

# Mauritania

## *Ethnicity in Mauritania*

### *Group selection*

1960 Independence

1978 Succession by the military

1984 Coup d'état

1984 Multiparty system, (President Sid Ahmed Ould Taya, maraboutic tribe)

2005 Coup d'état

2007 Free election of president

*Ethnic groups* Three different ethnic groups can be distinguished: the population with Moorish language and culture, is spread throughout the entire country and makes up 70% of the population. They are divided between the White Moors, commonly called Beydhanes, who are descendants of the Arabo-Berber conquerors called Mourabitounes, and the Black Moors, commonly called Haratines, who are descendants of slaves. The Black Africans, 30% of the population (in order of relative size) comprise: the Halpoulers (Toucouleurs and Peulhs), the Soninkés (or Sarakollés), the Wolofs, the Bambaras, farmers and shephards that live in region of the Senegal River. Even though the Black Africans are currently much fewer in number than the Black and White Moors, Black Africans comprise the group experiencing the most demographic growth.

Mauritania is composed of 3 large communities or groups: the White Moors, the Black Moors, and the Black Africans (Halpoulers, Soninkés and Wolofs). The first group have always dominated politically and economically, together with the second group as junior partners. In contrast, the Black Africans have sometimes been excluded from political and economic power (which never prevented dissension in their own ranks), but they had some representatives in the national government; so they are taken as junior partner as well. Nevertheless they harbor a deep feeling of injustice and strive for reparations, notably for the expulsion of several tens of thousands of them after inter-ethnic clashes in 1989. The challenge lies in the battle against extremism, whether it be Arab, Black Moor, or religious. A strong signal was sent by the new president elect and his prime minister to put a definitive end to this humanitarian debt, which

has always been an open wound that has prevented the country's consolidation of national unity.

The first republic was born on the 28th of November 1960. It ended the 10th of July, 1978 without the effect of the first military coup. The president then was a White Moor from the Oulad Ebayri tribe of Boutilimitt in the region of Trarza. The leadership of that time was retraced by the now defunct president, Mokhtar Ould Dad-dah, in a book entitled *Mauritania against the Winds and Tide*. The three decades of military power killed the Mauritani-ans' embryonic desire for democracy, and the same number of years used to divert public resources ran the economy into the ground and put the coun-try on its knees. On the 3rd of August 2005, under the doubtful watch of the international community, a military coalition, led by the old head of security, deposed president Maaouiya Sid Ahmed Taya, who had been president for 21 years. To allay national and interna-tional concerns, they promised that they would not stay more than two years—the time needed to put into place a democratic process that would lead to the organization of free, just, and transparent elections. During the period of transition, municipal, legislative, senatorial, and presidential elections were organized. The lower chamber of parliament comprises 95 deputies. The political parties together obtained 54 deputies. The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister came from the White Moorish group since 1960. Today, 2007, the President of the National Assembly, Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, is a Black Moor (Haratines). He is a symbol and political leader who has always fought for the eradication of the consequences of slavery within the Haratine community. The President of the Senate is Black African (Halpoulaar).

*2006-2009:* Ely Ould Mohamed Vall who rose to power by a coup d'état on August 3, 2005, organized democratic elections in April 2007 without running for office himself and leaving power as pre-viously promised. The elections were won by Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, a white Moor. However, the country slid into a political and economic crisis in 2008 and 2009. Moreover, the new president displaced the military leadership. The military conducted yet another coup, led by Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz who then be-came president and organized new elections in July 2009 – won by himself. Three months before these elections he temporarily stepped back. During this time the country was governed by Ba Mamadou dit M'Baré, a black African (Halpoulaar) for the first time in the country's history. However, this does not change the fact that most political power rests in the hands of the white Moors.

