

# BENIN



**Area:** 112,622km<sup>2</sup> (43,484 sq. mi)

**Population:** 11,340,504 (July 2018 est.)

**Capital:** Porto Novo (population 1,302,910; largest city)

**Ethnic groups:** Hausa Fon and related 38.4%, Adja and related 15.1%, Yoruba and related 12%, Bariba and related 9.6%, Fulani and related 8.6%, Ottamari and related 6.1%, Yoa-Lokpa and related 4.3%, Dendi and related 2.9%, other 0.9%, foreigner 1.9% (2013 est.)

**Languages:** French (official), Fon and Yoruba (most common vernaculars in south), tribal languages (at least six major ones in north)

**Religions:** Muslim 27.7%, Roman Catholic 25.5%, Protestant 13.5% (Celestial 6.7%, Methodist 3.4%, other Protestant 3.4%), Vodoun 11.6%, other Christian 9.5%, other traditional religions 2.6%, other 2.6%, none 5.8% (2013 est.)

**Life expectancy:** Total life expectancy is 61.1 years. (Male 59.7; female 62.4 [2015 estimate])

**Literacy rate:** 38.4% (2015 est.)% (male 49.9%; female 27.3% [2015 estimate])

**Education:** The education program adheres to the French model of 6-4-3, and is compulsory from age six through to age eleven. This period is spent at primary school where children receive their foundation education. Primary school participation rate (male 72%, female 68%). Primary school survival rate 56% The following four years are spent at middle school where a general academic curriculum continues. Students who wish to pursue their academic options further proceed to senior high school for another three years. Next, one must pass their baccalaureate examination which is the key to the doors of university. A student may go to one of five vocational schools spread across twelve provinces instead. Benin has reformed its vocational training system in line with urban demand for skilled labor. Notable among its strategies is a dual apprenticeship system, where theoretical education alternates with practical apprenticeship training. Lower order tertiary institutions in Benin include a school of applied economics & management, a national school of administration & prosecutor training, a polytechnic, a teachers' training school and several others. There are two universities, of which the National University of Benin illustrated here is the more prestigious. It was established in 1970 originally as the Université du Dahomey, and has nineteen institutions and six campuses.

**Climate:** Benin is tropical, hot and humid in the south, and semiarid (quite dry) in north. Overall, the dry season runs from November to April, and a rainy season from the end of April through September. The mean temperature is near 80 degrees (26°C).

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** \$9.246 billion (2017 est.) The GDP per capita in Benin is \$2,300 (2017 est.). Primary economic activities: Agriculture (farming and animal husbandry, 38.5% of GDP, 90% of employment), industry, other services.

**Primary crops:** cotton, corn, cassava (manioc, tapioca), yams, beans, palm oil, peanuts, cashews; livestock

**Industries:** textiles, food processing, construction materials, cement

Present day Benin was the site of Dahomey, a West African kingdom that rose to prominence in about 1600 and over the next two and a half centuries became a regional power, largely based on its slave trade. Benin's shore includes what used to be known as the Slave Coast, the departure point for captives to be shipped across the Atlantic. Elements of the culture and religion brought by slaves from the area are still present in the Americas, including voodoo - which has made a comeback in Benin and is even celebrated at the country's annual Voodoo Day. Coastal areas of Dahomey began to be controlled by the French in the second half of the 19th century; the entire kingdom was conquered by 1894. French Dahomey achieved independence in 1960; it changed its name to the Republic of Benin in 1975.

A succession of military governments ended in 1972 with the rise to power of Mathieu Kerekou. Mathieu Kerekou overthrew the ruling triumvirate in 1972, and forced himself into a presidential role, stating that Benin would not

"burden itself by copying foreign ideology, and wants neither Capitalism, Communism, nor Socialism."

A move to representative government began in 1989. Riots broke out in 1989 after the banking system collapsed, and Kerekou was forced to arrange elections. Two years later, free elections ushered in former Prime Minister Nicephore SOGLO as president, marking the first successful transfer of power in Africa from a dictatorship to a democracy. In the 1990's Benin became the first African country to successfully transition from a dictatorship to a pluralistic political system, and Prime Minister Nicephore Soglo secured a win in the presidential election, remaining in office until Kerekou returned to power in 1996.

Kerekou was returned to power by elections held in 1996 and 2001, though some irregularities were alleged. Kerekou stepped down at the end of his second term in 2006 and was succeeded by Thomas Yayi Boni, a political outsider and independent, who won a second five-year term in March 2011. Patrice Talon, a wealthy businessman, took office in 2016 after campaigning to restore public confidence in the government

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Compiled by Mark Holman in January 2019