



# Integrated Country Strategy

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Benin

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## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

The U.S. Mission to Benin serves the American people by promoting sustainable development, economic opportunity, and strong ties between our governments and people based on shared democratic values; by joining forces to combat international threats affecting the security of Beninese and Americans alike; and by partnering for a healthier, more democratic, and prosperous Benin closely allied with the United States.

For thirty years, Benin enjoyed a reputation as a model of democratic stability in an otherwise troubled region. President Patrice Talon, elected in 2016, has prioritized economic development over strengthening democratic institutions, and the space for pluralism, dissent, and free expression has narrowed under his administration. Revisions to the electoral code and the law governing parties in the run-up to 2019 legislative elections dramatically altered the political landscape, and no opposition parties qualified to participate, thereby ensuring that all 83 members of the National Assembly came from two pro-Talon parties. A subsequent amendment to the constitution in 2020 limiting presidential candidates to those that can show backing from National Assembly members and mayors restricted even further competitive democracy and pluralism. Beninese pride in their democratic history persists, however, and Beninese are united in their dedication to peaceful coexistence among all religious and ethnic groups, despite some underlying tensions. The Government of Benin is a proponent of African self-reliance, and a strong contributor to peacekeeping missions in Africa and elsewhere. On the economic front, however, Benin remains one of the world's least developed countries. The joint shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and Nigeria's 2019-2020 border closure have slowed growth significantly. The country is plagued by corrupt business practices, ineffective governance, weak infrastructure, and alarming health statistics. Trafficking in persons – particularly internal trafficking of young girls to work as domestics – and child labor remain serious problems.

Tepid economic growth is offset by high population growth. Security threats include piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, high crime rates, and regional terrorism. The May 2019 kidnapping of two Western tourists from a popular national park on Benin's border with Burkina Faso highlighted the imminent threat that instability and extremism could spill over onto Beninese territory. Women and the large youth population have particularly dim economic prospects.

We have identified three Mission Goals that reflect our own capacity to influence the most pressing issues facing Benin:

- Promote American values and interests, strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and advance adherence to international human rights standards.
- Partner with Benin to counter transnational, maritime, and environmental crime and improve regional stability.

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- Assist Benin in expanding opportunity, reducing poverty, and implementing effective and transparent development initiatives.

**Promote American values and advance American interests through strengthened democratic institutions, improved governance, and adherence to international human rights standards**

Benin's incremental turn away from democracy will undermine in the long term the peace and security it needs to drive economic growth, increasing the potential that disaffected and disenfranchised elements, particularly among the youth, might adopt agendas antithetical to regional stability and U.S. interests. To strengthen representative government responsive to citizens, we will work across agencies to support competitive and inclusive elections, build the capacity of civil society organizations, strengthen autonomous human rights institutions, and professionalize the media.

While Benin's legal framework provides for an independent judiciary and the right to a fair trial, arbitrary detentions and politically motivated judicial harassment have increased, decreasing citizens' confidence in the impartial rule of law. We will support and encourage an independent judicial system and increased access to justice, and promote professional prison management, rehabilitation, and crime prevention.

Although Benin generally respects human rights standards, its record has deteriorated, and several fundamental civil liberties, including freedoms of assembly and expression, have suffered. While the Government of Benin espouses the principle of gender equity, women continue to face institutional and societal inequities. We will partner with civil society and like-minded members of the international community to promote greater government adherence to human rights standards, respect for civil liberties, and access for women and girls to services, including for those at risk of gender-based violence. Mission Cotonou's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group will contribute to embassy efforts as we work with local partners to raise awareness about women's rights and underrepresented groups, and to build the capacity of local NGOs and the Government of Benin to combat gender-based violence and assist victims. We will continue to build Benin's judicial and forensic capacity to combat gender-based violence and will prioritize efforts to increase women's political participation.

Public diplomacy outreach and programs will demonstrate to the Beninese people the economic advantages of preserving and strengthening democracy, freedom of expression, and market-friendly business practices. To do this, we have rekindled and will sustain democracy workshops to train everyday citizens how to effectively but peacefully lobby their local and national government to address their most pressing needs. The Mission will mobilize staff from every section and agency to conduct outreach to Benin's bulging youth population – especially young women – using their strong interest in learning English as a platform for learning about American culture, values, and foreign policy. We will support media partners who offer accurate reporting, particularly investigative journalists and community radio stations, and continue to train journalists who reject Benin's pay-for-play media culture.