*2010-2013:* As in the previous coding period, political power in Mauritania is largely a White Moor affair. Between 2011 and 2013, White Moors controlled 19 of a total of 27 to 29 cabinet seats, leaving Haratins (Black Moors) and Black Africans significantly underrepresented (<sup>1947</sup>). Similarly biased distributions of power can be observed in the country's security apparatus, the judiciary, and other administrative divisions (<sup>1948</sup>). On this basis, the White Moors were coded as Senior Partner and Haratins and Black Africans as Junior Partners. Black Africans are subjected to some forms of government discrimination and were involved in ethnically motivated demonstrations and riots (<sup>1949</sup>). Most notably, a national registration campaign launched in 2011 spurred ethnic tensions. Apparently, identification cards were distributed in an ethnically biased way that disenfranchised many Black Africans. Municipal and legislative elections originally scheduled for April 2011 were delayed due to registration problems, protests and political impasse, but were finally held in late 2013 (<sup>1950</sup>).

<sup>1947</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2011–2013]

<sup>1948</sup> [Freedom House, 2011]

<sup>1949</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2011–2013]

<sup>1950</sup> [U.S. Department of State, 2011–2013]

*Western Sahara (1976-1979):* Western Sahara was a Spanish colony until 1976. When internal political unrest in mainland Spain made decolonization of the Western Sahara imminent, Morocco and Mauritania started to scramble for the Spanish colony. After a ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1975 which established the right of the Western Sahara for self-determination, Morocco and Mauritania decided to ignore the ruling of the ICJ and divided up the territory of the Western Sahara between themselves while granting Spain the continued exploitation of phosphate in the Western Sahara. "The Spanish government finally terminated its claim to the Spanish Sahara in February 1976 and bequeathed the territory—renamed the Western Sahara—jointly to Morocco and Mauritania, both of which consented to allow Spain to exploit the Bu Craa phosphates." (<sup>1951</sup>) The anti-colonial rebels from POLISARIO turned against their new occupants and proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February 1976, one day after the Spanish had officially handed over power to Morocco and Mauritania. The SADR is today recognized by the African Union and over sixty countries world-wide.

<sup>1951</sup> [Library of Congress, 1988]

The inhabitants of the Western Sahara are mainly Sahrawis, a formerly nomadic tribal people who are politically united in their struggle against foreign occupational forces (<sup>1952</sup>). They are of mixed Arab, Berber and Black African descent and population numbers are disputed but several sources indicate a number around 500,000 today (<sup>1953</sup>). The population share for Mauritania was calculated based on present-day population numbers for both Mauritania and the Western Sahara, assuming that both populations were growing at a similar rate. Moreover, it was based on the assumption that the majority of Sahwari people were not living in the area claimed by Mauritania (about 1/3 of the entire territory of the Western Sahara) but in the area controlled by Morocco, arriving at a population share

<sup>1952</sup> [UCDP, 2008]

<sup>1953</sup> [CIA, 2011]

of 7% for Sahwaris in the period in question. All other population figures were adjusted accordingly.

Mauritania never managed to achieve de facto control of the Western Saharan territory and even struggled to defend its own state territory in the period from 1976-1979. In 1978 a truce was reached and in 1979 Mauritania pulled out its troops and recognized POLISARIO as the official representative of the Western Sahara, although it never recognized the state itself. Moroccan troops moved quickly into the former Mauritanian territory and holds it since 1979. Neither were Sahwari representatives ever included into a Mauritanian government nor were citizenship rights ever extended to Sahwari people. The political status of Sahwari people can thus be coded as discriminated.

## *Bibliography*

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## Political status of ethnic groups in Mauritania

*From 1960 until 1976*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
White Moors (Beydan)	0.43	SENIOR PARTNER
Haratins (Black Moors)	0.41	JUNIOR PARTNER
Black Africans	0.16	JUNIOR PARTNER

*From 1977 until 1977*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
White Moors (Beydan)	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER
Haratins (Black Moors)	0.39	JUNIOR PARTNER
Black Africans	0.14	JUNIOR PARTNER
Sahrawis	0.07	DISCRIMINATED

*From 1978 until 1979*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
White Moors (Beydan)	0.4	JUNIOR PARTNER
Haratins (Black Moors)	0.39	SENIOR PARTNER
Black Africans	0.14	JUNIOR PARTNER
Sahrawis	0.07	DISCRIMINATED

*From 1980 until 1983*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
White Moors (Beydan)	0.43	JUNIOR PARTNER
Haratins (Black Moors)	0.41	SENIOR PARTNER
Black Africans	0.16	JUNIOR PARTNER



Figure 476: Political status of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1960-1976.

