

# 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 (<sup>330</sup>, 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.

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 <sup>331</sup> and, where necessary, consulted additional sources. According to the World Factbook, 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 <sup>332</sup>).

The size of the southwestern Adja cluster is 15.2 % according to the World Factbook (<sup>333</sup>). 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

<sup>330</sup> [Battle Seely, 2007]

<sup>331</sup> [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

<sup>332</sup> [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

<sup>333</sup> [CIA World Factbook, 2014]

population of 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 (<sup>334</sup>). Maga is named president, and Apithy vice-president. Maga has a Bariba mother (<sup>335</sup>) and is generally perceived as a northern leader (<sup>336</sup>). Apithy is from Porto Novo (southeast). 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”.

<sup>334</sup> [Dickie Rake, 1973]

<sup>335</sup> [Dickie Rake, 1973]

<sup>336</sup> [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 (<sup>337</sup>; <sup>338</sup>). Thus, the Fon and the southeastern groups are both coded as “senior partners”, while the northern groups are considered “powerless”.

<sup>337</sup> [Allen, 1988]

<sup>338</sup> [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 (<sup>339</sup>). 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”.

<sup>339</sup> [Allen, 1988]

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.

*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 <sup>(340)</sup>. <sup>340</sup> [Allen, 1988]  
 However, the civilian president installed in 1968, Emile Zinsou, is from the Fon south/center. Moreover, Alley had the confidence of the “Abomey clique” <sup>(341)</sup>. Therefore, the northern groups are coded <sup>341</sup> [Allen, 1988]  
 as “senior partner” and the Fon as “junior partner”.

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 <sup>(342)</sup>, and then was overthrown by Major Mathieu Kérékou. <sup>342</sup> [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 <sup>(343)</sup>. Nevertheless, besides assuring <sup>343</sup> [Boko, no date]  
 an ethnic balance in the circles of power, Kérékou also enhanced northern representation and influence <sup>(344)</sup>. Therefore, this period <sup>344</sup> [Allen, 1988]  
 is conceived as an authoritarian power-sharing regime – or, as Boko <sup>(345, 17)</sup> called it: an “equal opportunity dictatorship” –, in which <sup>345</sup> [Boko, no date]  
 the northern groups are the “senior partner”, and the Fon and the southeastern groups the “junior partners”.

*1990-1995; Year of the National Conference and Nicéphore Soglo's presidential term*

This period is coded as a period of power sharing. 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.

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 <sup>(346)</sup>.

<sup>346</sup> [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 <sup>(347; 348; see also <sup>349</sup>, 9)</sup>. Therefore, the northern groups are coded as “senior partner”, and the Adja and the southeastern groups as “junior partners”.

<sup>347</sup> [David, 1998]

<sup>348</sup> [Wantchekon, 2003]

<sup>349</sup> [Battle Seely, 2007]

The Fon group is still represented by Soglo (and his wife) who finds himself in the opposition <sup>(350)</sup>. 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 <sup>(351)</sup>. 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.

<sup>350</sup> [Wantchekon, 2003]

<sup>351</sup> [US State Department, 2005–2013]

*2007-2016*

The 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; 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 (<sup>352</sup>, 12, 15-6). His party FCBE, moreover, is the only major party in Benin which cannot be considered an ethnic party (<sup>353</sup>, 18). His first cabinet excluded all former political heavyweights and party leaders (<sup>354</sup>).

<sup>352</sup> [Battle Seely, 2007]

<sup>353</sup> [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

<sup>354</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008–2014]

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 (<sup>355</sup>).

<sup>355</sup> [US State Department, 2005–2013]

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, the 14/15 ministers from the Fon, Goun and Adja groups from 2007 to 2009 relate to three different ethno-regional groupings of this 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 (<sup>356</sup>, 18; <sup>357</sup>, 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.

<sup>356</sup> [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

<sup>357</sup> [Battle Seely, 2007]

Also the southeastern Goun and Yoruba/Nagot groups can hardly be more than a "junior partner" 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 (<sup>358</sup>, 18) – also formed part of the opposition alliance in 2007. Soglo's

<sup>358</sup> [Basedau Stroh, 2009]

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 is coded as a “junior partner” in Yayi Boni’s government as well.

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 (<sup>359</sup>, 17; <sup>360</sup>; and <sup>361</sup>). 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 are coded as “senior partner” again although their political weight has certainly decreased since Kérékou’s retirement.

