

Module: Sub-Saharan Africa
Topic Content: West Africa and Central Africa

West Africa and Central Africa



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West Africa



West Africa is located on the westernmost part of the African continent. The region is bordered by the Sahara in the north, the Atlantic Ocean in the west, and the Gulf of Guinea in the south. The Sahara and the Sahel span the northern part of West Africa. Tropical rainforest and savanna span the southern part of the region.

There are sixteen countries in West Africa. These countries are Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, Senegal, and Cape Verde.

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Senegal



Senegal is located on the Atlantic coast of West Africa. Dakar is the capital and most populous city in Senegal. It is located at a harbor site on the coast. This is rare, as much of Africa's coastline is smooth. This has helped Dakar become a major seaport and transportation hub.

Senegal was once a part of a larger French colony known as French West Africa. French West Africa included several nations in the region. Dakar served as the capital of French West Africa until Senegal gained independence in 1960. French remains the country's official language. However, Senegal is home to many different ethnic groups that speak other languages in addition to French. The population is predominantly Islamic.

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Mali

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Mali



Niger River

- Sahara is in the north and Niger River is in the south
- Main exports are gold and cotton
- French colony until 1960
- Official language is French
- 13 other national languages
- 90% of population is Muslim
- Conflict has torn the country apart in recent years

Close

Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa. The southern Sahara covers the northern part of the country. The Niger River flows through southern Mali. Since water resources are limited in the desert, most of the population lives in the southern part of the country. Mali's economy is based on primary economic activities like mining and agriculture. The country's main exports are gold and cotton.

Mali was a part of French West Africa until it gained independence in 1960. French is the country's official language. There are also thirteen national languages spoken among many different ethnic groups. More than 90% of the population identifies as Muslim.

In recent years, conflict has broken out among different groups in Mali. In some cases, the conflict is based on ethnic divisions and access to resources. In other cases, the conflict is led by religious extremists. Tensions remain high between different groups in the country.

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Niger

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Niger



- French colony until 1960
- Named for the Niger River
- One of the world's least developed economies
- Population relies on subsistence agriculture
- Uranium, oil, and gold are major exports
- Predominantly Muslim
- Home to many different languages and ethnic groups

Close

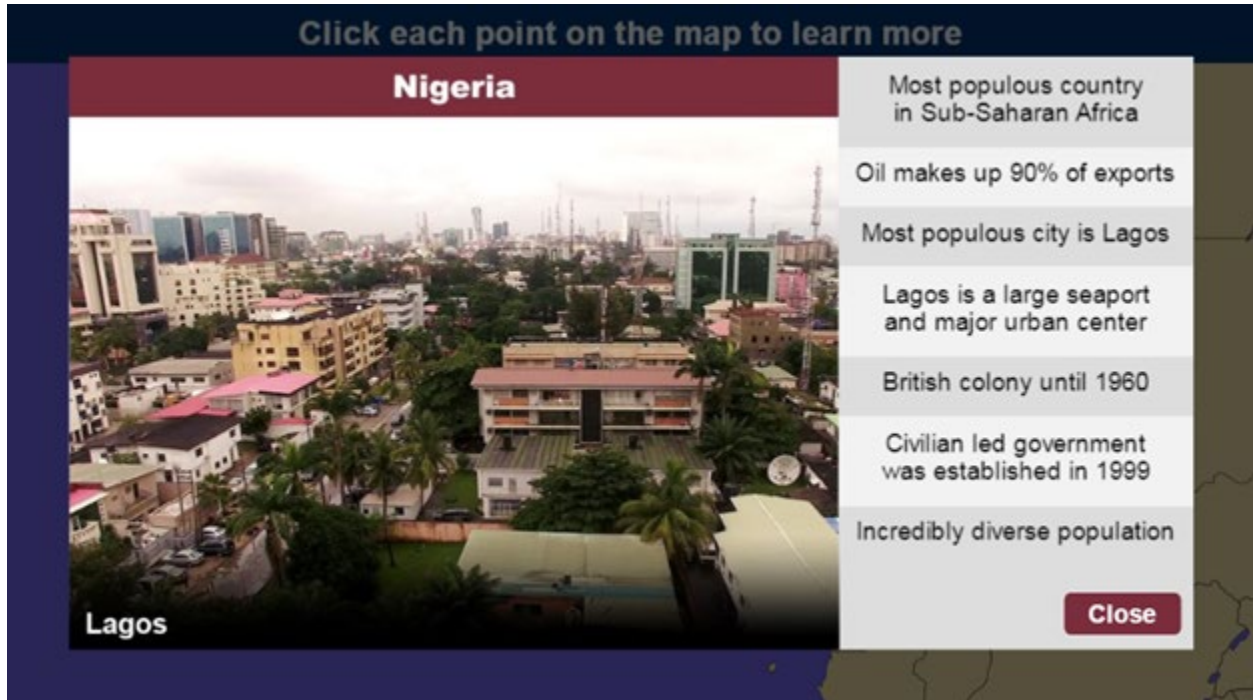
Niger is a dry landlocked nation located on the southern edge of the Sahara. It was a part of French West Africa until 1960. Niger is named for the Niger River, which flows through the southwestern part of the country. The population is concentrated near the Niger River and the southern border.

