

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Islamic Republic of Mauritania

**CAPITAL:** Nouakchott

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Unitary Multiparty Republic

**AREA:** 1,029,920 Sq Km (397,654 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION:** 2,587,100

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Mauritania is located in North West Africa. It is bound by Senegal to the southwest, Mali to the south and east, Algeria to the northeast, Western Sahara (occupied by Morocco) to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The country is divided into four geographical zones. (1.) The Saharan zone which accounts for 66% of the country and consists of shifting sand dunes, mountainous plateaux and an occasional oases. (2.) The coastal zone which is almost devoid of vegetation. (3.) The Sahelian zone with its savannah grasslands and steppes. (4.) The Chemama or Senegal River Valley zone which is a narrow belt of land with rich alluvial soil. The only permanent river is the Senegal River with floods often occurring between September and October that cover the whole valley area. Major Cities (pop. est.); Nouakchott 480,400, Nouadhibou 72,300, Kaedi 35,200, Kiffa 33,000, Rosso 31,400 (1992). Land Use; forested 4%, pastures 38%, agricultural-cultivated 0.5%, desert and other 57.5% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Mauritania has four climatic zones, although in general it has a dry tropical climate characterized by sparse and sporadic rainfall. (1.) The Chemama zone which has a rainy season from May to September while tornadoes are also common. Average annual precipitation varies from 300 to 600 mm (12 to 24 inches). (2.) The Sahelian zone which has decreasing rainfall northward and an average annual precipitation, in the south, of around 350 mm (14 inches). (3.) The coastal zone which is humid but with a temperate climate, receives less than 25 mm (1 inches) of annual precipitation. (4.) The Saharan zone receives 25 to 127 mm (1 to 5 inches) of annual precipitation with a rainy season from July to September. The Harmattan, which is a dry and dust laden wind from the Sahara Desert, intensifies the conditions. Average temperature ranges in Nouakchott are from 13 to 28 degrees Celsius (55 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit) in December to 24 to 34 degrees Celsius (75 to 97 degrees Fahrenheit) in September.

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**PEOPLE:** The principal ethnic majority are the Moor or Maure who account for 81.5% of the population. The remainder belong to the Fulbe, Toucouleur, Soninke, Wolof and Bambara tribal groups.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 2 persons per sq km (5 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 39.1% urban, 60.9% rural (1988). Sex Distribution; 49.4% male, 50.6% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 44.0 years male, 50.0 years female (1991). Age

Breakdown; 45% under 15, 26% 15 to 29, 15% 30 to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 1% 75 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 46.2 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 19.0 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 27.2 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 127.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

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**RELIGIONS:** The official religion is Islam with the majority of the population Sunni Muslims. There is also a Christian minority, predominantly Roman Catholic, which accounts for .4% of the population.

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**LANGUAGES:** The official language is Arabic which is also the national language, although a variety of African tribal languages are also spoken.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: N/A. Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 34.0% (1990).

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**MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993:** In 1946 Mauritania became an overseas territory in the French Union and in Nov. 1958 it became a self-governing state in the French Community. On Nov. 28, 1960 Mauritania became a fully independent Islamic Republic. Morocco claimed that Mauritania was historically Moroccan territory and did not recognize Mauritania's independence until 1969. In May 1961 Mauritania adopted a constitution that established a presidential system of government and Mokhtar Ould Daddah was elected President in Aug. In 1965 a constitutional amendment officially established the country as a single party state. In 1973 Mauritania joined the Arab League. In 1976 Spain gave up control of its overseas province of Spanish Sahara (Western Sahara) while Mauritania and Morocco invaded and occupied it. In July 1978 military leaders led by Col. Moustapha Ould Saleck overthrew Pres. Daddah and took control of the government by dissolving the National Assembly. Col. Saleck was in turn ousted in another coup in Apr. 1979. In 1979, Mauritania withdrew from the area it occupied in Western Sahara and signed a peace treaty. In Jan. 1980 Lt. Col.. Ould Heydalla led a coup and became President until Dec. 1984 when Col. Maaouya Ould Sidi Ahmed Taya became President in a bloodless coup. In the early 1980's a severe drought caused widespread food shortages and large losses of livestock. In 1989 relations with Senegal became strained and were broken off after two people died over claims regarding farming rights on their common border. Ethnic violence then escalated as the nationals of each country, resident in the other, were attacked resulting in Mauritania expelling 40,000 Blacks into Senegal. In Jan. 1990 the two countries exchanged artillery fire across the border. On April 15, 1991 Col. Taya ended 13 years of military rule by announcing the introduction of a multiparty democracy, a national referendum on a new constitution and new legislative elections. On July 12, 1991 there was an overwhelming vote of approval for constitutional reforms and on July 29, 1991 a general amnesty was announced with all citizens given the right to vote and be nominated for office. In Oct. 1991 four new opposition parties were officially recognized. On Jan. 24, 1992 Col. Taya won Presidential elections and in March

1992 legislative elections resulted in Taya's Democratic and Social Republican Party winning 67 of the 79 seats. On April 1992 Sidi Mohamed Ould Boubacar became Prime Minister and appointed his Cabinet that consisted of only one military representative, the Defense Minister. Also in April 1992 full diplomatic relations were reestablished with Senegal. In Oct. 1992 mass demonstrations erupted after the government, at the IMF's insistence, devalued the currency which resulted in a 40% increase in basic food items. On May 29, 1993 the government passed legislation that granted an unconditional amnesty to all military and security personnel convicted for the deaths of black Mauritians between April 1991 to April 1992. On May 30, 1993 mass demonstrations occurred in protest to the legislation resulted in police using tear gas to disperse the protesters. On June 24, 1993 the opposition leader of the Union of Democratic Forces-New Era, Hamdi Ould Mouknass was arrested while tensions between the Moors and Blacks remained high throughout the remainder of the year.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Ouguiya (UM) divided into 5 Khoums.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$947,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$2,500,000,000 (1994). Imports; UM 32,436,000,000 (1993). Exports; UM 34,599,000,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$13,000,000 (1991). Balance of Trade; UM 2,163,000,000 (1993). Economically Active Population; 654,000 or 30.5% of total population (1992). Unemployed; 50.0% (1988).

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Its main trading partners are France, Japan, Spain ,Italy, the former USSR and Belgium.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS:** Copper, Dates, Fish, Iron Ore, Livestock, Millet, Phosphates, Rice, Salt, Sorghum, Wheat.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES:** Agriculture, Cement, Fishing, Industrial Gas, Mining, Paints, Textiles.

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Iron Ore, Processed Fish.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; route length 670 km (416 mi) (1989), passenger-km 7,000,000 (4,350,000 passenger-mi) (1984), cargo ton-km 6,743,000,000 (4,618,000,000 short ton-mi) (1987). Roads; length 7,558 km (4,696 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 8,000 (1989), trucks and buses 5,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 121 (1990), deadweight tonnage 22,397 (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) (1988).

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Daily Newspapers; total of 1 with a circulation of N/A. (1993). Radio; receivers 300,000 (1993). Television; receivers 1,100 (1993). Telephones; units 7,600 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** 15,650 (1995) total active duty personnel with 95.8% army, 3.2% navy and 1.0% air force while military expenditure accounts for 2.8% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).