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Benin at 60

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Citation

Dietz A.J., E. D. W. L. , V. F. (2020). Benin at 60. *Ascl Infosheet*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/133395>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



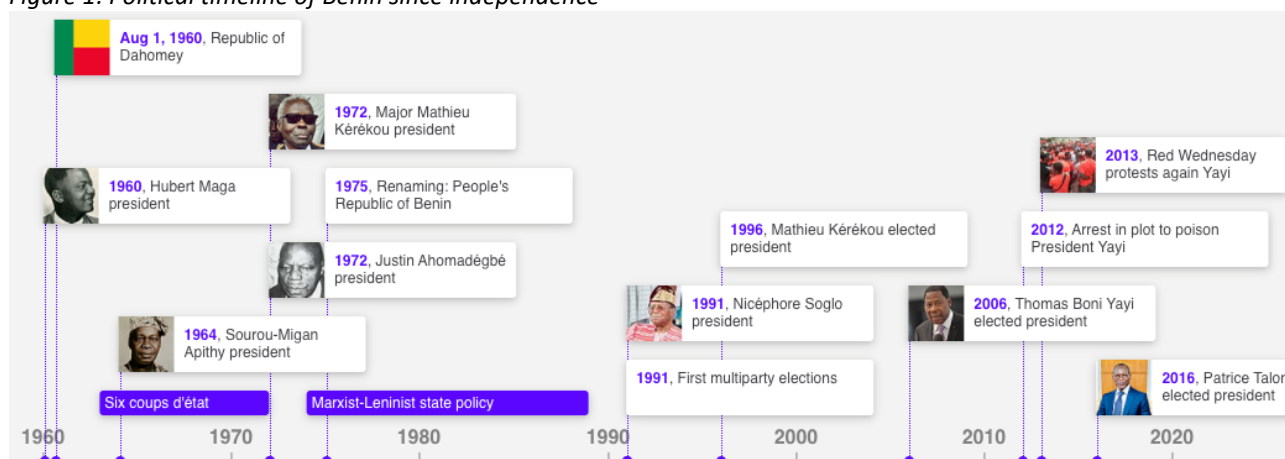
Benin at 60

Political history

1960 was the 'Year of Africa': many former colonies in Africa became politically independent. Of the seventeen colonies gaining independence in that year,

Benin (earlier known as Dahomey) was the seventh one: on August 1. Benin/Dahomey had been a French colony from 1894 onwards, as part of French West Africa (see Figure 1 for a political timeline).

Figure 1: Political timeline of Benin since independence



Dahomey became an autonomous republic within the French Community in 1959, after which it became independent in August 1960. Upon independence, the country struggled with regionalist competition in the nationalist movement – not unlike its large, former British neighbour, Nigeria. The subsequent decade was tumultuous, with economic hardship as well as student and trade union protests, six successful military coups d'état, and several periods of military rule. Major Mathieu Kérékou brought stability along a Marxist-Leninist state policy, implementing nationalisation of the economy as well as top-down economic planning, and (in 1975) a new name: 'République Populaire du Benin'.

Following the end of the Cold War, the country was renamed the Republic of Benin in 1990. In this new era, political liberalisation and the introduction of more market-based economic policies strengthened Benin's international reputation. But ultimately, these reforms left much to desire in terms of development and the well-being of most Beninese citizens. Politics has been organised around multi-party elections, with relatively positive evaluations (e.g. 13/54 in the Ibrahim Index of

African Governance). The first post-Cold War elections in 1991 resulted in a change of president, as Nicéphore Soglo defeated Kérékou. The latter regained the presidency five years later though, for two consecutive terms. Former World Bank executive Thomas Boni Yayi then won the 2006 elections, and survived an alleged attempt to poison him in 2012. In 2013, he then faced large-scale protests ('Red Wednesday') against his constitutional amendment attempts to support a third-term presidency. After leaving office in 2016, he was succeeded by businessman Patrice Talon.

Conflict, state fragility, and travel risks

Benin is not very high on the 'security risk' indices. Before the corona crisis, in December 2019, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs had put most of the country in the 'yellow' zone (= relatively mild risks), although it had put the border zone with Burkina Faso in the red zone (= don't travel) [Currently, July 2020, all 'danger zoning' has been disturbed by the global COVID-19 crisis]. The North of Benin is close to the

recent trouble zones of Burkina Faso, and close to unstable Northern Nigeria.

