
COMPANION TO THE EIGHT-VOLUME REFERENCE

AFRICA

APPENDIX B

Country Profiles — West Africa

Benin · Burkina Faso · Cabo Verde · Côte d'Ivoire · The Gambia · Ghana ·
Guinea · Guinea-Bissau · Liberia · Mali · Niger · Nigeria · Senegal · Sierra
Leone · Togo

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About These Profiles

AFRICA: AN ENCYCLOPEDIC REFERENCE — 2026 EDITION

This is the second of five regional installments of the **Country Profiles**, the companion series to the eight-volume main reference compiled and edited by Marie-Soleil Seshat Landry and published by Landry Industries Inc. under the Marie Landry's Spy Shop imprint, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada.

The eight-volume reference (Volumes I-VIII) is complete, and the companion series profiles all 54 African states across five appendices — A: North Africa, B: West Africa, C: Central Africa, D: East Africa, and E: Southern Africa. **This appendix covers the fifteen states of West Africa**, the continent's most populous region. Each profile gives a country's essential data at a glance — capital, population, area, languages, currency, head of state or government, independence, GDP, and key sectors — followed by a short narrative.

A NOTE ON DATA, CURRENCY, AND CITATION INTEGRITY

Country data is a snapshot taken in **June 2026**. West Africa has been the continent's most politically volatile region, and several states changed leadership in 2025-26: the military governments of **Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger** (which left ECOWAS in January 2025); **Guinea** (whose junta leader was elected president in December 2025); **Guinea-Bissau** (a November 2025 coup); and **Benin** (a new president inaugurated in May 2026). All current heads of state and latest population and GDP figures were individually verified against identifiable public sources and are keyed to the numbered *References*.

Stable facts — capitals, areas, independence dates, currencies, and official languages — are from established reference knowledge. GDP is nominal and in US dollars; figures are the latest available estimates and may carry a short lag. Nigeria's GDP in particular has been volatile following major currency reforms. Nothing is reproduced verbatim.

Companion series:

A — NORTH AFRICA (**PUBLISHED**)

B — WEST AFRICA (**THIS INSTALLMENT**)

Benin · Burkina Faso · Cabo Verde · Côte d'Ivoire · The Gambia · Ghana · Guinea · Guinea-Bissau · Liberia · Mali · Niger · Nigeria · Senegal · Sierra Leone · Togo

C — CENTRAL AFRICA · D — EAST AFRICA · E — SOUTHERN AFRICA (**TO FOLLOW**)

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APPENDIX B

West Africa

The continent's demographic heartland — anchored by Nigeria, home to roughly half the region's people — and its most turbulent. A belt of cocoa, gold, oil, and bauxite economies stretching from the Sahel to the Atlantic, now split between the ECOWAS bloc and the breakaway Alliance of Sahel States.

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Benin | 9. Liberia |
| 2. Burkina Faso | 10. Mali |
| 3. Cabo Verde | 11. Niger |
| 4. Côte d'Ivoire | 12. Nigeria |
| 5. The Gambia | 13. Senegal |
| 6. Ghana | 14. Sierra Leone |
| 7. Guinea | 15. Togo |
| 8. Guinea-Bissau | |

West Africa: The Fifteen States

West Africa stretches from the arid Sahel to the humid Atlantic coast and contains both the continent's demographic giant, Nigeria, and several of its smallest states. Eight of the fifteen — Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo — share a common currency, the West African CFA franc, while the others keep their own. The region is bound together by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but that bloc fractured in January 2025 when the military-led Sahel states of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger formally withdrew to form their own Alliance of Sahel States. The profiles below follow in alphabetical order.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 1 OF 15

Benin

Republic of Benin

CAPITAL	Porto-Novo (official); Cotonou (seat of government & largest city)
POPULATION	~14 million
AREA	114,763 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	President Romuald Wadagni (since May 2026, succeeding Patrice Talon) ^[7]
INDEPENDENCE	1 August 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$23 billion; per-capita ~US\$1,600 ^[7]
KEY SECTORS	Cotton (a leading export), the Port of Cotonou, agriculture, re-export trade with Nigeria

The birthplace of the Vodun (voodoo) religion and heir to the historic Kingdom of Dahomey, Benin is a slender coastal state whose economy turns on cotton, the busy Port of Cotonou, and trade with neighbouring Nigeria. After two terms under businessman-president Patrice Talon — a period of steady growth but a narrowing political space — the April 2026 election brought his former finance minister, Romuald Wadagni, to the presidency.^[7] Benin also faces a growing spillover of jihadist violence from the Sahel along its northern border.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 2 OF 15

