuves pour identifier les lacunes et formuler des recommandations pour une meilleure représentation des femmes dans les élections et la formation des femmes élues ;

Le gouvernement devrait continuer à investir dans la réduction de la fracture numérique, en investissant dans des infrastructures hybrides (radios communautaires, bibliothèques hors ligne) pour les zones mal connectées, avec une formation ciblée en connectivité rurale et culture numérique ; et

Les agences de sécurité compétentes devraient poursuivre les échanges régionaux et envisager un cadre réglementaire panafricain pour les grandes plateformes afin de surveiller les contenus et retirer les contenus illégaux.

Pillar IV

Security Agencies and Conflict Mitigation

Regulation of Violence • Trust In State
Responses • Surveillance • Sanctions •
Conflict mitigation • Recommendations

Elections are exercises of nonviolent political competition for legitimacy of power.⁶⁶ Resolving this conflict without aggravating political tensions requires electoral processes that are perceived to be trustworthy, equitable, and safe. This places significant pressure on security agencies. The failed December coup established the security forces as a crucial actor for the upcoming election, and their actions could either calm or aggravate further political conflict and electoral violence. Actions taken immediately by the government after the attempted coup, including arrests of military personnel and opposition figures, have sparked fears that potential involvement of the executive and police forces in the upcoming vote could undermine the credibility, openness, and safety of the 2026 presidential election. Moreover, the deterioration of the security situation in the North, where recent armed attacks, coupled with the growing presence of terrorist groups, have increased instability in the country. Benin faces growing security risks linked to regional instability in the Sahel, and the expanding reach of terrorist operations along its northern borders.

Regulation of Violence



The electoral legal framework and criminal legislation provide a basis for the regulation and sanctioning of violent behaviour during elections. Law enforcement in Benin is carried out by the Direction Générale de la Police Républicaine (DGPR), which integrates and replaces the former national police and gendarmerie. The DGPR is responsible for maintaining national security, ensuring law and order, and protecting persons and property.

The Constitution of Benin guarantees fundamental rights, including protection against torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. In particular, Article 18 prohibits torture, maltreatment, and other forms of degrading treatment.⁶⁷ The Penal Code of Benin (2018 revision) constitutes the primary legal framework for addressing acts of violence and maintaining public order, alongside the [Criminal Procedure Code](#). The Penal Code criminalises a range of violent acts and establishes penalties proportionate to their seriousness.

⁶⁶ ACEProject, [Regards sur la sécurité politique des élections](#).

⁶⁷ Benin Constitution, Article 18: "No one shall be submitted to torture, nor to maltreatment, nor to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment. No one shall have the right to prevent a detainee or an accused person from being examined by a doctor of his choice. No one may be detained in a penal institution if he does not fall under the provisions of a penal law in force."

“When one or more citizens have been prevented from exercising their civic rights by assembly, assault or threats, each of the guilty parties shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of not less than six (6) months and two (02) months years, and the prohibition of the right to vote, to be elected and to stand for election for five (05) years at least and ten (10) years at most.”

Article 243 of the Penal Code

Specific provisions relating to electoral offences are outlined in Articles 243–267 of the Penal Code. These provisions criminalise acts such as voter intimidation, vote buying, fraudulent voter registration, the unlawful disclosure of sensitive electoral information, and fraud during vote counting. The Electoral Code of Benin further defines the role of law enforcement during the electoral process, requiring coordination between the police and CENA to ensure the secure deployment of electoral materials and the maintenance of public order during campaign activities and on election day.

Some provisions within the criminal framework may, however, be considered overly restrictive or may allow for disproportionate sanctions in practice. For example, threats, assault, or assembly intended to prevent a voter from exercising their right to vote can result in imprisonment ranging from six months to two years, as well as the loss of voting eligibility for a period of five to ten years. While these sanctions aim to deter electoral violence, concerns remain that certain provisions could be applied in a manner that restricts political participation.

