

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of Benin

**CAPITAL:** Porto Novo (Official) and Cotonou (Economic and Political)

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 112,622 Sq Km (43,484 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 6,107,200

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Benin is located in West Africa. It is bound by Niger to the north, Burkina Faso to the northwest, Nigeria to the east, Togo to the west and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The country has four natural topographical regions. (1.) A coastal belt which has four lagoons, the Cotonou, Ouidah, Grand Popo and Porto Novo while further north the land rises steeply to a savannah plateau. (2.) The Lama which is a wide marshy depression. (3.) The Atakora Mountains in the northwest and (4.) the eastern plains of Borgu and Kandi which slope to the Niger basin. The country is covered with dense vegetation and has many major rivers which includes the Niger which forms part of the northeastern border with Niger, the Queme which is the longest river, the Mono which forms the border with Togo and the Couffo. Other long rivers which are subject to flooding are the Mekrou, Alibory, Sota and Pandjari. Major Cities (pop. est.); Cotonou 533,000, Porto Novo 178,000, Djougou 132,000, Abomey Calavi 126,000, Parakou 107,000 (1992). Land Use; forested 31%, pastures 4%, agricultural-cultivated 17%, other 48% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Benin has a tropical climate with three climatic zones. (1.) The northern zone which has two seasons the wet season from July to September and the dry season which is hot with very low humidity. (2.) The central zone which has two wet seasons, a long one between March and June and a short one between October and mid November as well as a long dry season between November and March. (3.) The coastal zone to the south which has a steady temperature with rainfall occurring throughout the year especially during the Guinean Monsoon between May to October. The prevailing wind is the Saharan Harmattan, a hot dry dust laden wind that blows from the northeast and occurs between

December to March. Average annual precipitation varies between 960 mm (38 inches) in the north and 1,340 mm (53 inches) in the south. Average annual temperature ranges in Cotonou are from 23 degrees Celsius (73 degrees Fahrenheit) in August to 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit) in May.

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**PEOPLE:** Around 99% of the population are Black Africans of 42 ethnic groups. The four largest which constitute 54% of the population are the Fon, the Adja, the Bariba and the Yoruba. The 42 groups can be divided into five broad cluster groups (1.) the Voltaic, (2.) the Sudanese, (3.) the Fulani, (4.) the Ewe and (5.) the Yoruba. There is also a small European community, of which the French constitute the largest group.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 42 persons per sq km (110 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 19.0% urban, 81.0% rural (1985). Sex Distribution; 49.4% male, 50.6% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 44.4 years male, 47.6 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 47% under 15, 26% 15 to 29, 14% 30 to 44, 8% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 49.2 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 19.3 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 29.9 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 110.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

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**RELIGION:** Around 61% of the population follow local native tribal beliefs, 23% are Christians mostly located in the south and predominantly Roman Catholic while 15% are Muslims. Most of the Muslims are accounted for by the Fulani, Bariba and Dendi tribes.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is French, although many of the local tribal languages are important with 47% of the population speaking Fon, 12% Adja, 10% Bariba, 9% Yoruba, 5% Somba and 5% Aizo.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 89.2%, primary 8.3%, secondary 2.2%, higher 0.3% (1979). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 23.4% (1990).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** Social unrest and political rivalries have led to frequent changes in Benin's government since the country's independence on Aug. 1, 1960 after long French rule. Military leaders overthrew the government several times during the 1960's and 1970's. In May 1970 a civilian government was formed and headed by a three man presidential council. During Oct. 1973 the military led by Maj. Mathieu Kerekou again took control of the country. The government then embarked on a nationalization program and took control of Benin's most important businesses, industries, banks and industrial firms. In 1975 Pres. Kerekou founded the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin, the country's only legal party. In Dec. 1975 the country's name was also officially changed from Dahomey to the People's Republic of Benin. After a failed coup attempt in Jan. 1977 by French mercenaries relations with France virtually broke down, however, in 1978 France resumed aid payments to Benin. In 1981 three former Presidents were released from prison. Since 1980 the government has embarked on an economic liberalization program to encourage foreign investment and on Mar. 28, 1988 the military attempted to seize power again which resulted in the arrest of 150 officers. In Feb. 1990 approval was given to shift power away from the President, to legalize opposition parties, to change the country's official name, to remove the old guard cabinet and to appoint a new cabinet. In the same year former dissident Nicephore Soglo was elected as Prime Minister. In March 1991 the country's first free elections in 30 years were held and Kerekou was succeeded by Prime Minister Soglo as President on April 4, 1991. During Apr. 1991 further unrest and strikes by students in protest to poor living conditions as well as the non-payment of grants, resulted in clashes with security police. In May 1992 some 5,000 government workers demanded better working conditions, higher wages, the right to strike and greater freedom of the press. Also in May there was a failed coup attempt while on July 4, 1992 the government quelled a mutiny led by a former member of Pres. Kerekou's guard at the Kaba Camp in Natitingou without force. During 1992

Mohammed Cisse a former minister of the state was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for misappropriation of funds while state privatization continued at a slower rate than expected due to an overall weakness in the world economy. In Feb. 1993 Pope John Paul II visited Benin to meet with religious and voodoo leaders while in the same month the International Voodoo Art and Culture Festival opened in Ouidah. In April 1993 clashes between muslims and voodoo followers resulted in 2 deaths and 24 injuries. In July 1993 Pres. Soglo, officially above politics, announced he was joining the Renaissance Party of Benin and in October he lost his majority in the government. However, two weeks later 11 groups rallied behind the President to form the African Assembly for Progress and Solidarity. Also during 1993 increasing hostilities between the press and the government developed with the publisher of Le Soleil being jailed for libel against the President's wife.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the CFA Franc (Communaute Financiere Africaine-CFAF) divided into 100 Centimes.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$2,182,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$1,409,000,000 (1993). Imports; CFAF 203,200,000,000 (1994). Exports; CFAF 167,100,000,000 (1994). Tourism Receipts; USD \$38,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; CFAF - 36,100,000 (1994). Economically Active Population; 2,195,000 or 46.0% of total population (1991). Unemployed; N/A.

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are France, other EU countries, Nigeria, China, Japan and the USA.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Beans, Cassava, Coffee, Cotton, Ground Nuts, Maize, Palm Products, Sorghum, Yams.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Agriculture, Beverages, Cement, Cotton, Ginning, Palm Kernels, Palm Oil, Oil Processing, Textiles.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Cashew Nuts, Cocoa, Cotton, Palm Oil, Palm  
Kernels, Sea Products.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 635 km (395 mi) (1989),  
passenger-km 137,600,000 (85,501,000 passenger-mi) (1985), cargo ton-  
km 176,800,000 (121,090,000 short ton-mi) (1985). Roads; length 7,445  
km (4,626 mi) (1986). Vehicles; cars 22,000 (1989), trucks and buses  
12,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 13 (1990), deadweight tonnage  
4,610 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 208,567,000 (129,597,000  
passenger-mi) (1988), cargo ton-km 35,223,000 (24,124,000 short ton-  
mi) (1990).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 1 with a circulation  
of 12,000 (1990). Radio; receivers 400,000 (1994). Television; receivers  
20,000 (1994). Telephones; units 20,410 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 4,300 (1995) total active duty personnel with 93.8% army,  
3.1% navy and 3.1% air force while military expenditure accounts for  
1.3% (1992) of the Gross National Product (GNP).