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**Mauritania** [Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en) ([Template:Lang-ar](/wiki/Template:Lang-ar) [*Template:Transl*](/wiki/Template:Transl); [Template:Lang-ber](/wiki/Template:Lang-ber) or [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang); [Template:Lang-wo](/wiki/Template:Lang-wo); [Soninke](/wiki/Soninke_language): *Murutaane*; [Pulaar](/wiki/Pulaar_language): *Moritani*), officially the **Islamic Republic of Mauritania**, is a country in the [Maghreb](/wiki/Maghreb) region of western [North Africa](/wiki/North_Africa).[[1]](#cite_note-1)[[2]](#cite_note-2)[[3]](#cite_note-3) It is the eleventh largest country in Africa and is bordered by the [Atlantic Ocean](/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean) to the west, [Morocco](/wiki/Morocco) and the remnants of [Western Sahara](/wiki/Western_Sahara) in the north, [Algeria](/wiki/Algeria) in the northeast, [Mali](/wiki/Mali) in the east and southeast, and [Senegal](/wiki/Senegal) in the southwest.

The country derives its name from the ancient [Berber](/wiki/Berbers) [Kingdom of Mauretania](/wiki/Mauretania), which existed from the 3rd century BC to the 7th century, in the far north of modern-day [Morocco](/wiki/Morocco). Approximately 90% of Mauritania's land is within the [Sahara](/wiki/Sahara) and consequently the population is concentrated in the south, where precipitation is slightly higher. The capital and largest city is [Nouakchott](/wiki/Nouakchott), located on the Atlantic coast, which is home to around one-third of the country's 3.5 million people. The government was overthrown on 6 August 2008, in [a military coup d'état](/wiki/2008_Mauritanian_coup_d'état) led by then-General [Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz](/wiki/Mohamed_Ould_Abdel_Aziz). On 16 April 2009, Aziz resigned from the military to run for president in the 19 July elections, which he won.[[4]](#cite_note-4) About 20% of Mauritanians live on less than US$1.25 per day.[[5]](#cite_note-5) [Slavery in Mauritania](/wiki/Slavery_in_Mauritania) has been called a major [human rights](/wiki/Human_rights) issue, with roughly 4% (155,600 people) of the country's population – proportionally the highest for any country – being enslaved against their will, especially enemies of the government. Additional human rights concerns in Mauritania include [female genital mutilation](/wiki/Female_genital_mutilation),[[6]](#cite_note-6) [polygamy](/wiki/Polygamy), and [child labour](/wiki/Child_labour).

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## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

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### Ancient history[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

The [Bafours](/wiki/Bafour) were primarily agriculturalist, and among the first Saharan people to abandon their historically nomadic lifestyle. With the gradual desiccation of the Sahara, they headed south.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)[[7]](#cite_note-7) Many of the Berber tribes claimed Yemeni (and sometimes other Arab) origins. There is little evidence to support such claims, but a 2000 [DNA](/wiki/DNA) study of Yemeni people suggested there might be some ancient connection between the peoples.[[8]](#cite_note-8) Other peoples also migrated south past the Sahara to West Africa. In 1076, Moorish Islamic warrior monks ([Almoravid](/wiki/Almoravid) or Al Murabitun) attacked and conquered the large area of the ancient [Ghana Empire](/wiki/Ghana_Empire). Over the next 500 years, [Arabs](/wiki/Arab) overcame fierce resistance from the local population ([Berber](/wiki/Berber_people) and non-Berber alike) to dominate Mauritania. [thumb|The](/wiki/File:AMH-6743-NA_View_of_Arguin_castle.jpg) [Dutch](/wiki/Dutch_Empire) trading post of [Arguin](/wiki/Arguin) in 1665

The [Char Bouba war](/wiki/Char_Bouba_war) (1644–74) was the unsuccessful final effort of the peoples to repel the [Yemeni](/wiki/Yemen) [Maqil](/wiki/Maqil) Arab invaders. The invaders were led by the [Beni Hassan](/wiki/Beni_Hassan) tribe. The descendants of the Beni Hassan warriors became the [upper stratum](/wiki/Hassane) of [Moorish](/wiki/Moors) society. [Hassaniya](/wiki/Hassaniya), a Berber-influenced [Arabic dialect](/wiki/Arabic_dialect) that derives its name from the Beni Hassan, became the dominant language among the largely [nomadic](/wiki/Nomad) population. [Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

