

Groupe de Démographie Africaine

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**POPULATION SIZE
IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES :
AN EVALUATION**

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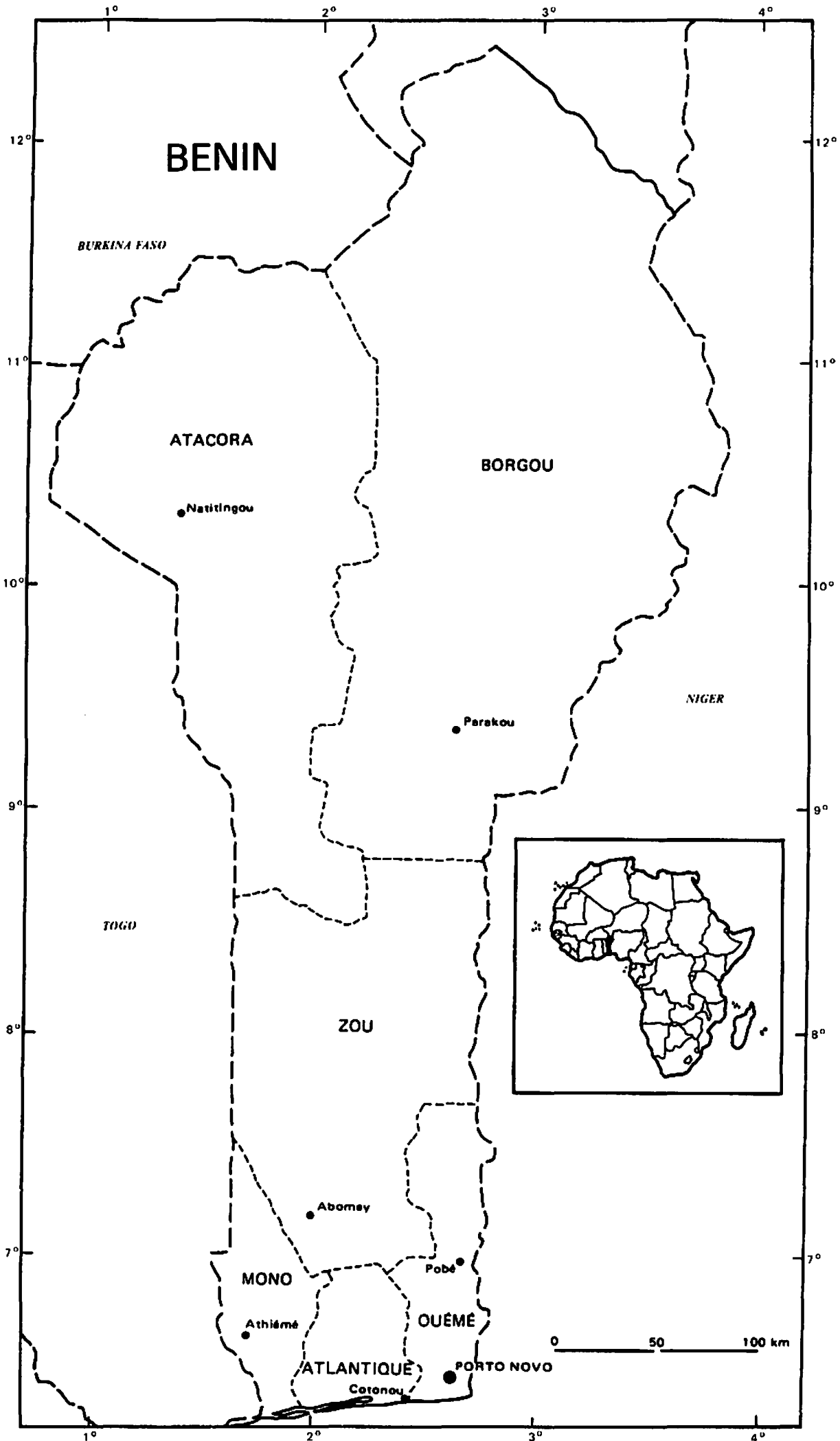
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BENIN

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B E N I N**I. INTRODUCTION**

The People's Republic of Benin is the name which was given to Dahomey on November 30th 1975. This country is bounded to the east by Nigeria, to the north by the Niger, to the west by Burkina Faso and Togo, and to the south by the Atlantic Ocean. It was a French colony which was integrated into the Federation of Western Africa on November 19th 1899. Like the other colonies, it was governed by a Lieutenant-governor. It obtained its independence in August 1960.