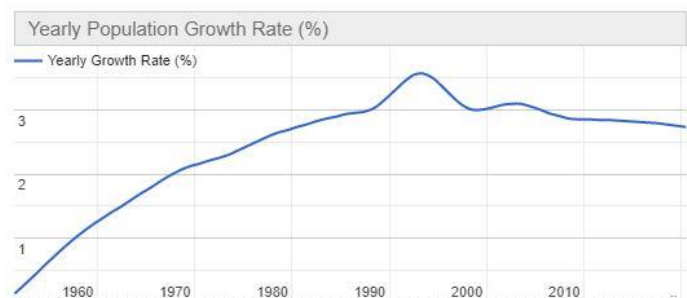
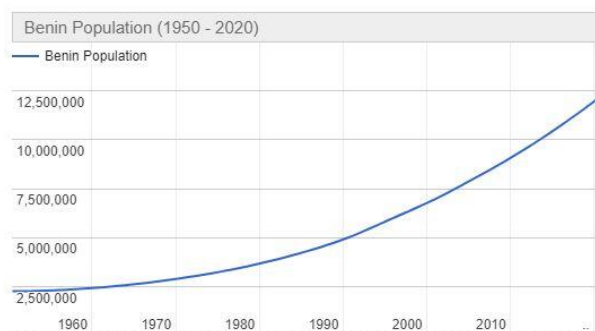
The State Fragility Index of the Fund for Peace puts Benin in the 'elevated warning range', with 73.6 points (most negative score would be 120.0 points; for Africa, 'elevated warning' is a relatively mild category) (<https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/9511904-fragilestatesindex.pdf>). The index consists of twelve variables, and Benin has relatively good scores for 'group grievances' and for state legitimacy, but problematic scores for the quality of public services and for unequal development (also see below).

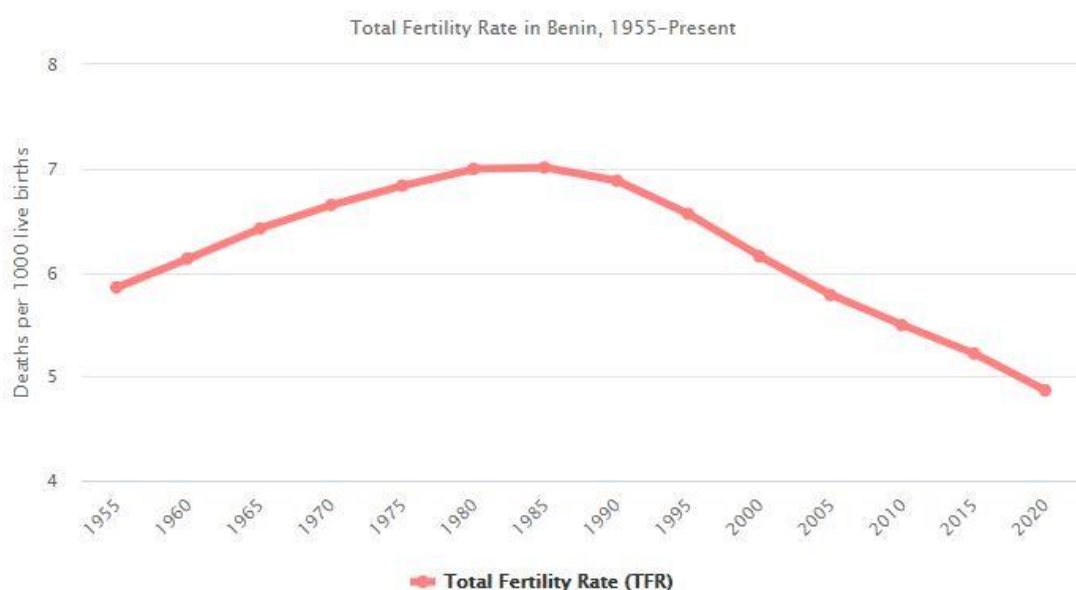


<https://geology.com/world/benin-map.gif>

Demography

Benin's population increased almost fivefold between 1960 and 2020, from 2.4 million in 1960 to 12.1 million in early 2020, mostly through high fertility rates and longer life expectancy for both males and females (also because of rapidly improving child and infant mortality figures). Population growth figures were always more than two-and-a-half percent per year since 1976, and beyond three percent per year between 1988 and 2005. Currently the average growth rate is around 2.7 percent per year. Total fertility was around 6.1 per woman in 1960; it first increased to 7.0 around 1985, and then started to diminish relatively fast, with currently 4.9 births per average woman in Benin during her lifetime. As a result of these demographic developments Benin has a very skewed population pyramid, with many more young people than adults and elderly people. The median age changed from 20.9 years old in 1960, to only 17.1 years old in 1990, and currently 18.8 years old. Urbanisation is on the increase, and will soon reach 50% of the total population.





