

Benin

Ethnicity in Benin

Group selection

The classification of groups corresponds to the ancient kingdoms existing before French colonization in the region that later became the independent state of Dahomey. There were three main kingdoms: Danhome (its capital being in Abomey in the south/center), Hogbonou (Porto Novo in the southeast) and Nikki (in the north). The hostilities between these historic kingdoms persisted during colonial time, determined the political cleavages in the newly independent state and keep playing a role even today (cp. ¹⁷⁶, 4). Ethnic groups are thus clustered into cultural blocs according to their historic kingdom-affiliation: "South/Central" (Fon and related groups), "Southeastern" (Goun and Yoruba/Nagot groups) and "Northern" (Bariba, Gurmanché/Betamaribe and others). These ethno-regional blocs were each represented by one of Dahomey's three most important political leaders in the years after independence: the north by Hubert Maga, the south/center by Justin Ahomadegbe, and the southeast by Sourou Apithy.

¹⁷⁶ [Battle Seely, 2007]

One can additionally list the southwestern Adja group because of its considerable size and geographic concentration. There is, however, no evidence for any political significance of this group until the advent of multi-party democracy in 1990 when it began to be represented by a political party (the PSD, led by Bruno Amoussou).

The group sizes were coded based on the information available via the CIA ¹⁷⁷ and, where necessary, consulted additional sources. According to the ¹⁷⁸, 39.2% of Benin's total population belong to the Fon and related groups. However, this figure also includes the Goun group, which should more appropriately be regarded as belonging to the same southeastern cluster as the Yoruba/Nagot group. According to the Ethnologue and the Joshua project, the Goun group constitutes roughly 4% of Beninese population. In light of this information, the group sizes of the south/central (Fon) cluster were coded at 35.2% and of the southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun) at 16.3% (12.3% in the ¹⁷⁹).

¹⁷⁷ [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

¹⁷⁸ [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

¹⁷⁹ [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

The size of the southwestern Adja cluster is 15.2 % according to the ¹⁸⁰. In calculating the size of the northern cluster, the CIA figures of the Bariba (9.2%), Peulh/Fulani (7%), Ottamari (6.1 %), Yoa-Lokpa (4%) and Dendi (2.5%) groups were included. Furthermore, the small Gourmanchéma group that has a population of

¹⁸⁰ [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

62000 (approximately 0.6%) in Benin according to the Ethnologue was added. In total, the Northern cluster (Bariba, Peul, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma) was coded at 29.4 %.

Power relations

1960-1963: A "grand coalition government" was installed after independence (¹⁸¹). Maga is named president, and Apithy vice-president. Maga has a Bariba mother (¹⁸²) and is generally perceived as a northern leader (¹⁸³). Apithy is from Porto Novo (south-east). Therefore, the northern groups are coded as "senior partner" in the coalition, the southeastern groups as "junior partner". Emile Zinsou (the "fourth man" in the country's politics) represents the Fon group in this "grand coalition government". Hence, the latter are also coded as "junior partner".

¹⁸¹ [Dickie Rake, 1973]

¹⁸² [Dickie Rake, 1973]

¹⁸³ [David, 1998]

1964-1965: After the overthrow of Maga, a "tandem government" is installed with Apithy and Ahomadegbe (who is from Abomey in the south/center) as leaders. The northerners remain excluded (¹⁸⁴; ¹⁸⁵). Thus, the Fon and the southeastern groups are both coded as "senior partners", while the northern groups are considered "powerless".

¹⁸⁴ [Allen, 1988]

¹⁸⁵ [Boko, no date]

1966-1967; Christophe Soglo's 2nd coup (Oct 1965) and his rule until 1967: . The Fon south/center clearly dominates the ruling military committee (¹⁸⁶). Soglo himself is from this region. Therefore, the Fon are coded as "senior partner". In general, the south was politically dominant during this period, so the northern groups are coded as "powerless". In contrast, there is no concrete evidence that the southeastern groups are excluded from power. Apithy is in exile but so is Ahomadegbe, the Fon political leader. Instead of the "old" political elite, new military leaders (such as Soglo) are now in power. Thus one can assume the southeastern groups to be a "junior partner" during Soglo's regime as well.

¹⁸⁶ [Allen, 1988]

1968-1969; Kouandété's coup (Dec 1967) and another military regime: The dominant people in the highest circles of power are now mostly northerners, like Lieutenant-Colonel Alley and (above all) Major Kouandété. Also the government is mainly of northern origin (¹⁸⁷). However, the civilian president installed in 1968, Emile Zinsou, is from the Fon south/center. Moreover, Alley had the confidence of the "Abomey clique" (¹⁸⁸). Therefore, the northern groups are coded as "senior partner" and the Fon as "junior partner".