Research and international assessments have highlighted that political and electoral violence often has gender-specific dimensions. Women candidates and voters may face verbal abuse, online hate speech, threats, or intimidation aimed at discouraging their participation in political life. In response to such challenges, Benin adopted legislation in 2021 strengthening sanctions for gender-based crimes, including harassment, sexual assault, rape, early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and aggravated violence. In 2021, Benin adopted specific legislation that strengthens sanctions for crimes based on sex (harassment, sexual assault, rape, early marriage, FGM, aggravated violence). These provisions can have positive effects to curb online and offline violence against women in elections.⁶⁸ There is no information, however, on whether police forces have

68 Benin, Law n°2021-11 of 20th December 2021.

been trained on these provisions or whether data has been compiled on specific crimes committed since the adoption of this law.

Many international non-governmental human rights organisations and media, such as Amnesty International, have denounced arbitrary arrests, a lack of due process guarantees, and disproportionate punishments and treatment in prison in the country. The security forces can use the self-defence argument, and that they operated within their duties to justify violence or arbitrary arrests. But the law limits this self defence argument to “unless the use of force is disproportionate to the seriousness of the threat.” Strengthening safeguards, clarifying operational rules on the use of force, and enhancing oversight mechanisms could, therefore, contribute to reinforcing public trust and protecting fundamental political rights during the electoral period.

Trust In State Responses



The failed 7 December 2025 coup heightened concerns regarding political and electoral violence in the lead-up to the April 2026 presidential election. The incident has contributed to a tense political environment and raised the risk of disproportionate responses by state authorities, including an increased presence of police and military forces during the electoral period. Previous electoral cycles have also been marked by episodes of violence. During the 2019 Benin legislative elections and the 2021 Benin presidential election, clashes occurred between supporters of rival political parties, as well as between demonstrators and security forces. These violent events led to arbitrary arrests by police, and incidents of intimidation targeting opposition candidates or voters in contested constituencies. The authorities failed to investigate the killings of civilians in connection with the 2019 legislative elections, during which civil society groups claim police and military forces used disproportionate force against protesters.⁶⁹ Since the attempted coup, similar arrests and detentions have taken place, with opposition party members imprisoned. The absence of investigation of and publicly available information surrounding these violent incidents and extended detentions can undermine public trust in the government’s intentions.

69 <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2107617.html>

More broadly, the lack of comprehensive data and accountability mechanisms regarding the use of force by security forces has implications for the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and the overall integrity of the electoral process. While several international media outlets and organisations, including Amnesty International, have reported allegations of disproportionate use of force in past electoral contexts, the government has not publicly released detailed data or investigative findings that could address concerns related to potential police impunity.

At present, limited information is available regarding the government's operational response to the failed coup or the specific security measures adopted in its aftermath. Nevertheless, the combination of a weakened political opposition and the consolidation of executive authority since December may affect the level of public confidence in the electoral environment, and could influence voters' perceptions regarding the openness and competitiveness of the upcoming presidential election.

Surveillance



Military and Police Presence

During the legislative and local elections, police and military presence remained important to ensuring safe electoral operations. Yet this presence, if not fully explained to the public, could also intimidate voters and undermine participation. In their preliminary statements, observers noted that security services were professional and neutral during the entire process. But observers also recommended adopting more rigorous measures to protect election officials, journalists, observers, and voters, to counter impunity, encourage participation, and build trust.⁷⁰

Surveillance

Some CSOs interviewed reported growing concerns of surveillance online and confirmed heavier presence of security agencies, in particular in urban areas, since the December

⁷⁰ Déclaration préélectorale du Cadre d'Appui aux Processus Electoraux (CAPE) et de la Coalition des Organisations de la Société civile pour les Élections et la Paix (COSCEP).

coup attempt. While not documented, the CSOs mentioned their suspicions of surveillance of civil society actors by the national intelligence service and described the resulting atmosphere of fear when CSOs share information or publish analysis online. For instance, post-coup, this concern has led some organisations to refrain from publishing their pre-election observation reports and statements against the government's actions; others reported no concerns. Fear of violence and surveillance could deter citizens from participating in campaign rallies, voting, or expressing political preferences openly. Opposition supporters, particularly in areas with a heavy security presence, may avoid the polls entirely or feel pressured to support government-aligned candidates. But some interviews also reveal that the presence of police forces also reassures voters at the polls.