Source: Worldometers



Source: <https://www.populationpyramid.net/benin/>

Demographic statistics, Benin as a whole, 1960 and 2020

	1960	2020
Population	2.4 million	12.1 million
Fertility rate	6.1 children per woman	4.9 children per woman
Life expectancy (males)	37.8 years	61.2 years
Idem (females)	39.0 years	64.5 years
Median age	20.9 years	18.8 years
Infant mortality (< 1 yr)	176/1000	54/1000
Under-5 mortality	296/1000	85/1000
Urbanization rate	9%	48%
Urban population	0.2 million	5.9 million
Rural population	2.2 million	6.2 million

Source: Worldometers

Human Development Index, Benin as a whole, 1990 and 2018

Human Development Index data exist since 1990, with annual UNDP updates. In 1990, Benin's Human Development Index started at a level of 0.348. The HDI consists of a health index, an income index and an education index, while UNDP also provides data about life expectancy, and some other indicators. For Benin the various components of the HDI all show gradual improvement. Between 1990 and 2018 Benin's total

HDI increased with .172 points to .520 (163th out of 189 ranked countries). The increase in the HDI between 1990 and 2018 can be attributed to improvements in all components: health, education and standard of living, and can also be seen in the data for life expectancy. However, the most significant growth took place in education. Average income levels per capita (in US\$ of 2011, PPP) currently are estimated to be 2,135\$/capita, 50% better than in 1990.

Benin: HDI composition, and life expectancy; data for 1990, and 2018

	1990	2018	2018/1990
Health Index	0.520	0.638	1.23
Income Index *	0.402	0.462	1.15
Education Index	0.201	0.476	2.37
Life Expectancy	53.8	61.5	1.14
Total HDI index	0.348	0.520	1.49

Source: <https://globaldatalab.org> 4.0; * = for 2018 called 'standard of living component'.

Trade statistics, Benin: exports and imports, 2017

In 2017, Benin exported products for a total value of 629 million \$, and imported for a total value of 4.34 billion \$ (mostly from China, India, Malaysia, USA, and France, in that order), resulting in a major negative

trade balance. Leading import products were woven cotton, palm oil, rice, fake hair, and cars, in that order.

The most important export products and most important export destinations in 2017 were:

Main export products (value in \$ million)	Main export destinations (value in \$ million)
Raw cotton	148
Nuts	140
Refined petroleum	74
Gold	68
Scrap copper	40
India	195
China	86
Mali	76
Lebanon	71
South Korea	27

Source: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/ben/>

Protected areas and Forests

Benin currently has two national parks, three national (hunting) reserves, one special fauna reserve, two Ramsar sites, and two UNESCO-MAB biosphere reserves. (<http://www.parks.it/world/BJ/index.html>). According to Protectedplanet, currently 3.4 million hectares are protected areas (30 % of Benin's total area; and this source mentions 59 protected areas; <https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/BEN>).

There is no marine protected area in Benin's portion of the Atlantic Ocean. Benin has 4.6 million hectares of forests (41% of its total land area). However, every year

60,000 hectares of forests have disappeared; between 1990 and 2010 Benin has lost 20% of its forest cover (<https://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Benin.htm>). Other areas are mainly 'other wooded land', and areas for agriculture, livestock, hunting and gathering.

Agricultural Benin

Crop Area (in 1000 hectares), and total production (in 1000 tonnes), 1961 and 2018, in the order of the crop areas in 2018.