There is no available information on the negotiations which took place between the various colonizing nations (Germany, England and France) to determine the country's frontiers. A report by the Lieutenant-governor, addressed to the political authorities of his country in 1929, established the surface area of Benin at 122,010 km². This same report gave the following details : "its width of 125 km in lower Dahomey increases to 335 km in the northern parts..; from the shores of the ocean to the Nigerian savannah it extends over more than 700 km in length (6°20' to 12°25' latitude north)". This description is accompanied by a military map which is very similar to the present layout of the territory, the surface area of which is estimated at 112,622 km².

The People's Republic of Benin takes the form of a long strip of territory following a north-south direction and its climate varies according to the latitude.

The continental, tropical climate with a single rainy season and with significant temperature and hygrometric variations in the north, changes in the south into a subequatorial climate with two maximum rainfalls separated by a minimum rainfall, especially noticeable on the coast line, where temperature and humidity determinants are a lot less variable.

As a result, five climatically different regions can be distinguished from north to south:

a) The Northern Zone, bounded to the south by the mountainous regions of the north-east and the north-west (Atacora), where there is a typical continental tropical climate (Sudan variety) with a single rainy season (April-October, with a maximum rainfall in August).

Annual rainfall varies between 900 mm and 1,100 mm from north to south.

b) The Mountainous Zones of the North-East and North-West (the Atacora range), possessing the same climatic characteristics as the northern zone. However, the maximum rainfall is in September and not in August and the rainy season is a little longer there (the end of March to the beginning of November).

The population of these two areas is composed of Baribas, Dendis, Peuhls, Sombas, Tanguietas and various other very heterogeneous groups.

c) A Central Zone, between the two parallels of Djougou and Dassa. This is a transitional zone between the tropical climate of the former regions and the subequatorial climate of the coastal regions.

From Djougou southwards, a slight minimum rainfall in August becomes gradually more pronounced, separating two maxima which fall in July and September - that of the month of September dominating. At the lowest latitudes, the first maximum gradually gains over the second.

Annual rainfall is lower than in the mountainous regions of the north-east and the north-west (1,100 to 1,300 mm).

During the dry season, which extends from November to March, a certain low humidity persists.

d) A Pre-Coastal Zone, to the south of the central zone, where the characteristics of a double rainy season are gradually established through a progressive decrease in the minimum August rainfall. This, nevertheless, stays between 50 and 100 mm. The first maximum, which slowly increases, occurs in the month of June, while the second maximum tends to occur later on in October.

Annual rainfall varies between 1,000 and 1,300 mm.

e) A Coastal Zone, where the minimum rainfall in the month of August is particularly distinct (at Cotonou, average rainfall of 22 mm) whilst the maximum in June is greater than in October (at Cotonou, average of 342 mm in June, as against 177 mm in October).

With regard to annual rainfall quantities, significant differences can be seen in the east and west coastal regions; the eastern region (Porto-Novo, Sèmè) has a lot more rain (1,300, 1,400 mm on average) than the region to the west of Ouidah, where average annual rainfall is 900 to 1,100 mm, similar to the dry coastal climate of lower Togo.

These three regions are inhabited by the Fons, Aizos, Gouns, Adjás, Minas, Nagots, Yorubas, Djougous and related tribes.

The latter two regions are the most populated, the most economically developed and the most culturally homogeneous. This homogeneity is reflected in a relatively good mutual understanding of the languages spoken by the population.

The division of the country into large administrative units dates back to 1960. The country was divided into six areas or provinces: Atacora, Atlantic, Borgou, Mono, Ouémé and Zou. These provinces were subdivided into districts and, since 1978, number 84.