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Ouagadougou
POPULATION	~23 million
AREA	272,967 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES	French and national languages (Mooré, Dioula, others)
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	Capt. Ibrahim Traoré , transitional leader (seized power September 2022) ^[1]
GOVERNMENT	Military transitional government; member of the Alliance of Sahel States; left ECOWAS January 2025
INDEPENDENCE	5 August 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$20 billion ; per-capita ~US\$850
KEY SECTORS	Gold (the leading export), cotton, livestock

A landlocked Sahelian state once known as Upper Volta, Burkina Faso has been gripped since the mid-2010s by a jihadist insurgency that has displaced millions and now contests large parts of its territory. Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who seized power in a September 2022 coup, has become the most prominent face of the region's anti-French, sovereignty-first military wave, expelling French forces and turning toward Russia.^[1] Burkina Faso is a major gold producer, though much of that wealth is overshadowed by the cost and insecurity of the war.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 3 OF 15

Cabo Verde

Republic of Cabo Verde

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Praia (on Santiago island)
POPULATION	~525,000
AREA	4,033 km ² (an archipelago of ten islands)
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	Portuguese (Cape Verdean Creole widely spoken)
CURRENCY	Cape Verdean escudo (CVE)
HEAD OF STATE	President José Maria Neves (since 2021); PM Ulisses Correia e Silva
INDEPENDENCE	5 July 1975 (from Portugal)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$2.5 billion ; per-capita ~US\$4,700 — among the region's highest ^[8]
KEY SECTORS	Tourism, services, fisheries, remittances

An Atlantic archipelago off the West African coast, Cabo Verde is one of the continent's most stable and best-governed democracies, with the lowest poverty rate in the ECOWAS region and one of its highest incomes per head.^[8] Lacking significant natural resources, it has built a service economy centred on tourism and leverages a large diaspora — more Cape Verdeans live abroad than on the islands — whose remittances are a pillar of national income. Its mid-Atlantic location also makes it a strategic node for maritime security.

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Côte d'Ivoire

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

CAPITAL	Yamoussoukro (official); Abidjan (economic capital & largest city)
POPULATION	~31 million
AREA	322,463 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	President Alassane Ouattara (since 2011; re-elected to a fourth term in October 2025) ^[4]
INDEPENDENCE	7 August 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$87 billion — among the region's largest; growth ~6% a year ^[4]
KEY SECTORS	Cocoa (the world's largest producer), cashews, oil and gas, rubber, gold

The economic powerhouse of Francophone West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest cocoa producer and one of the continent's fastest-growing economies, with Abidjan a major regional financial hub. Having recovered from civil wars in the 2000s and post-election violence in 2010–11, the country has enjoyed a long boom under President Alassane Ouattara, who won a contested fourth term in October 2025 after his main rivals were barred from the ballot.^[4] In February 2025 France handed over its last military base in the country, part of a broader Sahelian and coastal retreat of French forces.

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The Gambia

Republic of The Gambia

CAPITAL	Banjul (Serrekunda is the largest urban area)
POPULATION	~2.5 million ^[7]
AREA	11,300 km ² — the smallest country on mainland Africa
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	English
CURRENCY	Gambian dalasi (GMD)
HEAD OF STATE	President Adama Barrow (since 2017; re-elected 2021) ^[7]
INDEPENDENCE	18 February 1965 (from the UK)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$2.7 billion ; per-capita ~US\$900 ^[7]
KEY SECTORS	Tourism, agriculture (groundnuts), remittances, re-export trade

A narrow sliver of land enclosing the Gambia River and surrounded on three sides by Senegal, The Gambia is mainland Africa's smallest state. It emerged in 2017 from 22 years of autocratic rule under Yahya Jammeh when Adama Barrow won a surprise election, beginning a fragile democratic transition that continues to grapple with stalled constitutional reform.^[7] The economy leans heavily on tourism along its Atlantic beaches, groundnut farming, and remittances from a large diaspora.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 6 OF 15

Ghana

Republic of Ghana

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Accra
POPULATION	~34 million
AREA	238,535 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	English
CURRENCY	Ghanaian cedi (GHS)
HEAD OF STATE	President John Dramani Mahama (returned to office January 2025) ^[4]
INDEPENDENCE	6 March 1957 (from the UK) — the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$76 billion ; per-capita ~US\$2,200
KEY SECTORS	Gold (a leading African producer), cocoa, oil, services

In 1957 Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African colony to win independence, under Kwame Nkrumah, and it remains one of the region's most established democracies, with regular peaceful transfers of power. After a severe debt crisis and an IMF bailout, voters returned former president John Mahama to office in the December 2024 election, and he was inaugurated in January 2025.^[4] A leading producer of gold and cocoa and an oil exporter since 2010, Ghana is working to recover macroeconomic stability after its 2022 default.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 7 OF 15

