

Freedom in the World 2025 - Benin

Overview

Benin had been among the most stable democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, but President Patrice Talon began using the justice system to attack his political opponents after taking office in 2016, and he has since consolidated power. Deadly police violence at political protests, arrests of activists, and other restrictions on civil liberties have become increasingly problematic in recent years.

Key Developments in 2024

- In March, the legislature approved electoral-law amendments mandating that parties must win 20 percent of votes, up from 10 percent previously, in an electoral district to gain representation in the National Assembly. The amendments also required presidential candidates to be sponsored by at least 15 percent of legislative representatives and mayors across the country, up from 10 percent previously. The amendments, which President Talon promulgated that month, are expected to make it more difficult for new parties and opposition parties to win political representation.
- There were several instances where journalists, activists, or ordinary citizens faced legal penalties for criticism of authorities. In June, three journalists with Daabaaru TV were fined 500,000 West African CFA francs (about \$900) and handed suspended six-month sentences after a viewer who called in to a talk show made a joke about police misconduct. The program was also suspended for a month. Steve Amoussou, an activist with tens of thousands of social media followers, was detained in August on charges of inciting rebellion for his posts criticizing authorities; his lawyer said he was taken into custody in Togo and transferred to Benin. He remained in detention at year's end. A former director general of the national police was arrested on similar charges in November for social media posts critical of the government. Separately, in April, a demonstration in Cotonou against high prices was dispersed by police, and a second planned demonstration in May was banned.
- In April, trial proceedings opened for 42 opposition activists or sympathizers who had been arrested during the 2021 presidential election period. The election campaign had featured the violent dispersion of opposition protests by police. Charges against the defendants reportedly included "interference with electoral rights," "ammunition trafficking," and "participation in prohibited gatherings," and carried sentences ranging from 3 to 10 years; all pleaded not guilty.
- Businessman Olivier Boko, a close adviser to President Talon who had indicated interest in running for president in 2026, was arrested alongside two other men in September on suspicion of planning a coup d'état.

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For additional background information, see last year's [full report](#).

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? | 1 / 4

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? | 2 / 4

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? | 1 / 4

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? | 1 / 4

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to increases in both the endorsement requirement for presidential candidates and the vote threshold needed to win representation in the legislature, making it more difficult for new and opposition parties to gain representation.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? | 2 / 4

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? | 3 / 4

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? | 3 / 4

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? | 1 / 4

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? | 2 / 4

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? | 2 / 4

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 2 / 4

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? | 4 / 4

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? | 4 / 4

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? | 4 / 4

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? | 3 / 4

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? | 3 / 4

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 3 / 4

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 2 / 4

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 2 / 4

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? | 2 / 4

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? | 3 / 4

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

**3 /
4**

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

**3 /
4**

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

**2 /
4**

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2 / 4

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