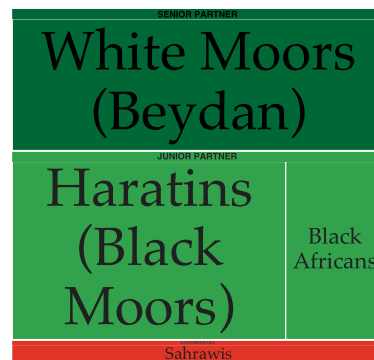


Figure 477: Political status of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1977-1977.

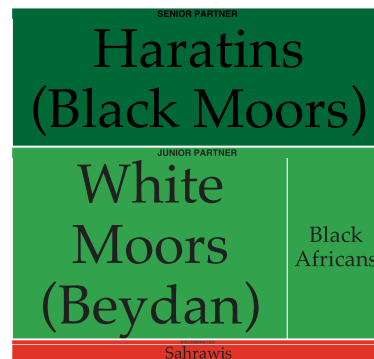


Figure 478: Political status of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1978-1979.



*From 1984 until 2013*

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Haratins (Black Moors)	0.4	JUNIOR PARTNER
White Moors (Beydan)	0.3	SENIOR PARTNER
Black Africans	0.3	JUNIOR PARTNER

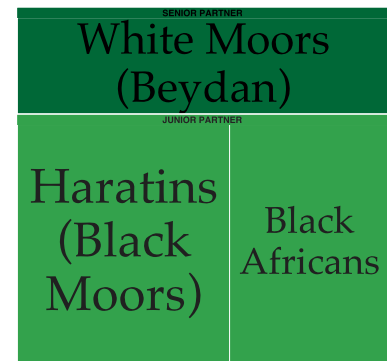


Figure 480: Political status of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1984-2013.



## *Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Mauritania*

*From 1960 until 1975*

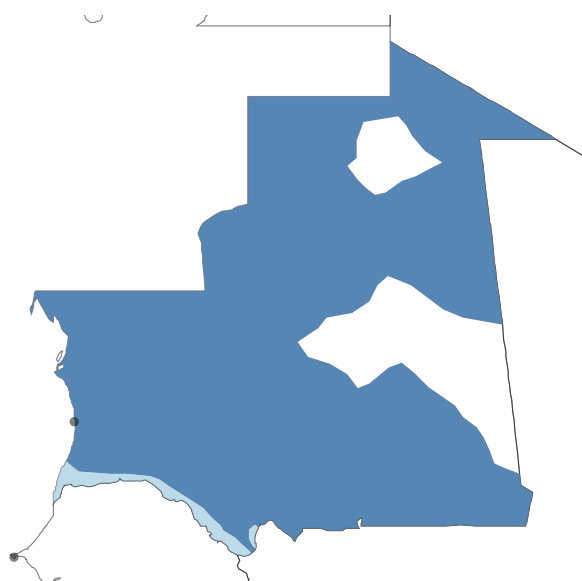


Figure 481: Map of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1984-2013.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
White Moors (Beydan)	878 553	Regionally based
Haratins (Black Moors)	878 553	Regionally based
Black Africans	17 333	Regionally based

Table 144: List of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1960-1975.