Ethnic politics in Benin remained quite stable under Yayi Boni. The distribution of cabinet seats between the relevant groups has remained almost unchanged (<sup>362</sup>) over the years. According to most sources, president Yayi Boni’s regime is somewhat biased in favour of northern groups (Bariba, Peul, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma), yet still includes representatives from the other politically relevant groups as well (<sup>363</sup>, <sup>364</sup>).

In August 2013, president Boni reshuffled his cabinet due to increasing tensions with several ministers. However, there is no indication that, with the new cabinet in place, some ethnic groups were not included in executive power anymore (Porst, 2013). The coding is therefore extended until 2016.

## 2017

After two terms in office, president Yayi Boni had to step down in spring 2016. In the presidential elections in March, the independent businessman Patrice Talon defeated former Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou in the second electoral round (<sup>365</sup>). The transfer of power happened peacefully (<sup>366</sup>). Patrice Talon can be seen as a representative of the Southern/Central ethnic groups. He is ethnic Fon and was born in Ouidah (<sup>367</sup>). He did not assign a prime minister, however two ministers of State, of which one is a Northerner and the other one comes from the central South as well (<sup>368</sup>). The sources consulted do not indicate any political exclusion of the ethnic groups that have formerly been part of Benin’s government (<sup>369</sup>, <sup>370</sup>). The Minister of maternal and primary education, for example, is of Southeastern origin, while the Minister of Living and Sustainable Development and the Minister of Finance stem from the Southwestern region (<sup>371</sup>). Rather than not including some ethnic groups, Talon is criticized for the very low number of women in his cabinet (<sup>372</sup>, <sup>373</sup>, <sup>374</sup>). Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the cabinet members seems to be of central/southern origin, just as the president himself. This can be explained with the fact that the president, amongst others, appointed business partners and friends as ministers (<sup>375</sup>, <sup>376</sup>). From January 1st 2017 on, the South/Central ethnic groups are therefore coded as “Senior Partner”, while the

<sup>359</sup> [Battle Seely, 2007]

<sup>360</sup> [FreedomHouse, 2017]

<sup>361</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008–2014]

<sup>362</sup> [US State Department, 2005–2013]

<sup>363</sup> [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008–2014]

<sup>364</sup> [US State Department, 2005–2013]

<sup>365</sup> [Agon, 2016]

<sup>366</sup> [FreedomHouse, 2017]

<sup>367</sup> [Global Black History, 2016]

<sup>368</sup> [BBC, 2016]

<sup>369</sup> [FreedomHouse, 2017]

others are coded “Junior Partner”.



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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

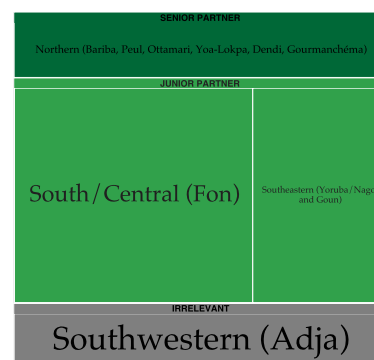


Figure 61: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1960-1963.

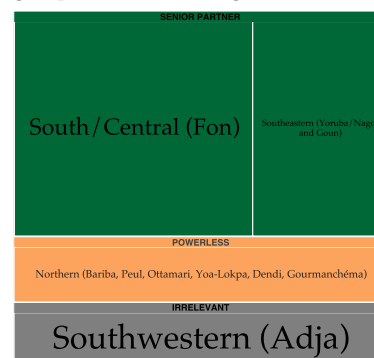


Figure 62: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1964-1965.

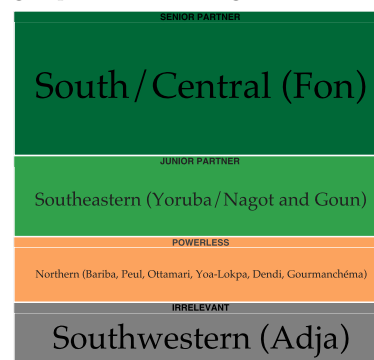


Figure 63: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1966-1967.

*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

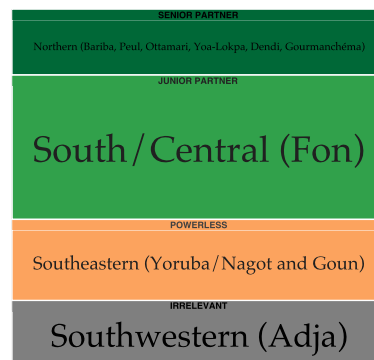


Figure 64: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1968-1969.