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## **Partner with Benin to counter transnational, maritime, and environmental crime and improve regional stability**

Benin is a good partner in promoting stability in a region that is threatened by piracy, transnational crime, and terrorist activity, but its long, porous borders leave it vulnerable to trafficking in persons, narcotics, wildlife, and other contraband. We will work with Beninese investigators and judicial authorities to strengthen efforts to prosecute traffickers and build the capacity of port and border authorities to interdict trafficking, while encouraging Benin to cooperate more effectively and consistently with its neighbors in the region against transnational crime. We will work with Diplomatic Security, DoD, and INL to support and train Benin's military and law enforcement and increase its ability to cooperate with regional navies to curb increasing piracy threats and strengthen maritime security.

Alert to the growing menace of extremist elements seeping across its borders from elsewhere in the region, Benin is seeking support for its own Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy focused on improving services to isolated—and potentially alienated—border areas. While Benin's political will to confront the problem of ill-protected borders and potential extremism is high, its capacity is low. We will assist Benin to increase control over its borders, contribute to counter-terrorism initiatives, and improve information gathering, analysis, and response related to security threats. The Public Diplomacy Section will increase the availability of existing programs for emerging leaders and to counter misinformation in underrepresented border areas of northeastern Benin.

Benin remains committed to peacekeeping, especially on the African continent. Benin has historically deployed a very high percentage of its active-duty military as well as a significant number of police officers to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) missions in Africa. We will continue to facilitate peacekeeping capacity building activities to ensure that Beninese forces are capable and deployable.

Given Benin's presence in a volatile region, we will ensure that our consular, regional security, and management sections are well prepared to respond to local and regional crises. We will facilitate legitimate travel to the U.S. while protecting our borders through rigorous application of visa law and improving fraud prevention capabilities. We will also provide the best possible support to U.S. citizens in need of consular services or emergency assistance.

## **Assist Benin to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and implement effective and transparent development initiatives**

Benin faces enormous challenges in reducing high levels of poverty and growing its economy. These include rapid population growth, low levels of literacy, high incidences of infectious diseases, weak public institutions, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, an undiversified economy, and poor education and health services. Our interagency approach to increasing Benin's capacity to implement development initiatives aimed at promoting increased prosperity for all Beninese citizens will include helping Benin take advantage of trade opportunities under AGOA; reforming Benin's electricity sector through the second Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact to help grow the economy; expanding

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access to quality health services; and increasing youth, entrepreneurship, and English-language programs run by the economic and public affairs sections, as well as USAID and Peace Corps.

MCC's six-year, \$375 million Compact focuses on electric power, a key constraint to economic growth in Benin. Since the Compact entered into force in June 2017, it has incentivized the Government of Benin to strengthen its national electricity utility through a management contract, adopt tariff reforms, support private investment in power generation, and create an enabling environment for off-grid electrification. By the Compact's completion in June 2022, Benin will benefit from a more reliable, modernized electricity distribution grid that can accommodate demand growth over the coming decades, as well as expanded access to power for unserved communities and households through public-private partnerships for off-grid electrification. Note: In December 2020, Congress granted MCC the authority to extend certain compacts that are experiencing delays due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The application and legislative approval process to extend the Benin Compact for 12 months - until June 2023 - is underway. End Note.

In 2018, the United States Congress granted MCC the authority to select countries that currently have MCC compacts for concurrent compacts for the purpose of regional economic integration, increased regional trade, or cross-border collaboration. MCC's Board of Directors reselected Benin in 2019 and 2020 as eligible to develop a concurrent compact, and MCC dedicated due diligence resources to assess whether there are opportunities in the cross-border transportation sector with Niger that meet its strict investment criteria. These studies are ongoing.

To contribute to economic growth and attain prosperity, the Beninese people must have access to adequate health services, education, and nutrition. The Global Health Initiative (GHI) is a major USG initiative that brings together disease-specific programs to ensure an integrated approach to addressing global health. USAID implements the GHI in Benin with resources that support the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), maternal and child health, family planning, HIV/AIDS, and Ebola preparedness. Beginning in FY2022 USAID will implement PEPFAR programming. Through these resources, USAID will strengthen Benin's capacity to improve the health status of its citizens by expanding the availability of health services, increasing citizen use of those services, strengthening key health sector systems including supply chain continuity, and increasing citizen participation in decision-making regarding health sector resources. Support also promotes broader good governance objectives as they will strengthen the health sector. For example, the influx of counterfeit medications poses threats to security and public health; therefore, Mission activities work to build strong coordination among the health, interior, and justice ministries. Furthermore, programs support national efforts to improve public audit and oversight functions with pilot projects in the health sector. These efforts are expected to have direct impacts on the health sector while also contributing to stronger national commitments to democratic principles.