Guinea

Republic of Guinea

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Conakry
POPULATION	~14 million
AREA	245,857 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French
CURRENCY	Guinean franc (GNF)
HEAD OF STATE	President Mamadi Doumbouya (seized power 2021; elected president December 2025, sworn in January 2026) ^[2]
INDEPENDENCE	2 October 1958 (from France) — the first French colony to gain independence
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$24 billion ; per-capita ~US\$1,700
KEY SECTORS	Bauxite (the world's largest reserves), gold, iron ore (the giant Simandou deposit), diamonds

Guinea holds the world's largest reserves of bauxite, the ore of aluminium, and is developing Simandou, one of the planet's richest untapped iron-ore deposits — resources that have drawn heavy Chinese investment. Politically, it followed the Sahel pattern: Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya seized power in a 2021 coup, then, under a new constitution, won the December 2025 presidential election in a landslide and was sworn in as elected president in January 2026, a transition critics call a military grip dressed in civilian clothes.^[2] Despite its mineral wealth, much of the population remains poor.

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Guinea-Bissau

Republic of Guinea-Bissau

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Bissau
POPULATION	~2.1 million
AREA	36,125 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	Portuguese (Crioulo widely spoken)
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
GOVERNMENT	Military transitional government. A November 2025 coup deposed President Umaro Sissoco Embaló; Gen. Horta Inta-A was sworn in as transitional president ^[3]
INDEPENDENCE	24 September 1973 (declared) / 1974 (from Portugal)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$2 billion; per-capita ~US\$900
KEY SECTORS	Cashew nuts (the dominant export), fisheries, agriculture

One of the world's most coup-prone states, Guinea-Bissau has endured chronic instability since independence from Portugal in the 1970s, with the military repeatedly intervening in politics and the country serving as a notorious transit point for Latin American cocaine bound for Europe. In November 2025 — amid a disputed presidential election — soldiers seized power once again, deposing President Embaló and installing a transitional military command, the ninth successful or attempted coup since independence.^[3] The economy depends overwhelmingly on cashew exports.

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Liberia

Republic of Liberia

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Monrovia
POPULATION	~5.5 million
AREA	111,369 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	English
CURRENCY	Liberian dollar (LRD); the US dollar also circulates
HEAD OF STATE	President Joseph Boakai (since January 2024)
INDEPENDENCE	26 July 1847 — Africa's oldest republic; never formally colonised
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$4.4 billion ; per-capita ~US\$800
KEY SECTORS	Iron ore, rubber, gold, timber, shipping (a major flag-of-convenience registry)

Founded in 1822 as a settlement for freed American slaves and declared a republic in 1847, Liberia is Africa's oldest republic and was never formally colonised. Its modern history was scarred by back-to-back civil wars (1989–2003) and the 2014–16 Ebola epidemic, from which it has slowly rebuilt. Joseph Boakai won the presidency in a closely contested 2023 election and took office in January 2024. The economy rests on iron ore, rubber, and one of the world's largest ship registries.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 10 OF 15

Mali

Republic of Mali

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Bamako
POPULATION	~23 million
AREA	1,240,192 km ² — one of West Africa's largest
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES	French and national languages (Bambara and others)
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	Col. Assimi Goïta , transitional president (took power 2020–21); also chairs the Alliance of Sahel States ^[1]
GOVERNMENT	Military transitional government; left ECOWAS January 2025
INDEPENDENCE	22 September 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$21 billion ; per-capita ~US\$900
KEY SECTORS	Gold (a leading African producer), cotton, livestock

Heir to the medieval Mali Empire and the fabled trading city of Timbuktu, modern Mali has been destabilised since 2012 by a Tuareg rebellion and a jihadist insurgency that spread across the Sahel. Two coups in 2020–21 brought Colonel Assimi Goïta to power; his government expelled French troops and the UN peacekeeping mission, turned to Russian security support, and joined Burkina Faso and Niger in leaving ECOWAS in 2025.^[1] A major gold producer, Mali nonetheless remains one of the world's poorest and most fragile states.

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Niger

Republic of the Niger

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Niamey
POPULATION	~ 27 million (one of the world's fastest-growing populations)
AREA	1,267,000 km ² — the largest country in West Africa
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani , transitional leader (coup July 2023) ^[1]
GOVERNMENT	Military transitional government; member of the Alliance of Sahel States; left ECOWAS January 2025
INDEPENDENCE	3 August 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~ US\$17 billion ; per-capita ~US\$600
KEY SECTORS	Uranium (a major world supplier), oil, gold, livestock

A vast, largely desert country with the world's highest birth rate, Niger is a leading supplier of uranium to the global nuclear industry, long tied especially to France. In July 2023 General Abdourahamane Tchiani's presidential guard overthrew the elected president, Mohamed Bazoum; the junta expelled French and later American forces, pivoted toward Russia, and joined the Sahel alliance that quit ECOWAS.^[1] Niger faces jihadist violence on multiple borders and ranks near the bottom of global human-development measures despite its mineral wealth.