¹⁸⁷ [Allen, 1988]

¹⁸⁸ [Allen, 1988]

The southeastern groups, however, seem to have lost their influence under the northern-dominated regime. Therefore, the southeastern groups are coded as "powerless" in this period.

1970-1972: from the invention of the "presidential council" to Kérékou's coup: After the aborted elections in 1970 – and in order to avoid civil war –, the country's political elite invents a new formula of power sharing between the three important ethno-regions: a "presidential council" with the three big leaders, and a rotation system which gives each of them in turn the presidency for 2 years.

As Maga is the first to assume office, the northern groups are coded as "senior partner" in this period, while the Fon south/center and the southeastern groups are "junior partners".

Ahomadegbe's turn (initiating in May 1972) is not considered here since he first was unable to govern for the most part due to the joint obstruction by Maga and Apithy (¹⁸⁹), and then was overthrown by Major Mathieu Kérékou.

¹⁸⁹ [Dickie Rake, 1973]

1973-1989; Kérékou's reign: Kérékou, a northerner, becomes the dominant political figure. His military (later political) government, however, was a mixture of both southern and northern officers and politicians. There is a regional equilibrium within the junta, and no ethnic or regional group is favored during the dictatorship (¹⁹⁰). Nevertheless, besides assuring an ethnic balance in the circles of power, Kérékou also enhanced northern representation and influence (¹⁹¹). Therefore, this period is conceived as an authoritarian power-sharing regime – or, as Boko (¹⁹², 17) calls it: an "equal opportunity dictatorship" –, in which the northern groups are the "senior partner", and the Fon and the southeastern groups the "junior partners".

¹⁹⁰ [Boko, no date]

¹⁹¹ [Allen, 1988]

¹⁹² [Boko, no date]

1990; Year of the National Conference: Hence, this period can be coded as a power sharing arrangement again. Head of the interim government is the later president Nicéphore Soglo from the Fon group in the south/central region. Thus, the latter are classified as "senior partner" in this year, and all other groups as "junior partners".

With democratization and the advent of multipartyism, the southwestern Adja group is now also represented by a political party (PSD). Hence, from 1990 on, the group is coded as politically relevant.

1991-1995; Nicéphore Soglo's presidential term: The new electoral system forces the parties (and therefore the ethno-regional factions) to build national coalitions in order to win elections and to be able to govern. As all parties represent a certain ethno-regional group, the result is a de-facto ethnic power sharing government (¹⁹³).

¹⁹³ [Creevey et al., 2005]

Soglo and his party represent the Fon south/center, which are therefore coded as "senior partner", while all other groups are given the status of "junior partners".

1996-2006; Kérékou's presidential terms: Kérékou becomes president again. His new ruling coalition includes several southern politicians and southern-based parties, such as, for example, Adrien Houngbédji (PRD), Albert Tévoédjré (NCC) –both representing the southeastern groups –, and Bruno Amoussou (PSD), representing the southwestern Adja group (¹⁹⁴, ¹⁹⁵; see also ¹⁹⁶, 9). Therefore, the northern groups are coded as "senior partner", and the Adja and the southeastern groups as "junior partners".

The Fon group is still represented by Soglo (and his wife) who finds himself in the opposition (¹⁹⁷). According to the U.S. State Department's Human Rights Report from 2005, no members of the opposition were included in the cabinet or in the National Assembly's Executive Committee (¹⁹⁸). Yet, it still has some local power as can be seen by Soglo's being elected mayor of Benin's economic capital Cotonou in 2003. However, this does not justify coding political inclusion or even regional autonomy, since Soglo and other Fon remain excluded from central executive power and the Cotonou region does not have any sort of autonomous status, neither in de jure nor in de facto terms.

2007-2009 Presidential elections are held in March 2006, with Thomas Yayi Boni emerging as the winner, being inaugurated on April 6. Due to EPR's January-1st-rule, the new period is coded as starting in 2007.

Yayi Boni himself can be seen as the actual personification of an ethno-political power-sharing. His father is a Yoruba/Nagot from the southeast, while his mother hails from northern ethnic groups (Bariba and Peul); he was born as a Muslim and later converted to Christianity. His voter support - measured in a survey in the forefront of the election - was not ethnically-based either (¹⁹⁹, 12, 15-6). His party FCBE, moreover, is the only major party in Benin which cannot be considered an ethnic party (²⁰⁰, 18). His first cabinet excluded all former political heavyweights and party leaders (²⁰¹).

The ethnic power-sharing practiced in Benin that covers the highest executive level is also confirmed by the U.S. State Department's Human Rights Reports from 2006 to 2009 (²⁰²).

Overall, however, it is not quite evident which ethno-regional bloc now occupies the leading position under the new president Yayi Boni. The U.S. State Department's HR Reports from 2006 to 2009 provide a few figures but they do not exactly correspond to the politically relevant groups listed here:

2006: 7 cabinet ministers from the north; 16 ministers from the Fon, and the Goun and Yoruba/Nagot groups.