Niger has one of the world's least developed economies. Drought is a serious threat, as most of the population relies on subsistence farming and pastoralism to survive. Attempts to expand the economy have led to growth in mining and oil drilling. Uranium, oil, and gold are major exports, along with agricultural goods.

Islam is the country's predominant religion and French is the official language. There are a variety of languages spoken throughout the country by many different ethnic groups. Most of these people speak their native language and learn French as a second language.

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Nigeria



Nigeria is located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea near the Niger River Delta. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It also has the largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. This development is primarily supported by oil and petroleum products, which account for more than 90% of all exports.

Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria. The city is located at a harbor site. This is rare, as there are few harbor sites on Africa's smooth coastline. Because of this, Lagos is one of the biggest and busiest seaports on the continent. It is also an important center for finance, education, commerce, and culture.

Nigeria was controlled by the British Empire until it gained independence in 1960. The country was under military control for many years. In 1999, there was a peaceful transition to a civilian-led government. Despite instances of political corruption and violence, the civilian government has remained relatively stable.


Nigeria is incredibly diverse. The country is home to more than 250 different ethnic groups. English is the official language, but the diverse population speaks hundreds of different languages.

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Côte d'Ivoire

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Côte d'Ivoire



Name means "Ivory Coast"
French colony until 1960
Ethnically diverse
Relatively wealthy from exporting cash crops
Largest producer of cocoa in the world
65% of the labor force is involved in agriculture
Recently experienced a coup and civil war

Close

Côte d'Ivoire is located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. The name Côte d'Ivoire is French for the Ivory Coast. The country was a French colony until it gained independence in 1960. Like other nations in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire is an ethnically diverse country where a variety of languages are spoken. French is the official language.

Compared to its neighbors, Côte d'Ivoire is a relatively wealthy country. The economy is mainly based on the export of cash crops like cocoa and coffee. In fact, it is the largest producer of cocoa beans in the world. Roughly 65% of the labor force is involved in agriculture. Many of these laborers immigrated to Côte d'Ivoire for work.

Côte d'Ivoire experienced a military coup in 1999. The coup eventually turned into a civil war. The conflict lasted for many years, but tensions have begun to decrease.

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Central Africa



Central Africa is located southeast of West Africa. This region forms the core of the African continent. It is centered on the equator and extends from the Sahara to Southern Africa. Tropical rainforest and savanna cover most of the region, with some arid and semiarid climates in the north and south.

There are thirteen countries in Central Africa. These countries are Chad, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, and Angola.