Berbers retained a niche influence by producing the majority of the region's [marabouts](/wiki/Marabout): those who preserve and teach Islamic tradition.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Modern history[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[Imperial France](/wiki/French_colonial_empire)[Template:Vague](/wiki/Template:Vague) gradually [absorbed the territories](/wiki/Franco-Trarzan_War_of_1825) of present-day Mauritania from the [Senegal River](/wiki/Senegal_River) area and upwards, starting in the late 19th century. In 1901, [Xavier Coppolani](/wiki/Xavier_Coppolani) took charge of the imperial mission. Through a combination of strategic alliances with [Zawiya](/wiki/Zawia_tribe) tribes, and military pressure on the Hassane warrior nomads, he managed to extend French rule over the Mauritanian [emirates](/wiki/Emirate). [Trarza](/wiki/Emirate_of_Trarza), [Brakna](/wiki/Brakna) and [Tagant](/wiki/Tagant_Region) quickly submitted to treaties with the colonial power (1903–04), but the northern emirate of [Adrar](/wiki/Adrar_Plateau) held out longer, aided by the anti-colonial rebellion (or [jihad](/wiki/Jihad)) of shaykh [Maa al-Aynayn](/wiki/Maa_al-Aynayn). Adrar was finally defeated militarily in 1912, and incorporated into the territory of Mauritania, which had been drawn up and planned in 1904. Mauritania was part of [French West Africa](/wiki/French_West_Africa) from 1920. [Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

French rule brought legal prohibitions against slavery and an end to inter-clan warfare. During the colonial period, 90% of the population remained nomadic. Many sedentary peoples, whose ancestors had been expelled centuries earlier, began to trickle back into Mauritania. The previous capital of the country, [Saint-Louis](/wiki/Saint-Louis,_Senegal) was located in Senegal, so when the country gained independence in 1960, Nouakchott, at the time little more than a fortified village (*"ksar"*), was chosen as the site of the new capital of Mauritania.[[9]](#cite_note-9) After gaining independence, larger numbers of indigenous [Sub-Saharan African](/wiki/Sub-Saharan_African) peoples ([Haalpulaar](/wiki/Fula_people), [Soninke](/wiki/Soninke_people), and [Wolof](/wiki/Wolof_people)) entered Mauritania, moving into the area north of the [Senegal River](/wiki/Senegal_River). Educated in French language and customs, many of these recent arrivals became clerks, soldiers, and administrators in the new state. This occurred as the French militarily suppressed the most intransigent Hassane tribes of the Moorish north. This changed the former balance of power, and new conflicts arose between the southern populations and Moors. Between these groups stood the [Haratin](/wiki/Haratin), a very large population of Arabized slaves of sub-Saharan African origins, who lived within Moorish society, integrated into a low-caste social position.[[10]](#cite_note-10) [Modern-day slavery](/wiki/Slavery_in_Mauritania) is still a common practice in Mauritania.[[11]](#cite_note-11) According to some estimates, up to 600,000 Mauritanians, or 20% of the population, are still enslaved.[[12]](#cite_note-12)[[13]](#cite_note-13)[[14]](#cite_note-14) A 2012 CNN report, "Slavery's Last Stronghold," by John D. Sutter, describes and documents the ongoing slave-owning cultures.[[15]](#cite_note-15) This social discrimination is applied chiefly against the "black Moors" (Haratin) in the northern part of the country, where tribal elites among "white Moors" (Beidane) hold sway.[[16]](#cite_note-16)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)

[Political parties](/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Mauritania), illegal during the military period, were legalized again in 1991. By April 1992, as civilian rule returned, 16 major political parties had been recognized; 12 major political parties were active in 2004. The [*Parti Républicain Démocratique et Social*](/wiki/Parti_Républicain_Démocratique_et_Social) (PRDS), formerly led by President Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, dominated Mauritanian politics after the country's first multi-party elections in April 1992, following the approval by [referendum](/wiki/Referendum) of the current constitution in July 1991. President Taya won elections in 1992 and 1997. Most opposition parties boycotted the first legislative election in 1992. For nearly a decade the parliament was dominated by the PRDS. The opposition participated in municipal elections in January–February 1994, and in subsequent [Senate](/wiki/Senate) elections – most recently in April 2004 – and gained representation at the local level, as well as three seats in the Senate.