Sanctions



Regulations

During the legislative elections, CENA effectively coordinated with police and military authorities to deliver polling equipment and ensure the security of electoral operations. No further information was available, however, regarding similar cooperation specifically aimed at preventing or responding to electoral violence. As highlighted earlier, the January legislative and local elections were conducted in a calm and peaceful environment, with no violent incidents reported during the pre-election period or on polling day.

Regarding allegations of election offences, the Electoral Code of Benin (Articles 256–259) provides for sanctions, including imprisonment of six months to five years and fines, for acts such as vote buying, illegal voting, disruption of election operations, and using a false identity. In addition, the Penal Code of Benin (2018 revision) enumerates several election-related crimes. During interviews, CENA did not report the existence of a formal protocol with the police for sharing information or evidence concerning alleged electoral offences. Establishing rapid referral mechanisms for election-related crime allegations and facilitating information exchange could strengthen investigative processes and help counter impunity in future electoral cycles.

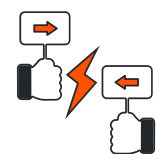
Accountability and Enforcement

As noted above, the criminal framework in Benin establishes clear – and, in some cases, severe – sanctions for acts related to electoral violence, including voter intimidation, the seizure of ballot boxes, and other forms of interference with the electoral process. These provisions are primarily contained in the Penal Code (2018 revision) and the Electoral Code, which together provide the legal basis for preventing and sanctioning election-related offences.

Adherence to these legal provisions has been called into question, however, in the aftermath of the 2025 attempted coup. Reports of arrests and prolonged detentions following the incident, combined with limited public information regarding investigations or judicial proceedings, have raised concerns among observers about transparency and accountability as noted in the section above.

Despite the existence of a relatively robust legal framework governing electoral offences, the perceived lack of transparency surrounding arrests, investigations, and judicial outcomes has contributed to public mistrust towards law enforcement institutions. These dynamics may weaken guarantees of due process for political opponents, activists, and journalists. In turn, they risk contributing to an environment of self-censorship and a gradual narrowing of civic space during the electoral period.

Conflict mitigation



Prevention

Effective conflict mitigation depends on clear communication, interagency coordination, and proactive engagement with communities by electoral bodies, government agencies, and civil society to de-escalate tensions, respect human rights, and reinforce confidence in the legitimacy of the election process. The coup attempt in December has led police forces and the military to bolster their apparatus to conduct arrests, enhance surveillance, and respond to further political violence. CENA and the HAAC have both called for peaceful elections and have reiterated commitments in their respective engagements with political parties and candidates in the lead up to the recent elections.

While the CENA e-learning platform addresses the prevention of violence with specific educational resources, CENA reports that the coup attempt has not impacted its education and training plans, which it considers the responsibility of law enforcement and the government. Similarly, CENA has not issued much messaging focused on reporting or filing complaints in cases of violations during the pre-election period. Rather than accountability, CENA's educational campaign has been focused on prevention, rather than sanction. The HAAC, meanwhile, includes the prevention of violence as part of its educational resources and awareness campaign, calling for parties, candidates, and media to contribute to violence-prevention efforts.

Several CSOs and observers have led projects to prevent or counter violations in the lead-up to the elections. For instance, through its Digital Youth project, Amicale Pour le Développement Durable (APDD-ONG) educated young people on conflict and electoral violence mitigation techniques. Les bloggeurs du Benin also held youth dialogues to discuss violence prevention. Youth engagement is critical to effectively mitigating potential offline and online violence ahead of the election, and to avoid manipulation by political parties. With the absence of the main opposition running in the upcoming presidential election, however, citizens may feel less motivated to participate in political rallies or marches, decreasing tensions during the campaign period. Observer groups and regional bodies have also called for a peaceful and transparent process during their visits and observation missions.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Aside from CENA and civil society actors, other national institutions can also contribute to conflict and violence mitigation efforts, and are empowered to receive reports or complaints. The Benin Human Rights Commission ([Commission Béninoise des Droits de l'Homme](#)) or the Ombudsman ([le Mediateur](#)) are competent to receive and address allegations of the excessive or indiscriminate use of force by the government, as well as to enhance inter-institutional cooperation. These institutions act as watchdogs on the government's power and can also take up cases on their own initiative. They could also encourage citizens to file complaints during the elections. Finally, there are many alternative dispute resolution mechanisms used at the local level. CENA could rely on these existing traditional structures and religious leaders to conduct dialogues or mediations at the community level during the elections. CENA could partner to sensitise these traditional structures on the nature of election disputes and their crucial role to mediate and defuse tensions during the elections, notably on disinformation, violence, intimidation, or abuse of state resources.