We will support entrepreneurship development, especially among women and youth, via Public Diplomacy Section programming, USAID training and credit authorities, Peace Corps

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engagement, and Special Self Help funding. The Mission will also increase experiential learning and mentorship opportunities for young micro entrepreneurs, using American business best practices to build skills necessary to transition their small enterprises to the formal economy. We will seize on a growing interest among Beninese youth in environmental protection to promote climate-friendly development and business practices. To increase bilateral trade with Benin, we will promote improvements to Benin's business climate, expand U.S. commercial outreach, and encourage more active Beninese use of AGOA, including through encouraging the Government of Benin to finalize and implement a national AGOA strategy.

The political section will continue to support the Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) in Benin, through which the Beninese Armed Forces' medical unit and patients benefit from U.S.-funded medical supplies and equipment, professional development, and public awareness campaigns.

USAID, Peace Corps, and USDA projects will improve gender equality, health, and food security, including through the pursuit of Food for Peace funding. USAID and PDS will partner with civil society and NGOs to promote English language and educational opportunities for at-risk youth.

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## 2. Mission Strategic Framework

**Mission Goal 1: Promote American values and interests, strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and advance adherence to international human rights standards.**

**Mission Objective 1.1:** Benin improves accountable, transparent, and democratic governance and holds inclusive and competitive elections.

**Mission Objective 1.2:** Benin improves rule of law, access to justice, and judicial processes.

**Mission Objective 1.3:** Benin takes concrete steps to advance human and constitutional rights and gender equity.

**Mission Goal 2: Partner with Benin to counter transnational, maritime, and environmental crime and improve regional stability.**

**Mission Objective 2.1:** Benin secures its border and reduces human, narcotics, and wildlife trafficking.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Benin continues its efforts to counter the influence and reach of extremist groups in the Sahel and its support of U.S.-led counterterrorism initiatives.

**Mission Objective 2.3:** Improve fraud prevention strategies and modernize consular communication and support for U.S. citizens in order to better protect American citizens at home and in Benin.

**Mission Goal 3: Benin is better able to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and implement effective and transparent development initiatives.**

**Mission Objective 3.1:** Benin capitalizes on U.S. assistance and trade-preference programs in order to attain broad-based, sustainable economic growth and closer trade linkages with the United States.

**Mission Objective 3.2:** A healthier and more inclusive society is fostered by expanding the delivery of health services and strengthening the governance of health sector resources.

**Management Objective 1:** Improve the Mission's effectiveness in attaining ICS goals with an enhanced diplomatic platform.

**Management Objective 2:** Build a more effective workforce through competitive recruitment and effective personnel development practices that capitalizes on the Mission's diverse workforce.

**Management Objective 3:** Increase the efficiency and quality of service deliverables by streamlining management controls.

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### **3. Mission Goals and Objectives**

**Mission Goal 1: Promote American values and interests, strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and advance adherence to international human rights standards.**

**Description and Linkages:** Working with partners to strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and advance adherence to international human rights standards are priorities for U.S. engagement abroad as laid out in the President's National Security Strategy (NSS). These efforts also align with Goals 1, 2, and 3 of the Department/USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP). Enhanced democratic institutions and governance will promote peace and stability, allow the government to respond to longstanding human development needs, and counter the growing threat of malign non-state actors in ungoverned areas. These improvements will benefit Beninese citizens, create favorable conditions for economic growth, and expand opportunities for U.S. investors and bilateral trade. The risk of not achieving this goal is further democratic backsliding in Benin which could negatively impact political stability, economic growth, and the government's ability to counter extremist threats.

**Mission Objective 1.1: Benin improves accountable, transparent, and democratic governance and holds inclusive and competitive elections.**

**Justification:** Benin is a democratic republic that has enjoyed four peaceful transfers of power since 1990 and, until recently, held a reputation as a model democracy in West Africa. Benin has recently experienced a reduction in democratic space, signaling a possible divergence from its democratic foundations. A government that is transparent, accountable, and inclusive can better ensure peace and stability, counter extremist narratives that threaten U.S. national security interests, and promote economic growth and open markets that lead to commercial opportunities for U.S. business.