II. DATA SOURCES

1) Administrative Censuses

Until Independence, the administrative census comprised the sole data source for defining social, economic and cultural policies. It was established during colonization in order to 'determine tax assessment'; to recruit conscripts; and to carry out economic programmes. For a long time

it was badly accepted by the native population who found it unjustifiably restricting. The administrative census methods were subject to false statements, a source of underestimation. These censuses often leave out a proportion of women and children. Seasonal migrations are usual; they enable those who migrate to avoid enumeration and the levying of taxes. This led to the inauguration of the travel pass, by the colonial authorities, and to the signing of population movement policies with other countries. In 1930 an agreement was reached between Dahomey and Togo: "natives living in Dahomey and farming land in Togo will come under the census and administration of Dahomey. Conversely, natives living in Togo and farming land in Dahomey will come under the census and administration of Togo".

Travel difficulties, the material organization of the census operations, and the lack of personnel, did not make the task of the administrators any easier and sometimes justified the repeating of the population for the past year, for want of a current census. Nevertheless, from year to year, the operations became more exact and the young population, the under 15's who were not previously counted, were included in the census.

One of these administrative censuses, conducted some months after Independence in November 1960, served as a sampling frame for the 1961 population survey.

2) Population Surveys

Immediately following Independence, in July-August 1961, the Department of Statistics conducted a population survey with the participation of the French Ministry of Co-operation. This took the form of a sample survey using the Departments (current provinces) and rural-urban divisions as a stratification frame. The sample represents a little over a quarter of the population.

This survey is accepted as being the first to give precise details on population size, age composition, socio-economic factors, and fertility and mortality levels. As a result of material and geographic difficulties, a little over 1% of the population was not included in the survey.

To this first 'national scale' survey should be added further operations carried out either on the initiative of the Department of Statistics or at the users' request.

- Agonvy socio-demographic survey (1966);
- Hinvi population survey (1966);
- Cotonou census (1964);
- Household budget/consumption survey, with a demographic section, in the districts of Porto-Novo (1975, 1976-1977) and in the province of Atacora (1978).

For a long time the data from the 1961 Population Survey was the only available on a 'national scale'. Civil registration, known only to the urban centres, could not provide reliable data. The only events recorded, and these were far from exhaustive, were births and deaths. There was an

urgent need for a general census of the entire population of the country. This operation was carried out in March 1979 (see below).

In order to maximise the advantages of this census with regard to updating of data, a national population survey in three rounds, at six month intervals, was planned.

This survey, which was the start of a national programme for population research, had as goals, as well as census verification, the study of fertility, mortality, migration and employment.

It was conducted on a sample of 125,000 people and began on November 23rd 1981.

3) General Population Census

The first general population census was carried out from March 20th to 31st 1979. This operation was part of the 1970 United Nations census programme. It was the subject of lengthy preparations. From the time of the presidential decree of December 9th 1969, many changes were made as to its ultimate aims. The method employed involved the complete enumeration of the 'de facto' population present in the area at the time of the census. The preparatory cartography work, which made it possible to constitute a very much needed data base for future surveys, lasted almost a year and covered the entire territory, thus eliminating all risk of omissions or double counts. Estimates made during the cartography preparation gave a population size which was later confirmed by the enumeration of March 1979. Apart from the basic information (name, age, sex, place of birth), the single household questionnaire dealt with length of stay, educational level, socio-economic characteristics and type of settlement. Data processing is in progress and if dates are respected, it should be finished by 1981. In October 1980, only data by sex, broad age groups (0-5 years, 6-14 years, 15-49 years, 50 years and over) and by administrative units, were available.

Financial sources for the analysis and publication of the census data are required.