2007: 9 from the north; 14 from the Fon, Goun, and Adja groups; 3 from the Yoruba/Nagot.

2008 and 2009: 9 from the north; 15 from the Fon, Goun, and Adja groups; 3 from the Yoruba/Nagot.

These figures are based on purely linguistic criteria. Particularly,

¹⁹⁴ [David, 1998]

¹⁹⁵ [Wantchekon, 2003]

¹⁹⁶ [Battle Seely, 2007]

¹⁹⁷ [Wantchekon, 2003]

¹⁹⁸ [US State Department, 2005–2013]

¹⁹⁹ [Battle Seely, 2007]

²⁰⁰ [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

²⁰¹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008–2014]

²⁰² [US State Department, 2005–2013]

the 14/15 ministers from the Fon, Goun and Adja groups from 2007 to 2009 relate to three different ethno-regional groupings in our dataset. A first, rather safe deduction is that the Adja group cannot be more than a "junior partner". This notion seems to be confirmed by the role of the group's traditional party, the PSD, which is still clearly an ethnic Adja party (²⁰³, 18; ²⁰⁴, 12, 15-6), and formed part of the opposition alliance in the 2007 legislative elections. Hence, its role in the government will be somewhat limited.

²⁰³ [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

²⁰⁴ [Battle Seely, 2007]

Also the southeastern Goun and Yoruba/Nagot groups can hardly be coded as more than "junior partners" based on these numbers. (Yayi Boni, although Yoruba/Nagot from his father's side, is generally seen more as a northern exponent, as explicated below).

Subtracting a few ministers for the Adja group and the southeast (Goun) from these 14/15 ministers indicated by the HR Reports for 2007-2009, the south/central Fon group will probably be left with less than the 9 ministers hailing from the north. Moreover, Nicéphore Soglo's party RB – still the traditional Fon party (²⁰⁵, 18) – also formed part of the opposition alliance in 2007. Soglo's youngest son, Ganiou Soglo, was appointed as minister by Yayi Boni administering some minor portfolios (youth and sport; culture). Thus, the south/central Fon group can be regarded as a "junior partner" in Yayi Boni's government as well.

²⁰⁵ [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

Although of mixed ethnic heritage, based on his regional origin Yayi Boni seems to be identified more often with the north than with any southern group (²⁰⁶, 17; ²⁰⁷; and ²⁰⁸). Also, the northern groups (Bariba, Gurmanché/Betamaribe) are strongly represented in the cabinet (with perhaps more ministers than any other ethno-regional bloc). Thus, the northern groups were coded as "senior partner" again although their political weight has certainly decreased since Kérékou's retirement.

²⁰⁶ [Battle Seely, 2007]

²⁰⁷ [Freedom House, 2008-2010]

²⁰⁸ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008-2014]

2010-2013 In recent years, ethnic politics in Benin have been quite stable. The distribution of cabinet seats between the relevant groups has remained almost unchanged (²⁰⁹). According to most sources, president Yayi's regime is somewhat biased in favor of northern groups (Bariba, Peul, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma), yet still includes representatives from the other politically relevant groups as well (²¹⁰; ²¹¹). Thus, the period of power-sharing between all relevant groups with the northern groups in a leading role was extended until 1 January 2013.

²⁰⁹ [US State Department, 2005-2013]

²¹⁰ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008-2014]

²¹¹ [US State Department, 2005-2013]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Benin

From 1960 until 1963

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

From 1964 until 1965

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	SENIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	SENIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	POWERLESS
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

From 1966 until 1967

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	SENIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	POWERLESS
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

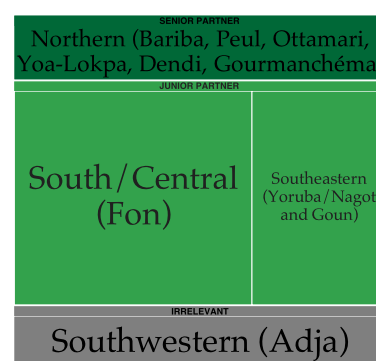


Figure 49: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1960-1963.

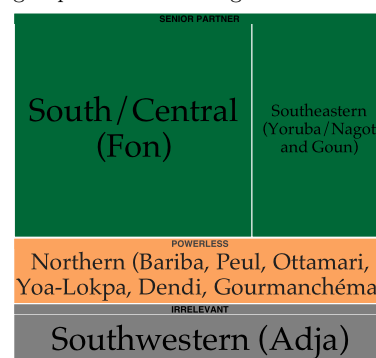


Figure 50: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1964-1965.