**Mission Objective 1.2: Benin improves rule of law, access to justice, and judicial processes.**

**Justification:** Benin's legal framework provides for an independent judiciary and the right to a fair trial. It also prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and cruel and inhuman punishment. Despite these protections, the government has recently carried out arbitrary arrests and used disproportionate force against protesters. Prolonged pre-trial detention is common, at times exceeding the sentence for the crime accused. A fair, effective, and accessible judicial system will build citizens' confidence in the judicial process, strengthen rule of law, and ensure stability.

**Mission Objective 1.3: Benin takes concrete steps to advance human and constitutional rights and gender equity.**

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**Justification:** Benin is a democratic society that generally respects internationally recognized human rights standards and civil liberties, though it has recently backslid in these areas. Recent human rights issues include unlawful or arbitrary killings, inadequate government action on violence against girls and women, and child labor. Improving adherence to internationally recognized human rights standards, respect for civil liberties, and gender equity will help Benin become a more peaceful, prosperous, and participatory society.

**Mission Goal 2: Partner with Benin to counter transnational, maritime, and environmental crime and improve regional stability.**

**Description and Linkages:** Benin is an active maritime security partner and a long-standing contributor to regional peacekeeping operations. The country is also used as a transit route for illegal trade. The U.S. Mission in Benin's capacity-building programs foster bilateral cooperation and support the NSS priority action of countering terrorism and trafficking in Africa. Inadequate progress on this goal could lead to weakened maritime and border security environments, leaving space for criminal and extremist groups to expand operations and threatening U.S. security and commercial interests in West Africa.

**Mission Objective 2.1:** Benin secures its borders and reduces human, narcotics, and wildlife trafficking.

**Justification:** Benin is a transit country for cocaine, methamphetamine, chemical precursors, and heroin. Benin is a source, transit, and destination country for sex and labor trafficking in persons. Benin's populations of elephants, lions, and pangolins are among the highest in West Africa. Criminal networks and extremist groups exploit security vulnerabilities in national parks, ports, and land borders.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Benin continues its efforts to counter the influence and reach of extremist groups in the Sahel and its support of U.S.-led counterterrorism initiatives.

**Justification:** There is a growing threat of extremist ideologies and movements in West Africa. Benin is a motivated and committed partner to regional peacekeeping operations. The Government of Benin's effort to prevent and counter violent extremism inside the country addresses root causes, consonant with the U.S. strategy focus on drivers of extremism worldwide.

**Mission Objective 2.3:** Improve fraud prevention strategies and modernize consular communication and support for U.S. citizens in order to better protect American citizens at home and in Benin.

**Justification:** Readily available visa facilitators and falsified documents in Benin make fraud prevention and detection activities essential to keeping bad actors out of the United States. The poor quality of emergency medical care and other social services, underdeveloped transportation and telecommunications infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies increase the embassy support required by U.S. citizens in

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crisis in Benin. The consular section will modernize its communication and support to U.S. citizens through the American Liaison Network and adopt strategies to root out all forms of consular fraud.

**Mission Goal 3: Benin is better able to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and implement effective and transparent development initiatives.**

**Description and Linkages:** This goal reflects the National Security Strategy and Joint Regional Strategy focus on supporting African nations to move from assistance recipients to enduring partners that promote prosperity, improve the business environment, and become strong trade partners. This goal is also reflective of the USAID Journey to Self-Reliance framework that focuses on locally sustained results, mobilizing public and private revenues, and strengthening local capacities. The fight against poverty remains at the heart of Benin's development agenda. This effort requires bringing electricity to Beninese businesses and homes, promoting economic growth and trade, and improving health outcomes in order to have a healthy, capable workforce. In alignment with the Joint Regional Strategy's objective of promoting and protecting fundamental rights and liberties, these efforts will place a special focus on reducing gender-based violence and supporting those who have been affected, strengthening women's roles regarding health care decisions for themselves and their families, and promoting women's leadership, including in determining health budgets, and monitoring for accountability and transparency from the national to the community level. Not achieving this goal could lead to weakened economic growth and hinder progress on rights and human development indicators.