	1961		2018		2018/1961	
	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.	Area	Prod.
Maize	376	220	1158	1510	3.1	6.9
Cashewnuts	2	0	622	215	311.0	+++
Cotton seed	21	2	600	758	28.6	379.0
Sorghum	123	61	293	319	2.4	6.4
Cassava	74	280	281	3820	3.8	13.6
Groundnuts	74	26	226	226	3.1	8.7
Yams	69	614	217	2945	3.1	4.8
Dry beans and other pulses	133	38	200	193	1.5	5.1
Soybeans	-	-	200	222	+++	+++
Rice paddy	2	1	135	459	67.5	459.0
Vegetables	16	41	110	616	6.9	15.0
Fruits	3	118	68	587	22.7	5.0
Oil palm fruit/oil/kernel	30	379	34	724	1.1	1.9
Millet	23	7	29	26	1.3	3.7
Other nuts	12	46	27	33	2.3	0.7
Other crops	23	19	12	73	0.5	3.8
Total (area)	981		4212		4.3	

2018/1961: **red** = 2018 is below 1961; **green**: 2018 is more than 4.7 times the 1961 figures (that is: more than population increase in Benin from 2.5 to 11.5 million between 1961 and 2018); black: in-between.

Source: Faostat data.

Benin's land area is 11.3 million hectares, and its crop area increased from 8.7% to 37.3% of its land area between 1961 and 2018. Almost all food crop areas expanded, and expansion was very rapid for rice, and soybeans. But also the cotton area has expanded tremendously. Not only the areas of almost all crops have expanded (much) more than Benin's population numbers, also crop yields became (much) higher. Benin's crop history is a major African success story. Benin can feed its population much better than in 1961, but it also increased its crop exports, and this is particularly true for cotton, but also for fruits. The only

problematic figure in the table above is for 'other nuts/production', and that is mainly caused by serious yield reductions for coconuts. Also oil palm is not doing very well.

The numbers of all live animals, measured in stock units, expanded more rapidly than Benin's population in these almost sixty years: 760% compared with 466%. Per capita the numbers of live animals in the country increased from 0.15 to 0.20. The best performance can be seen for cattle and goats; the growth of the number of pigs lagged behind.

Livestock numbers (x 1000)

	1961	2018	2018/1961
Cattle	322	2,462	X7.6
Chicken	5,000	21,304	X4.3
Goats	421	1,921	X4.6
Pigs	240	504	X2.1
Sheep	287	954	X3.3
Livestock units	370	2273	X6.1

Source: Faostat data; 1 livestock unit = based on 0.7 cattle; 0.1 goats/sheep/pigs; 0.01 chicken.

International migration

In 2015 616,000 people who were born in Benin lived outside the country (5.5% of Benin's total population of 11.2 million people inside and outside the country during that year), of which 585,000 million elsewhere in Africa (mainly Nigeria, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Gabon, in that order), and 31,000 outside Africa (less than 0.3% of Benin's total population: most of them in France; UN migration report 2015). In 2017 Benin had

around 253,000 immigrants, mainly from Niger, Togo, and Nigeria (UN Migration Report 2017). Between 1990 and 2017 the number of immigrants increased from 76,000 to 253,000.

Urban Benin

Benin's urban population increased from only 200,000 people in 1960 (only 9% of its national population at Independence) to 5.9 million in 2020 (48%). Growth has

been rapid for all cities. Between 1960 and 2020 the population increase was at least tenfold in all cities. The most rapid development took place in Djougou in the Northwest. However, the urban area of Abomey-Calavi, not far from Cotonou, experienced a population

explosion, and together with Cotonou, can now be regarded as an agglomeration of more than one million inhabitants. Its growth was so rapid that it can not or hardly be found on older maps.




Source: <http://www.vidiani.com/detailed-administrative-and-road-map-of-benin-with-cities-and-airports/>

Major urban areas in Benin

Cities (and region)	Population in thousands of inhabitants		
	Macrotrends: 1960	Worldometers, city, as given in 2020	Populationstat, City and Urban area, 2019
Cotonou (Littoral)	73	780	692/691
Abomey-Calavi (Atlantique)	21	386	386/1,044
Djougou (Donga)	8	237	237/341
Porto-Novo (Queme)	20	234	--
Parakou (Borgou)	13	164	164/355
Bohicon (Zou)	<10	125	--
Kandi (Alibori)	<10	110	--

Source for 2020: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/benin-population/>;
also: <https://populationstat.com/benin>

