

SENEGAL

CAPITAL: DAKAR—POPULATION: 3.2 MILLION

The Republic of Senegal, which covers 76,000 square miles and is approximately the size of South Dakota, is located on the West African bulge. It is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the west and separated from the Islamic Republic of Mauritania on the north by the Senegal River. On the east it is bordered by the Republic of Mali, and on the south by the Republic of Guinea and Portuguese Guinea. The British Colony of Gambia, located along the banks of the Gambia River, penetrates finger-like over 200 miles into Senegal.

Senegal, with an altitude of less than 650 feet, is mostly flat or rolling plain country, with savannah-type vegetation. In the southeast, however, plateaus with a maximum elevation 1,640 feet form the foothills of the Fouta-Djalou Mountains, while marshy swamps interspersed with tropical rain forest are not uncommon in the southwest. North of Cape Verde the coast forms an almost straight line; farther south it is indented by many estuaries and is often marshy. The country is drained by four major rivers flowing in almost parallel courses from east to west: the Senegal, Saloum, Gambia, and Casamance, each of which is navigable by oceangoing vessels for a substantial distance inland.

The two well-defined seasons in Senegal—one dry (November-June), the other moist—are the result of alternating winds from the northeast in the winter and from the southwest in the summer. Dakar has about 24 inches of rain per year which is concentrated between June and October. Maximum temperatures in the humid months average 81–84° F.; from December to February minimum temperatures average 60–66° F. In the interior temperature ranges are greater than along the coast, while precipitation increases substantially farther south, exceeding 60 inches a year in some areas of the Casamance. Sudden thunderstorms with heavy downpours are frequent in periods of seasonal change.

THE PEOPLE

Senegal has an estimated population of 3.2 million, slightly larger than that of Maryland, 85 percent of which is in the rural areas. Of the 50,000 non-Africans, approximately half are Europeans, the remainder mainly Syrians and Lebanese. They are concentrated chiefly in the cities. The population density is about 40 per square mile, but this varies from about 200 per square mile in the Sine-Saloum region to 5 per square mile in the more arid and less hospitable eastern section of the country.

Dakar, the capital, has a population of 350,000 of whom approximately 30,000 are Europeans and Lebanese. Only four other Senegalese cities surpass 40,000 in size: Kaolack, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, and Thies.

By ethnic group, 36 percent of the population are Wolof, 17.5 percent Peulh or Fulani, 16.5 percent Serere, 9 percent Toucouleur, 9 percent Diola, and 6.5 percent Mandingo. Smaller ethnic groups include the Sarakole, Moors, Bassari, and Lebous. By age distribution the population is young, 41 percent being under 14 years of age. Population growth is estimated as high as 2 percent per year. Approximately 80 percent of the population is Moslem. While the bulk of the remainder are animists, there is a small number of Christians, mostly Catholic.

GOVERNMENT

On March 3, 1963, Senegal adopted a new constitution which transformed its government from the former parliamentary structure into a presidential system. Under this new constitution the President is elected by direct popular vote for a 4-year term and is eligible for reelection. He determines and conducts national policy, assures the execution of the laws, and possesses regulatory power. He is chief of the administration, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and guardian of the constitution. He appoints all civil and military employees of the state, including ambassadors, judges, and other high officials, and names a government responsible only to himself. He may designate his substitute when he is temporarily unable to fulfill his duties.