TABLE 3 - BENIN - POPULATION BY BROAD AGE GROUPS AND PROVINCES - 1979

PROVINCE	BROAD AGE GROUPS					TOTAL
	0-5	6-14	15-49	50 & +	Undeter- mined	
Atacora	120 121	110.102	194.778	56 316	192	481 509
Atlantique	163 175	170 531	289 092	69 470	1 022	693 290
Borgou	120 879	115 709	199 945	53 387	422	490 342
Mono	130 961	120 928	170 931	53 095	585	476 500
Ouémé	156 626	143 027	250 464	75 955	1 058	627 130
Zou	145 048	136 728	209 342	77 745	606	569 469
Total	836 810	797 025	1 314 552	385 968	3 885	3 338 240

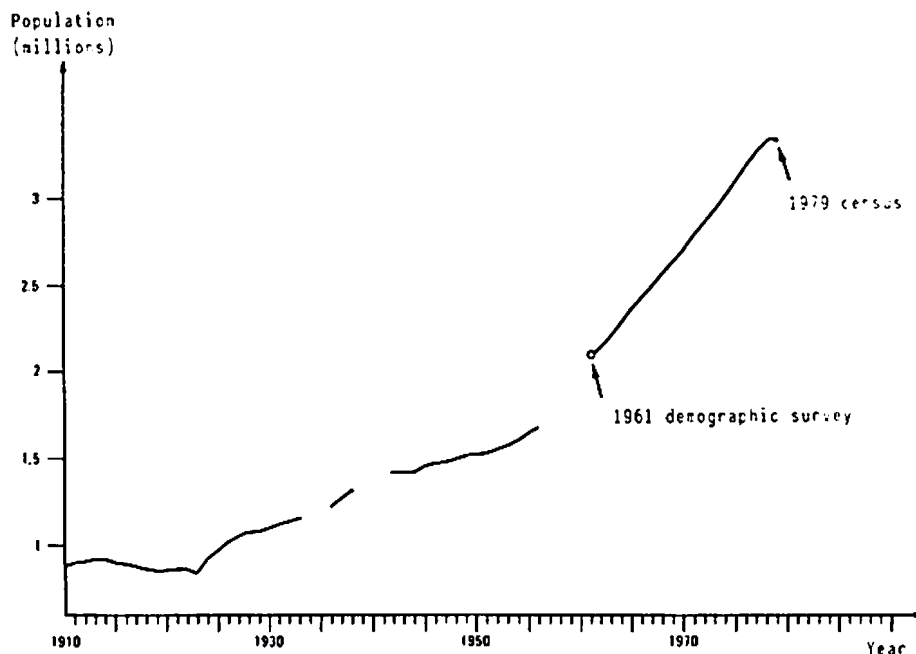
III. EVOLUTION OF POPULATION SIZE

The total population size from 1910 onwards is given in Table 4. Until 1930 (Fig.1) the estimate of the population size is unreliable, giving improbable annual fluctuations or increases. From 1945 onwards, there seems to be a constant growth. This could reflect an improvement in the administrative censuses. The annual increase of 2.5% observed from 1954 on, was maintained up to the 1979 census. Between 1961 and 1979, the population of Benin appears to have possessed the characteristics of a stable population, given the probable conformity between the projections established in 1961 and the 1979 census. There is however a difference in the age distribution. In 1979 the under 15's represented 49% of the total population (as against 46% in 1961), whilst the 15-49 year olds lost ground (43% in 1961 and 39% in 1979). This structural change could be due to the growth of international emigration, but it is possible that there are other causes, for example misreporting of ages.

The study of the geographical distribution of the population (Table 5) indicates an exodus to the province of Atlantique. In 1979, this province harboured 21% of the population, half of whom were living in Cotonou, the country's capital city. The population density of Atlantique was 215 inhabitants per km², approximately twice that of Ouémé, a province which had the highest population density in 1961. Whilst some provinces (Mono, Borgou, Atacora for example) seem to maintain the same proportion of the population, others are exposed to a depopulation movement towards Atlantique.

Fig. 1

BENIN - EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION



Source : Table 3

This change in the spatial composition of the population is merely a result of the economic and political transformations in the country. Since 1960, the politico-administrative structures have been progressively transferred from Porto-Novo (located in Ouémé) to Cotonou.