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Gabon

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Gabon



Gained independence from France in 1960

One of the highest GDP per capita rates in the region

OPEC member and major exporter of oil

Official language is French

Several regional African languages are also spoken

Predominantly Christian

Close

Gabon is located on the equator, along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. This nation gained independence from France in 1960. Gabon has one of the highest GDP per capita rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a member of OPEC, it is a major exporter of oil and petroleum. Despite its oil revenue, income inequality is high and most of the population remains poor.


French is the official language in Gabon, but there are several regional African languages spoken throughout the country. Christians make up the majority of the population. Roughly 80% of the population identifies as Catholic, Protestant, or other Christian. About 10% of the population identifies as Muslim.

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Democratic Republic of the Congo



- Second largest African nation
- Contains most of the Congo River and rainforest
- Colonized by King Leopold II of Belgium in the late 1800s
- Millions died from disease, famine, and forced labor
- Became independent in 1960
- Ruled by a dictator until 1997
- Involved in "Africa's First World War"

Close

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC, is a large country located on the equator in Central Africa. The DRC is the second largest nation in Africa, and is one-fourth the size of the United States. It contains most of the Congo River and large areas of tropical rainforest.

In the late 1800s, King Leopold II of Belgium privately colonized the Congo. During this time, millions of people died as a result of disease, famine, and forced labor. These atrocities led to international pressure, which forced the Belgian government to take control of the colony away from the King.


The DRC gained independence from Belgium in 1960. Shortly after, a brutal dictator took control of the country. He stayed in power until civil war removed him in 1997. Another civil war followed soon after. This period is sometimes called "Africa's First World War," because the conflict involved several surrounding nations. Conflict continues in the eastern part of the DRC.

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Rwanda

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Rwanda



Genocide Memorial

- Has a legacy of conflict between Hutus and Tutsis
- Conflict is rooted in class
- Division was made much worse by Belgian rule
- Became independent in 1962
- President was killed in 1993
- The assassination sparked genocide of Tutsis
- 800,000 people were killed

Close

Rwanda is a small landlocked country located in the African Great Lakes region. Rwanda has struggled with the legacy of animosity between two ethnic groups, the Hutus and the Tutsis. The tension between these groups is rooted in class differences. Historically, the Tutsis raised cattle and were wealthier than the Hutus, who grew crops. This division was made much worse by Belgian rule. As a Belgian colony, Hutus were treated as second-class citizens. Only Tutsis were allowed to hold positions of power or receive a higher education.

Rwanda gained independence in 1962. Hutus, who were a majority, took control from the Tutsis, who were a minority. In 1993, a plane carrying the Presidents of Rwanda and neighboring Burundi was shot down. Both men were Hutu, and both men died in the crash. Violence erupted as many Hutus began to execute Tutsis. Approximately 800,000 people were killed, roughly 70% of the Tutsi population. Today, Rwanda has two national holidays to commemorate the genocide. Denial of the genocide is considered a crime.

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Tanzania

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Tanzania



Mount Kilimanjaro

- Situated among the 3 largest African Great Lakes
- Includes a group of islands called Zanzibar
- Nation established in 1964
- Population composed of over 100 different ethnic groups
- Mainland is mostly Christian
- Zanzibar is mostly Muslim
- Exports gold, diamonds, and agricultural goods

Close

Tanzania extends from Central Africa to the coast of the Indian Ocean. The country is situated among the largest African Great Lakes: Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, and Lake Malawi. Tanzania also includes a small group of islands off the coast called Zanzibar.

The country was established in 1964, when two former British colonies merged. The first colony was located on the mainland and the second colony was located on Zanzibar. The population is composed of more than 100 different ethnic groups. In mainland Tanzania, the population is predominantly Christian. In Zanzibar, the population is predominantly Muslim. Swahili and English are both official languages. Arabic is also widely spoken in Zanzibar.

Tanzania's major exports are gold, diamonds, and agricultural goods. The country also has a major tourism industry. Two of Africa's most popular tourist attractions, Mt. Kilimanjaro and Serengeti National Park, are located within the country.