Regional Inequality

Map	Region / Région	Population x 1000		'18/ '90
		1990	2018	
	1 = Atakora/Donga	826	1750	2.1
	2 = Atlantique/ Littoral (incl. Cotonou)	971	2880	3.0
	3 = Borgou/Alibori	1023	1950	1.9
	4 = Mono/Couffo	660	1340	2.0
	5 = Queme (incl. Porto Novo)/Plateau	787	1770	2.2
	6 = Zou/Collines	733	1810	2.5
Total Benin		5000	11500	2.3

Source: <https://globaldatalab.org> 4.0;

map: <https://www.geographicguide.com/africa-maps/images/benin-political-map.jpg>

Benin has 12 Regions, but Globaldatalab uses six. Between 1990 and 2018 all regions experienced population growth, but the highest growth happened in Atlantique/Littoral, the area around Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi (not to be confused with Abomey, much more to the North). High population growth was not so much experienced in the area of the Northeast (Borgou/Alibori). If we look at the regional data for human development, which for Benin exist since 1990, we see that across the board improvements have taken

place between 1990 and 2018. Both in 1990 and in 2018 the best conditions existed in the coastal region around Cotonou, both for the HDI index as a whole, and for the education situation, while average life expectancy was also relatively high (but not the highest, that position was for Queme/Plateau in 1990 (the area of capital city Porto Novo) and shifted to Borgou/Alibori in 2017, an area with many foreign health-related NGOs. Otherwise Borgou/Alibori was the least developed region, both in 1990 and in 2018.

Region	Subregional HDI			Life expectancy			Education index		
	1990	2018	18/90	1990	2018	18/90	1990	2018	18/90
1	304	480	1.58	52.8	59.2	1.12	149	413	2.77
2	433	611	1.41	54.5	62.1	1.14	332	683	2.06
3	294	433	1.47	54.5	62.6	1.15	124	281	2.27
4	332	519	1.56	53.5	60.7	1.13	186	525	2.82
5	357	548	1.54	55.0	62.5	1.14	219	539	2.46
6	329	533	1.62	52.8	61.1	1.16	179	523	2.92
Benin	348	520	1.49	53.8	61.5	1.14	201	476	2.37
Ineq	1.47	1.41		1.04	1.06		2.67	2.43	

If we compare 2018 with 1990, the education situation has improved very much, with the fastest improvements in Zou/Collines, and the relatively slowest improvements in Atlantique/Littoral/Cotonou, which started at a higher level in 1990. The regional differences in education became less pronounced, but are still considerable. The same is true for the subregional HDI as a whole: a slightly lower level of regional inequality. The regional differences in life expectancy became a bit more pronounced, though,

and particularly the Northwest, Atakora/Donga, was and is lagging behind. Zou/Collines showed the biggest improvements for all three variables. With the exception of Atlantique/Littoral/Cotonou, it also showed the fastest population growth between 1990 and 2018, partly as a result of internal migration from the north of the country to the south.

Region	Income/capita (2011 US\$ PPP)		
	1990	2018	18/90
1	1191	1913	1.61
2	2135	3064	1.44
3	1271	1863	1.47
4	1251	1667	1.33
5	1282	2222	1.73
6	1368	2059	1.51
Benin	1432	2135	1.49
Ineq	1.79	1.83	

The economic situation, as measured by the average income-per-capita situation, increased everywhere, but the highest growth was experienced in the

southeast (around capital city Porto Novo: Queme/Plateau, near coastal Nigeria), and the slowest growth in the southwest (Mono-Couffo, near coastal Togo). That southwestern area can currently be regarded as the poorest area, taking over that position from the northwest (Atakora/Donga), where growth has been considerable. Of course, these are average figures, and based on estimates. Regional inequality is not the same as income or wealth inequality (which is also considerable in Benin). According to World Bank data

(<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=BJ>) the period of market liberalisation resulted in a sharp increase in income inequality, with a Gini-coefficient changing from 39 in 2003 to 48 in 2015.

Further Reading

Country Portal: <http://countryportal.ascleiden.nl/benin>
Selected publications: <https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/africa-2020-further-reading#Benin>



Reflecting on
60 years
of independence



<https://www.ascleiden.nl/africa2020>

Africa 2020 Country Information: Ton Dietz, David Ehrhardt and Fenneken Veldkamp

Countryportal: Harro Westra

Selected publications: Germa Seuren

African Studies Centre Leiden, July 2020