

LATEST TRENDS

Jihadist violence spiked in northern Benin in early 2025, while several armed group attacks were reported in recent months in the country's previously more peaceful east. Meanwhile, Benin is gearing up for a presidential election in April amid heightened political tensions in the wake of a December 2025 coup attempt.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS

1 The jihadist threat is expected to persist in northern departments

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Benin's dominant jihadist group, will probably keep entrenching itself in the northern Alibori and Atacora departments. Parks Pendjari and W, which straddle the borderlands of Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger, serve as a transit and supply zone and provide cover for the group's activities.

Changes in Benin's defence posture following a large-scale JNIM attack on soldiers in Alibori in April 2025 could have mixed outcomes. Since the military pulled back from isolated outposts to more defensible bases, such attacks have decreased. But insurgents could attain greater freedom of movement in zones the troops have left, putting civilians at risk.

The lack of security cooperation with Niger and Burkina Faso will continue to hamper Benin's efforts to secure its northern border and curb insurgent activity.

TO WATCH JNIM messaging on Benin; attacks on civilians; resurgence in raids on army posts; intercommunal tensions, which JNIM could exploit; shifts in Benin's security posture; relationship with Burkina Faso and Niger.

Potential Consequences

Persistent or large-scale jihadist attacks could fuel discontent within state forces, affecting political stability. The soldiers who launched the failed December 2025 coup attempt cited insecurity as a motivation.

Jihadists' footprint in northern Benin could give them greater capacity to intensify or expand operations in the country and the wider region.

2 Armed violence could spread and destabilise eastern Benin

Criminal or jihadist groups could step up attacks in Borgou department as they entrench themselves in Nigeria's Kainji Lake Park across the border. Borgou, where several incidents of non-state armed group violence have occurred since June 2025, holds strategic value for JNIM due to its potential to connect the group's activities in south-eastern Burkina Faso with a nascent presence in western Nigeria.

Limited security coordination between Cotonou and Abuja could hinder efforts to prevent intensifying violence on the Nigerian side from spilling into Benin.

TO WATCH Attacks in western Nigeria or eastern Benin; increased cross-border movement; intercommunal tensions in Borgou, which armed groups could exploit; Nigeria-Benin security

cooperation; shifts in JNIM messaging on Benin or Nigeria.

Potential Consequences

A corridor between south-eastern Burkina Faso and western Nigeria running through Benin's territory could facilitate JNIM's contacts with Nigerian armed groups and its access to the Nigerian market for weapons and fuel. It would also impede counter-terrorism efforts.

The expansion of violence could force Cotonou to shift troops to Borgou, giving greater freedom of action to armed groups in Alibori and Atacora.

3 Political tensions will probably intensify around the presidential election

President Patrice Talon's chosen successor, Finance Minister Romuald Wadagni, is expected to coast to victory in the 12 April presidential election. But, with his low political profile, Wadagni could struggle to control a divided ruling coalition that will remain under Talon's influence.

The exclusion from formal politics of the main opposition party, Les Démocrates – which holds no seats in the national legislature and has been barred from the presidential election under 2024 changes to the electoral code – has heightened political tensions. In the lead-up to the poll, the currently limited risk of street protests could increase, prompting a crackdown.

Authorities might detain more opposition politicians as part of the investigation into the failed December 2025 coup attempt, further raising the political temperature. Several



FLASHPOINT

high-profile opposition figures, including from Les Démocrates, have already been arrested.

TO WATCH Public criticism of the regime candidate; socio-economic grievances; further arrests of opposition figures; large-scale jihadist attacks fuelling public and/or military discontent.

Potential Consequences

Difficulty consolidating authority early in his tenure could complicate a newly elected President Wadagni's rule and fuel questioning of his leadership.