

Benin: Another coup attempt in an ECOWAS country

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Event

On 7 December, a group of soldiers led by special forces commander Pascal Tigri declared it had ousted President Talon after attacking the homes of senior military officials and storming the state broadcaster. Within a few hours, the coup attempt was foiled by loyalist forces supported by air strikes carried out by Nigeria and backed by French intelligence. This was followed by the deployment of Nigeria-led ECOWAS troops in Benin's major city Cotonou. Coup leader Tigri managed to flee, allegedly to Togo.

Impact

The putschists listed grievances over rising authoritarianism and the worsening security situation in the northern border region when staging their attacks. Political unrest has been increasing ahead of the April 2026 president elections, for which a ruling party successor was appointed while opposition candidates were virtually excluded. Recently approved constitutional amendments will moreover offer President Talon a permanent position of influence. The expected victory for the ruling party coalition enhances prospects of policy continuity on the one hand, but civil anger over autocratic tactics and political repression will be creeping sources of instability and unrest in the longer run.

This ECOWAS intervention was by far the strongest and most successful intervention against an unconstitutional power grab in the region in years. Since 2020, it had been unable to reverse military take-overs in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Guinea-Bissau. This ECOWAS win is of strategic importance, as it sends a warning to other potential coup plotters in the region and confirms Nigeria's decisive regional leadership role. Nevertheless, it will take more for the credibility of ECOWAS as an effective institution to be restored.

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