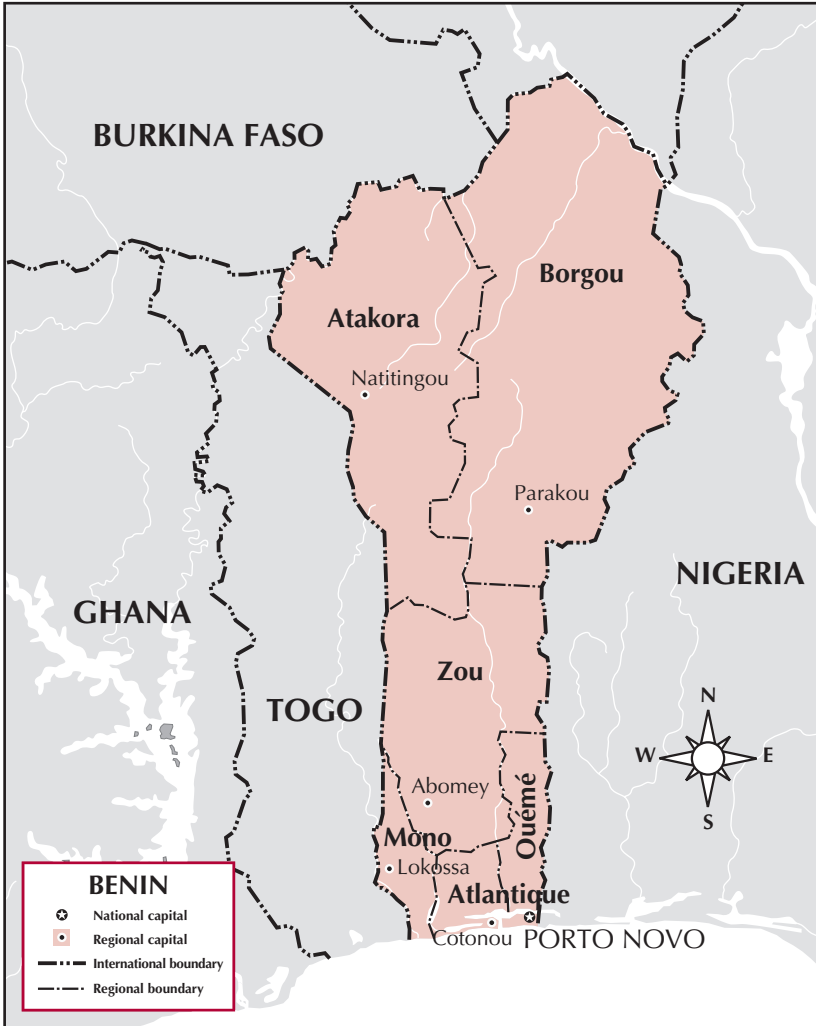


PART II

ARMED GROUPS AND SMALL ARMS IN ECOWAS MEMBER STATES (1998-2004)

PART II



BENIN

OVERVIEW

Following a series of post-independence military coups, Major Mathieu Kérékou took power in 1972 and gradually brought Benin to civilian rule. Although defeated in the 1991 elections, he returned to power following peaceful multiparty elections in 1996.¹ Today the country benefits from a political system that has remained open and pluralistic. Future stability, however, is to a large extent dependent on the country's economy, which is faltering and has contributed to rising levels of armed banditry and weapons trafficking.² Kérékou was re-elected in 2001; the next presidential elections are slated for 2006.

OUTLOOK

Unlike other countries in the subregion, Benin presently does not have a serious problem with internal displacement or refugees.³ But small arms-related insecurity is likely to become a growing problem. Throughout 2004, banditry was on the rise, with roadblocks on the highway between

Cotonou and Malanville a major problem. Though daytime travel is relatively safe, every night armed police now escort two convoys up and down the road because the trip has otherwise become simply too dangerous.⁴

Fortunately—for Benin, at least—many of the weapons circulating in the country are not staying there. For example, United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported that in 2002 Benin intercepted a shipment of 1,000 rounds of ammunition on its way from Burkina Faso to Nigeria, and in so doing arrested the leader of a network involved in the trafficking of small arms.⁵ Various press reports suggest, however, that Benin continues to be a transit point for arms and ammunition entering Nigeria.⁶ Indeed, in August 2003, Nigeria unilaterally closed its border with Benin in response to smuggling and armed robbery concerns.⁷ The border was subsequently reopened, but the problem remains.

PART II

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|---|
| DRC | Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| IRIN | United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks |

ENDNOTES

- 1 BBC News (2004).
- 2 Other reports link the rise in crime to the economic downturn, especially following the 2003 shutdown of the illegal second-hand car trade with Nigeria (IRIN, 2004).
- 3 At the end of 2003, Benin was host to about 5,000 refugees, including more than 1,000 from Togo, 1,000 from the Republic of Congo, nearly 1,000 from Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and about 2,000 from other countries (USCR, 2004).
- 4 IRIN (2004).
- 5 IRIN (2002).
- 6 Various press reports retrieved from the *NISAT Black Market Archive* available at <<http://www.nisat.org>>. See also Radio Kaduna Nigeria (2003); Bah (2004, p. 36).
- 7 GoN (2003).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bah, Alhaji. 2004. 'Micro-disarmament in West Africa: The ECOWAS Moratorium on Small Arms and Light Weapons.' *African Security Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 33–46.
- BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) News. 2004. *Country Profile: Benin*. Accessed April 2005.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1064527.stm>.
- GoN (Government of Nigeria). 2003. 'Government Closes Border with Benin Republic.' *Nigeriafirst*. 11 August. Accessed April 2005. <http://www.nigeriafirst.org/article_934.shtml>
- IRIN (United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks). 2002. 'Benin: Gendarmes Seize Nigeria-bound Ammunition.' 5 February. Accessed April 2005. <<http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=20408>>
- . 2004. 'Growing Banditry Forces Traffic to Travel in Armed Convoys.' 10 September. Accessed December 2004.
<<http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=43119>>
- Radio Kaduna Nigeria. 2003. 'Nigeria: Customs Authorities Recover Arms, Ammunition "Smuggled" from Benin'. Kaduna. 17 November. Accessed April 2005.
<<http://worldnews.xignite.com/xWorldNews.aspx?articleid=AFP20031118000189>>

USCR (United States Committee for Refugees).

2004. *World Refugee Survey 2004. Country*

Report: Benin. Accessed March 2004.

<<http://www.refugees.org/country-reports.aspx?id=70>>.