*From 1970 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

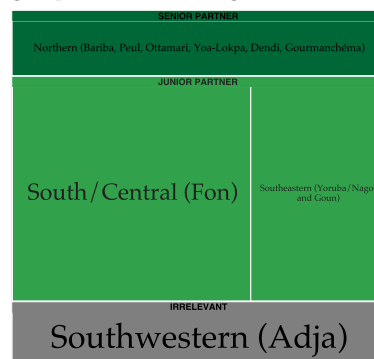


Figure 65: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1970-1989.

*From 1990 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

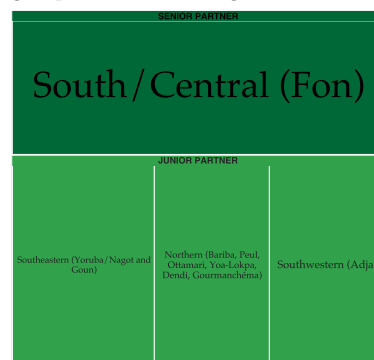


Figure 66: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1990-1995.

*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

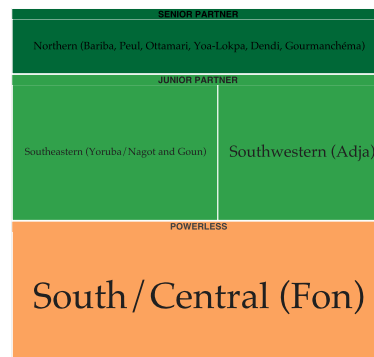


Figure 67: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 1996-2006.

*From 2007 until 2016*

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

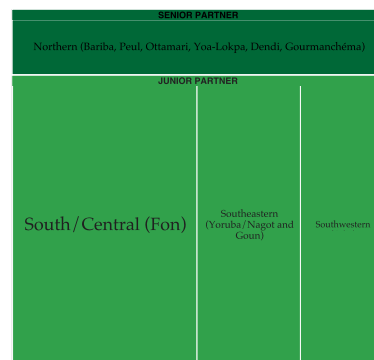


Figure 68: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 2007-2016.

*From 2017 until 2017*

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

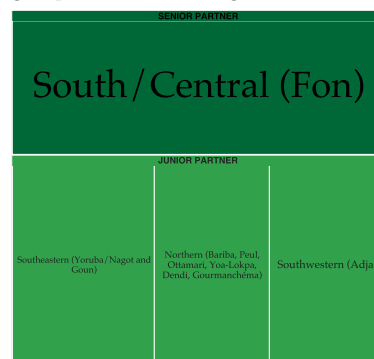


Figure 69: Political status of ethnic groups in Benin during 2017-2017.

## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Benin*

*From 1960 until 1989*

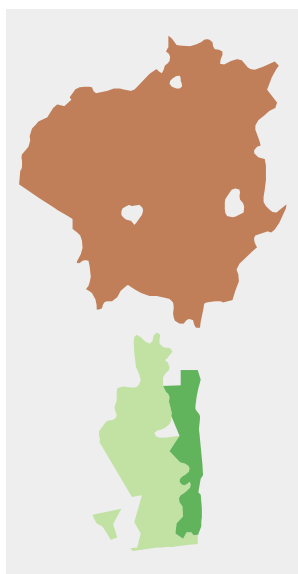


Figure 70: Map of ethnic groups in Benin during 1960-1989.

	Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■	Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottomari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	68 210	Regionally based
■	South/Central (Fon)	16 352	Regionally based
■	Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	5 458	Regionally based

Table 23: List of ethnic groups in Benin during 1960-1989.

*From 1990 until 2017*

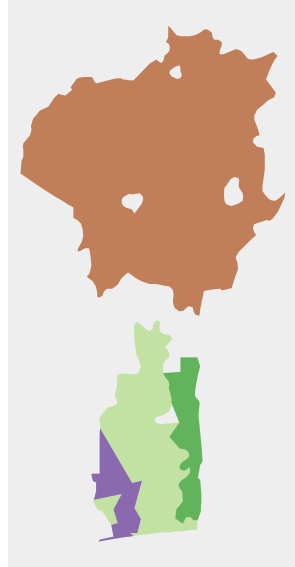


Figure 71: Map of ethnic groups in Benin during 1990-2017.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
■ Northern (Bariba, Peul, Ottomari, Yoa-Lokpa, Dendi, Gourmanchéma)	68 210	Regionally based
■ South/Central (Fon)	16 352	Regionally based
■ Southeastern (Yoruba/Nagot and Goun)	5458	Regionally based
■ Southwestern (Adja)	3869	Regionally based

Table 24: List of ethnic groups in Benin during 1990-2017.