To address fears of violence and protect electoral integrity, stakeholders should focus on transparent security protocols that protect, rather than intimidate, voters, sensitise security forces to electoral violence, and conduct confidence-building dialogues between political actors. Authorities should also promote a robust civil society presence as neutral observers, as well as acknowledge CSO's crucial role in the transparent and independent reporting of cases of clashes or abuses. The government should ensure security forces' professional conduct, and encourage strong messaging from regional bodies that violence will not be tolerated from any side. Without deliberate efforts to reduce fear and build confidence, the shadow of the coup attempt could distort the electoral process, regardless of whether actual violence occurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PRE-ELECTION

CENA and law enforcement bodies should continue to closely monitor violence, hate speech, and disinformation content during the campaign period. This will enable rapid detection, the transmission of corrective instructions to polling staff, the issuance of warnings to violators, and quick referral to law enforcement when needed. Improved data and evidence collection will enable lessons-learned analysis in the post-election period, strengthen case referrals, and enhance accountability;

Relevant authorities and CSOs should set up hotlines and encourage voters to report and/or file complaints to the police forces, CENA, the HAAC, or the Benin Human Rights Commission. Emphasis should be placed on severe violations of

electoral integrity and alleged election crimes, including intimidation or violence against women;

CENA should connect with peacebuilding actors, religious leaders, and traditional community alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and apply community dialogue and mediation to rapidly address local occurrences of election violence, intimidation, threats, or electoral corruption, especially in areas affected by conflict;

The Media and CSOs should continue to engage with radio and television outlets, and with social media influencers and bloggers to launch awareness-raising on conflict prevention and call for peaceful conduct of the election;

The Media and CSOs should monitor electoral violence and violence (intimidation, threats, assaults) and report cases to relevant authorities to counter impunity; and

Regional bodies and the diplomatic community should continue their calls for peaceful elections, to pursue commitment by authorities towards democratic traditions and reforms, and to support Benin's security forces and military in countering terrorist attacks in the region.

POST-ELECTION

The parliament should engage in comprehensive legal reform to review the criminal code and media-related regulations to remove disproportionate sanctions and restrictions to free speech and the right to protest, in line with international standards;

CENA should convene inter-institutional lessons-learned event(s) to address electoral offences and crimes, threats, violence, and intimidation;

Law enforcement agencies should publish all data on allegations of election-related crimes, complaints, arrests, detentions, and sanctions against electoral

actors and the media in the elections; they should share regular updates to this information for transparency and enable effective lessons learned for reform efforts;

The Media and CSOs should continue monitoring potential investigations of electoral violence, regularly release information on police, prosecution, and decisions by criminal courts, and advocate for transparency; and

Regional bodies and the diplomatic community should support electoral authorities and law enforcement by sharing tools, information, and innovative practices to best combat hybrid threats in elections and prevent electoral violence.

Conclusion

All actors in the electoral process – institutions, parties, candidates, the media, voters, and law enforcement – must continue to encourage voter participation, call for peace ahead of the presidential election process, and pave the way for meaningful and inclusive post-election reform. The government and law enforcement bodies must exercise restraint and ensure utmost transparency of the process, allow peaceful protests during the campaign, and enable unfettered monitoring and reporting of electoral violations or abuses by observers and media. The government must protect the principles of democracy and good governance, and engage in comprehensive legislative reform, in line with the principles set out in the Constitution and regional and international commitments, such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007).

