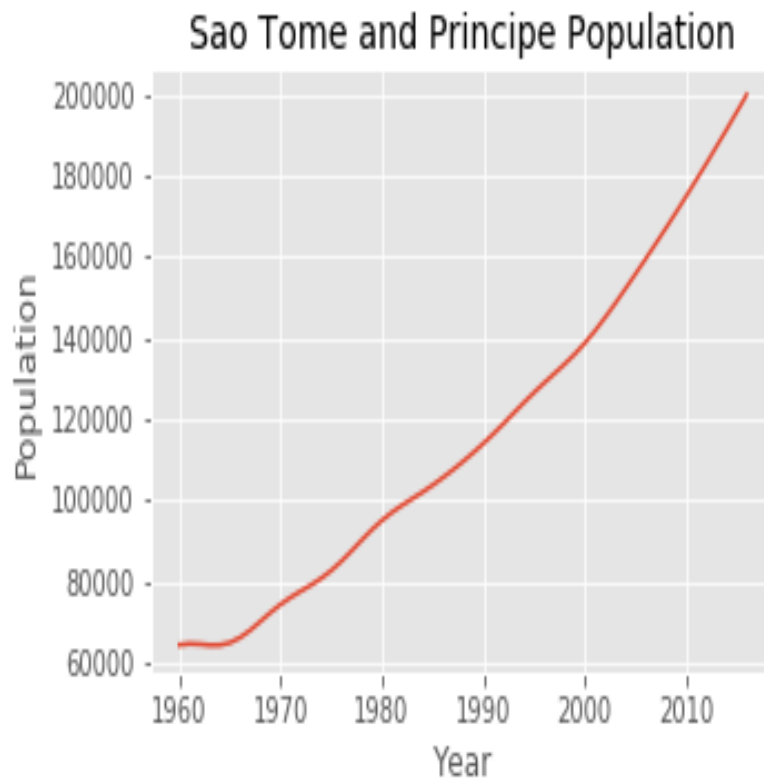


# Sao Tome and Principe



Coordinates:  $1^{\circ}\text{N } 7^{\circ}\text{E}$  /  $1^{\circ}\text{N } 7^{\circ}\text{E}$  / 1; 7 – in Africa (light blue & dark grey) – in the African Union (light blue) São Tomé and Príncipe (/sə tɒˈmeɪ ... ˈprɪnsɪpəl, -peɪ/; Portuguese: [sɔ̃w tuˈm i ˈpɾɨnsɪp]), officially the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, is an island nation in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Central Africa. It consists of two archipelagos around the two main islands: São Tomé and Príncipe, located about 140 kilometres (87 miles) apart and about 250 and 225 kilometres (155 and 140 miles), respectively, off the northwestern coast of Gabon. The islands were uninhabited until their discovery by Portuguese explorers in the 15th century. Gradually colonized and settled by the Portuguese throughout the 16th century, they collectively served as a vital commercial and trade center for the Atlantic slave trade. The rich volcanic soil and close proximity to the Equator made São Tomé and Príncipe ideal for sugar cultivation, followed later by cash crops such as coffee and cocoa; the lucrative plantation economy was heavily dependent upon imported African slaves. Cycles of social unrest and economic instability throughout the 19th and 20th centuries culminated in peaceful independence in 1975. São Tomé and Príncipe has since remained one of Africa's most stable and democratic countries.