*From 1976 until 1976*

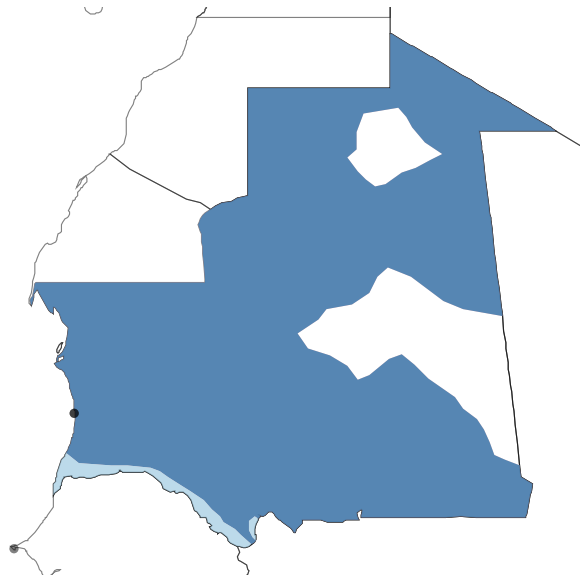


Figure 482: Map of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1984-2013.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
White Moors (Beydan)	878 553	Regionally based
Haratins (Black Moors)	878 553	Regionally based
Black Africans	17 333	Regionally based

Table 145: List of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1976-1976.

*From 1977 until 1979*

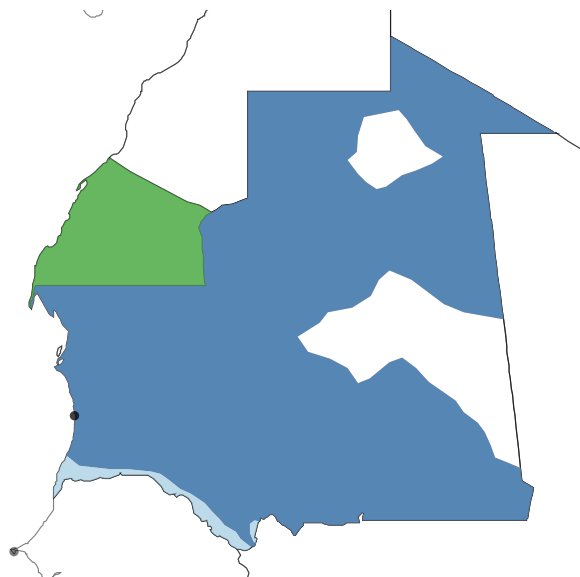


Figure 483: Map of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1984-2013.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
White Moors (Beydan)	878 553	Regionally based
Haratins (Black Moors)	878 553	Regionally based
Sahrawis	98 057	Regionally based
Black Africans	17 333	Regionally based

Table 146: List of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1977-1979.

*From 1980 until 2013*

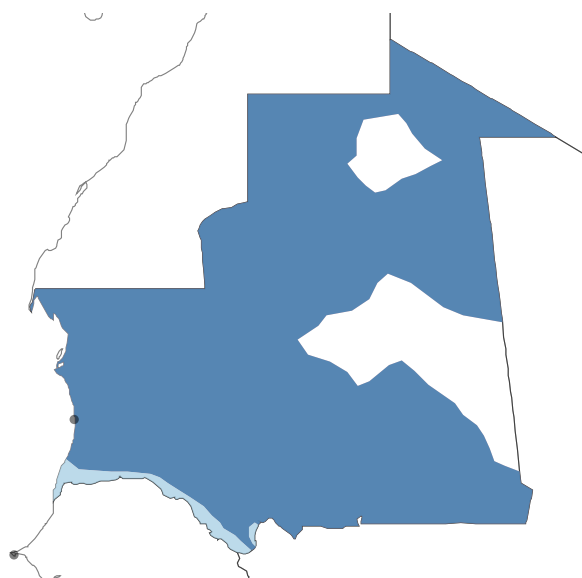


Figure 484: Map of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1984-2013.

Group name	Area in km <sup>2</sup>	Type
White Moors (Beydan)	878 553	Regionally based
Haratins (Black Moors)	878 553	Regionally based
Black Africans	17 333	Regionally based

Table 147: List of ethnic groups in Mauritania during 1980-2013.

## *Conflicts in Mauritania*

*Starting on 1957-01-12*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	NLA		1957-01-12			

*Starting on 1975-12-10*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Mauritania	POLISARIO		1975-12-10			

*Starting on 2008-09-15*

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Mauritania	AQIM		2008-09-15			