**Mission Objective 3.1: Benin capitalizes on U.S. assistance and trade-preference programs in order to attain broad-based, sustainable economic growth and closer trade linkages with the United States.**

**Justification:** Weak economic growth undercuts Benin's ability to serve as a strong partner to the United States across all domains of foreign policy. More than 70 percent of Benin's population remains dependent on agriculture, which contributes up to 35 percent of the GDP. Cotton accounts for 70 percent of official export earnings followed by cashew, shea butter, pineapples, and sea food. The Government of Benin's vision is to diversify its economy through a more robust services sector and become a major exporter of agricultural products by 2025. Benin is also encouraging new information and communications technology in an attempt to boost economic growth.

Mission Cotonou will increase efforts to support Benin's growing economy, focusing specifically on increasing U.S.-Benin economic activity by promoting AGOA, encouraging business climate improvements that create a level playing field for local and international companies alike, encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship, increasing the reliability of energy for the country's economic transformation, and supporting the transition of small enterprises to the formal economy. Mission Cotonou will draw upon the Prosper Africa initiative to accomplish this objective.

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The 2017-2022 Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact will increase the quantity and quality of electric power in Benin through policy reforms, institutional strengthening, and infrastructure investments. The Compact aims to: (i) strengthen the national electricity utility through a management contract, support the independent electricity regulator, and enact tariff reforms; (ii) attract private sector investment in solar power production; (iii) fund nationwide distribution grid modernization; and (iv) increase access to electricity through off-grid electrification.

**Mission Objective 3.2:** A healthier and more inclusive society is fostered by expanding the delivery of health services and strengthening the governance of health sector resources.

**Justification:** Benin's development is impeded by the extremely poor health status of its citizens, which is evidenced by extraordinarily high infant, child, and maternal mortality rates. More than a third of Beninese children suffer from chronic malnutrition, which significantly contributes to premature deaths. Poor water quality and sanitation furthermore increases the incidence of diarrhea and other infectious diseases, resulting in annual cholera outbreaks. Infectious disease is also a top public health threat in Benin, and deeply affects the wellbeing of its citizens and significantly weakens its workforce. Endemic malaria is the leading cause for all hospital visits and the primary cause of child mortality. Although bed net ownership and use are improving, malaria prevalence remains high with almost a third of children carrying malaria parasites. Neglected Tropical Diseases, a diverse set of communicable diseases that primarily affect populations living in poverty, further take a heavy human toll, causing chronic illness, blindness, and physical disfigurements.

Benin's population growth rate of approximately 3 percent annually is unsustainable and will have serious consequences on the country's development if left unchecked. Benin's low contraceptive prevalence rate of 12.5 percent is an outlier for the region, falling well below neighboring countries. Together, these trends are costly to individuals, families, and communities, and ultimately to the nation as it tries to respond to the chronic burden of disease and reduced productivity. Benin will require a strong and healthy workforce to overcome its major development challenges. The U.S. government will help to strengthen Benin's capacity to foster a healthier, more inclusive society by expanding the delivery (both supply and demand) of essential health services, strengthening the management systems that govern health sector resources, and ensuring the most marginalized groups in Benin are more integrated within the larger society. The U.S. aims to partner with Beninese counterparts to develop stable, resilient, and self-reliant healthcare systems that endure long after foreign assistance has been provided.

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## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1: Improve the Mission's effectiveness in attaining ICS goals with an enhanced diplomatic platform, including improved services.**

**Justification:** The U.S. Embassy in Cotonou moved into the New Embassy Compound (NEC) in 2015. Frequent electricity cuts require backup systems to ensure a reliable power supply when the main feed is down, and the Mission will take steps to reduce consumption at the NEC and at residences to reduce electricity costs. Workforce efficiencies can also be gained by improving the mission's IT infrastructure and updating the housing and residential property platform while maintaining high standards of cost efficiency and accountability.

**Management Objective 2: Build a more effective workforce through competitive recruitment and effective personnel development practices that capitalizes on the Mission's diverse workforce.**

**Justification:** In order to maximize the Mission's effectiveness and enable it to fully implement the ICS goals and objectives, we need to recruit competitively and advance existing personnel development efforts in order to ensure every staff member has the skills, resources, and motivation to perform at the highest possible level.

**Management Objective 3: Increase the efficiency and quality of service deliverables by streamlining management controls**

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