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Nigeria

Federal Republic of Nigeria

CAPITAL	Abuja; largest city Lagos (a megacity of ~17 million)
POPULATION	~230-240 million — the most populous country in Africa ^[5]
AREA	923,769 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	English (with Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and 250+ others)
CURRENCY	Nigerian naira (NGN)
HEAD OF STATE	President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (since May 2023) ^[5]
INDEPENDENCE	1 October 1960 (from the UK)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$250 billion (volatile after currency reforms) — one of Africa's largest economies ^[5]
KEY SECTORS	Oil and gas (Africa's largest exporter and gas reserves), agriculture, the Nollywood film industry, fintech, telecoms

Nigeria is Africa's demographic colossus — home to roughly one in five Africans — and one of its largest economies, the continent's biggest oil exporter, and the seat of the globally influential Nollywood film industry and a vibrant tech scene. Since taking office in 2023, President Bola Tinubu has pushed painful reforms, scrapping a costly fuel subsidy and unifying the exchange rate, which sharply devalued the naira and stoked inflation.^[5] The federation contends with deep regional divides and serious security challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, banditry, and separatist pressures.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 13 OF 15

Senegal

Republic of Senegal

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Dakar
POPULATION	~18-19 million ^[6]
AREA	196,712 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French (Wolof widely spoken)
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF STATE	President Bassirou Diomaye Faye (since April 2024); PM Ousmane Sonko ^[6]
INDEPENDENCE	1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$35 billion; per-capita ~US\$1,800; growth ~8% in 2025 ^[6]
KEY SECTORS	New offshore oil and gas, fishing, phosphates, gold, agriculture, services

Long regarded as one of West Africa's most stable democracies — never having suffered a coup — Senegal entered a new era in 2024 when Bassirou Diomaye Faye, released from prison weeks earlier, won the presidency on an anti-establishment, pan-Africanist platform alongside his ally, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko.^[6] The economy is being transformed by the start of offshore oil and gas production, driving growth above 8 percent in 2025, though the new government has also revealed far larger public debts than previously disclosed. Dakar is a major Atlantic port and cultural capital.

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Sierra Leone

Republic of Sierra Leone

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Freetown
POPULATION	~8.5 million
AREA	71,740 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	English (Krio widely spoken)
CURRENCY	Sierra Leonean leone (SLE)
HEAD OF STATE	President Julius Maada Bio (since 2018; re-elected 2023)
INDEPENDENCE	27 April 1961 (from the UK)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$4 billion ; per-capita ~US\$500 — among the region's lowest ^[8]
KEY SECTORS	Diamonds, mining (rutile, iron ore), agriculture, fisheries

Founded around a settlement for freed slaves — its capital named Freetown — Sierra Leone is still recovering from a brutal 1991–2002 civil war fuelled by “blood diamonds” and from the 2014–16 Ebola epidemic that struck it hard. It remains one of the world’s poorest countries despite significant diamond and mineral wealth. President Julius Maada Bio, re-elected in 2023, has prioritised education and food security, while the country works to strengthen fragile democratic institutions.

WEST AFRICA · PROFILE 15 OF 15

Togo

Togolese Republic

CAPITAL & LARGEST CITY	Lomé
POPULATION	~9 million
AREA	56,785 km ²
OFFICIAL LANGUAGE	French
CURRENCY	West African CFA franc (XOF)
HEAD OF GOVERNMENT	Faure Gnassingbé , President of the Council of Ministers (head of government since May 2025); ceremonial President Jean-Lucien Savi de Tové ^[4]
INDEPENDENCE	27 April 1960 (from France)
GDP (NOMINAL)	~US\$10 billion ; per-capita ~US\$1,050
KEY SECTORS	The Port of Lomé (a major regional transshipment hub), phosphates, cotton, agriculture

A narrow strip running inland from the Gulf of Guinea, Togo has been governed by the Gnassingbé family since 1967 — first Gnassingbé Eyadéma, then his son Faure since 2005. A 2024 constitutional change converted the country to a parliamentary system, and in May 2025 Faure Gnassingbé assumed a newly created, powerful post of President of the Council of Ministers, a move critics view as a device to extend his rule indefinitely.^[4] The deep-water Port of Lomé is a key regional gateway, and phosphates anchor the export economy.

References — Appendix B

All sources accessed June 2026. Listed in order of first citation. Volatile figures (leaders, latest population, latest GDP) are verified to these sources and are June 2026 snapshots; stable facts (capitals, areas, independence dates, currencies, languages) are from established reference knowledge. Population and GDP estimates may carry a short lag and, for Nigeria, reflect post-currency-reform volatility.

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END OF APPENDIX B — WEST AFRICA

Appendix C — *Country Profiles: Central Africa* (9 states, from Angola to São Tomé and Príncipe) — follows in the next installment.