TABLE 4 - BENIN - POPULATION TRENDS FROM 1910 TO 1979

YEAR	POPULATION (thousands)	YEAR	POPULATION (thousands)
1910	878.0	1946	1 478.6
1911	902.0	1947	1 478.6
1912	911.0	1948	1 511.7
1913	928.2	1949	1 524.9
1914	928.2	1950	1 528.0
1915	900.0	1951	1 548.9
1916	900.0	1952	1 560.4
1917	889.1	1953	1 582.5
1918	866.2	1954	1 606.3
1919	859.0	1955	1 664.3
1920	859.0	1956	1 730.6
1921	861.0		
1922	877.0	1961	2 106.0
1923	837.0	1962	2 162.0
1924	924.3	1963	2 222.0
1925	968.0	1964	2 302.0
1926	1 016.3	1965	2 377.0
1927	1 056.0	1966	2 442.0
1928	1 083.0	1967	2 508.0
1929	1 079.2	1968	2 576.0
		1969	2 646.0
1931	1 112.0	1970	2 718.0
		1971	2 792.0
1933	1 131.2	1972	2 869.0
		1973	2 948.0
1936	1 225.7	1974	3 029.0
		1975	3 112.0
1938	1 324.8	1976	3 197.0
		1977	3 286.0
1942	1 427.2	1978	3 319.0
		1979	3 338.2
1944	1 424.1		
1945	1 456.5		

Sources : 1910 to 1929 and 1936 to 1956: [2], 1931 and 1933: [3], 1961 to 1977: INSAE estimate based on the population survey [2], 1978 and 1979: population estimate based on the census [4].

During the same time, the town of Cotonou experienced an accelerated urbanization, with the setting up of many industries, a seaport and university halls of residence.

TABLE 5 - BENIN - POPULATION DISTRIBUTION IN 1961 AND 1979 ACCORDING TO PROVINCES

	PROVINCES						TOTAL
	Atacora	Atlantique	Borgou	Mono	Ouémé	Zou	
Surface Area in km ²	31 200	3 222	51 000	3 800	4 700	18 700	112 622
Population in 1961	313 500	309 400	304 600	289 900	463 500	425 100	2 106 000
Population Density per km ² in 1961	10.0	96.0	6.0	76.3	98.6	22.7	18.7
Population in 1979	481 509	693 290	490 342	476 500	627 130	569 469	3 338 240
Population Density per km ² in 1979	15.4	215.2	9.6	125.4	133.4	30.5	29.6
Annual Geometric Growth %	2.41	4.58	2.68	2.80	1.69	1.64	2.59
Proportion in 1961 %	14.89	14.69	14.46	13.77	22.00	20.19	100.00
Proportion in 1979 %	14.42	20.77	14.69	14.27	18.79	17.06	100.00
Increase in Proportions	- 0.47	6.08	0.23	0.50	- 3.21	- 3.13	

Sources : [4. 2]

The population estimate on January 1st 1975 is based on the hypothesis of a population increase at a constant rate: between August 1st 1961, when the population size was approximately 2,106,000, and March 25th 1979 when it was 3,338,200, a mean annual rate of growth of 2.65% is obtained. As a result, the population of the People's Republic of Benin on January 1st 1975 can be estimated at 2.991 million inhabitants.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study is a simple outline for the assessment of population trends in Benin. The primary sources of available data have not all been subjected to a detailed criticism. This work is not easy: it demands a painstaking search for the basic documents, which are not always available in the national archives.

The annual updating of the population size (from 1961 on) is only possible with the use of data on population change provided by civil registration. Unfortunately the registration of vital statistics is very bad, especially in the rural areas. A project to reform the system is underway, but it will need some time to gather momentum.

The focus points of this reform will be the extraction of vital records undertaken for the major civil registration centres; the revision of texts; the improvement of forms and registers, and, in particular, the methods of informing the public of the problem of civil registration.

Moreover, the National Population Survey (in three rounds), which will be nearing an end in March 1983, will make current data on population trends available.

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