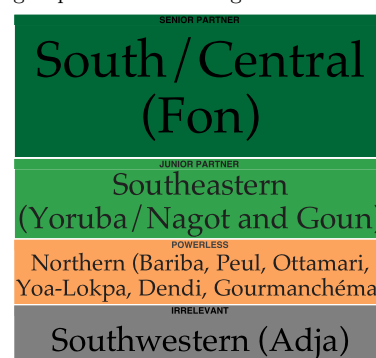


Figure 51: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1966-1967.

From 1968 until 1969

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	POWERLESS
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

From 1970 until 1972

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

From 1973 until 1989

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	IRRELEVANT

From 1990 until 1990

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	SENIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER

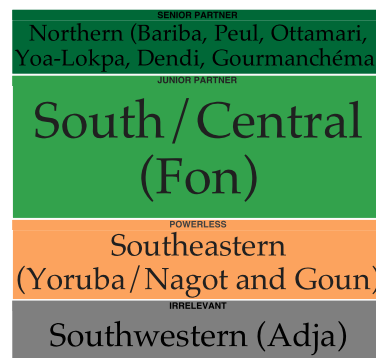


Figure 52: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1968-1969.

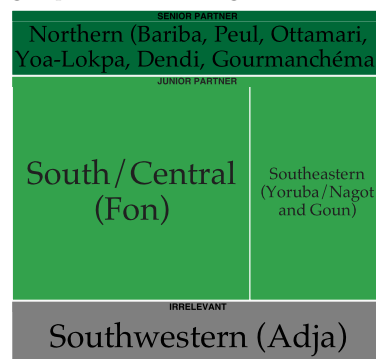


Figure 53: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1970-1972.

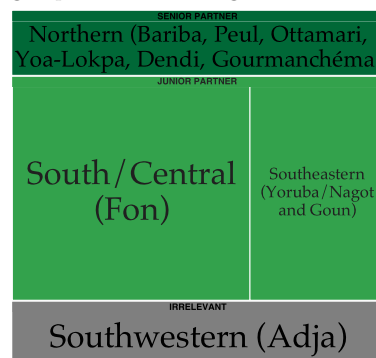


Figure 54: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1973-1989.



Figure 55: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1990-1990.

From 1991 until 1995

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	SENIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 1996 until 2006

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	POWERLESS
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER

From 2007 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
South/Central (Fon)	0.33	JUNIOR PARTNER
Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	0.185	JUNIOR PARTNER
Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottamari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	0.15	SENIOR PARTNER
Southwestern (Adja)	0.15	JUNIOR PARTNER

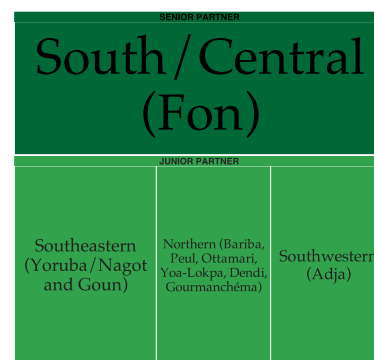


Figure 56: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1991-1995.

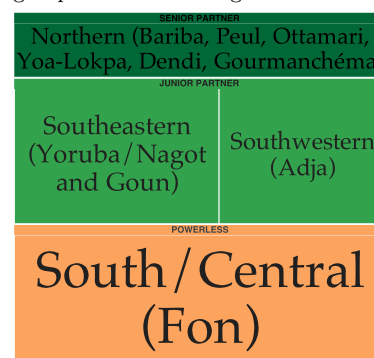


Figure 57: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1996-2006.

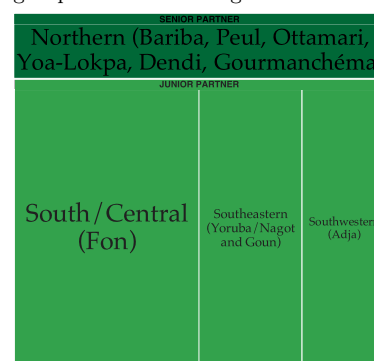


Figure 58: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 2007-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Benin

From 1960 until 2013

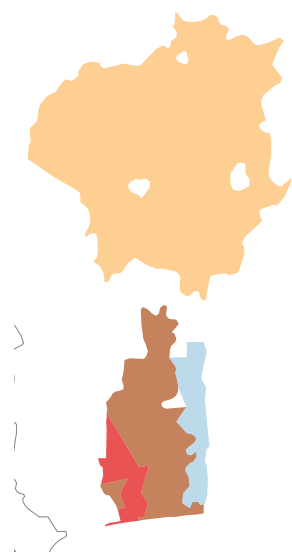


Figure 59: Map of ethnic groups in Benin during 2007-2013.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottomari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	68 215	Regional & urban
■	South/Central (Fon)	16 354	Regional & urban
■	Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	5458	Regional & urban
■	Southwestern (Adja)	3874	Regional & urban

Table 21: List of ethnic groups in Benin during 1960-2013.