This period was marked by extensive ethnic violence and [human rights abuses](/wiki/Human_rights_in_Mauritania). Between 1990 and 1991, a campaign of particularly extreme violence took place against a background of [Arabization](/wiki/Arabization), interference with blacks' association rights, expropriation, expatriation and slavery. The slaves were mostly black.[[20]](#cite_note-20) In October 1987, the government allegedly uncovered a tentative [coup d'état](/wiki/Coup_d'état) by a group of black army officers, backed, according to the authorities, by [Senegal](/wiki/Senegal).[[21]](#cite_note-21) Fifty-one officers were arrested and subjected to interrogation and torture.[[22]](#cite_note-22) Heightened ethnic tensions were the catalyst for the [Mauritania–Senegal Border War](/wiki/Mauritania–Senegal_Border_War), which started as a result of a conflict in Diawara between Moorish Mauritanian herders and Senegalese farmers over grazing rights.[[23]](#cite_note-23) On 9 April 1989, Mauritanian guards killed two Senegalese.[[24]](#cite_note-24) Following the incident, several riots erupted in [Bakel](/wiki/Bakel,_Senegal), [Dakar](/wiki/Dakar) and other towns in Senegal, directed against the mainly Moorish Mauritanians who dominated the local retail business. The rioting, added to already existing tensions, led to a campaign within the country of terror against black Mauritanians,[[25]](#cite_note-25) who are often seen as 'Senegalese' by Beidanes, regardless of their nationality. As conflict with Senegal continued into 1990/91, the Mauritanian government engaged in or encouraged acts of violence and seizures of property directed against blacks. The war culminated in an international airlift agreed to by Senegal and Mauritania under international pressure to prevent further violence. The Mauritanian Government expelled tens of thousands of black Mauritanians. Most of these so-called 'Senegalese' had no ties to Senegal, and many still reside in [refugee camps](/wiki/Refugee_camps) in Mali and Senegal.[[22]](#cite_note-22) The exact number of expulsions is not known but the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, as of June 1991, 52,995 Mauritanian refugees were living in Senegal and at least 13,000 in Mali.[[26]](#cite_note-26)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)

From November 1990 to February 1991, between 500 and 600 Fula and Soninke political prisoners were executed or tortured to death by Mauritanian government forces. They were among 3,000 to 5,000 blacks — predominantly soldiers and civil servants — arrested between October 1990 and mid-January 1991.[[27]](#cite_note-27)[[28]](#cite_note-28) Some Mauritanian exiles believe that the number was as high as 5,000 on the basis of alleged involvement in an attempt to overthrow the government.<ref name=unhcr>[Template:Citation](/wiki/Template:Citation)</ref>

The government initiated a military investigation but never released the results.[[29]](#cite_note-29) In order to guarantee immunity for those responsible and to block any attempts at accountability for past abuses, the Parliament declared an amnesty[[30]](#cite_note-30) in June 1993 covering all crimes committed by the armed forces, security forces as well as civilians, between April 1989 and April 1992. The government offered compensation to families of victims, which a few accepted in lieu of settlement.<ref name=unhcr/> Despite this amnesty, some Mauritanians have denounced the involvement of the government in the arrests and killings.[[26]](#cite_note-26)[Template:Rp](/wiki/Template:Rp)

In the late 1980s, Ould Taya had established close co-operation with [Iraq](/wiki/Iraq), and pursued a strongly Arab Nationalist line. Mauritania grew increasingly isolated internationally, and tensions with Western countries grew dramatically after it took a pro-Iraqi position during the [1991 Gulf War](/wiki/1991_Gulf_War). During the mid-to late 1990s, Mauritania shifted its foreign policy to one of increased co-operation with the US and Europe. It was rewarded with diplomatic normalization and aid projects. On 28 October 1999, Mauritania joined Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan as the only members of the Arab League to officially recognize Israel. Ould Taya also started co-operating with the United States in anti-terrorism activities, a policy which was criticized by some human rights organizations.[[31]](#cite_note-31)[[32]](#cite_note-32) (See also [Foreign relations of Mauritania](/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_Mauritania).)

[thumb|Road from Nouakchott to the Mauritanian–Senegalese border](/wiki/File:Road_from_Nouakchott_to_Mauritanian.jpg) A group of current and former Army officers launched a violent and unsuccessful coup attempt on 8 June 2003. The leaders of the attempted coup were never caught. Mauritania's [presidential election](/wiki/Mauritanian_presidential_election,_2003), its third since adopting the democratic process in 1992, took place on 7 November 2003. Six candidates, including Mauritania's first female and first Haratine (descended from former [slaves](/wiki/Slavery_in_Mauritania)) candidates, represented a wide variety of political goals and backgrounds. Incumbent President [Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya](/wiki/Maaouya_Ould_Sid'Ahmed_Taya) won reelection with 67.02% of the popular vote, according to the official figures, with [Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidalla](/wiki/Mohamed_Khouna_Ould_Haidalla) finishing second.

### August 2005 military coup[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

On 3 August 2005, a military coup led by Colonel [Ely Ould Mohamed Vall](/wiki/Ely_Ould_Mohamed_Vall) ended Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya's twenty-one years of rule. Taking advantage of Taya's attendance at the funeral of [Saudi](/wiki/Saudi_Arabia) [King Fahd](/wiki/King_Fahd), the military, including members of the presidential guard, seized control of key points in the capital [Nouakchott](/wiki/Nouakchott). The coup proceeded without loss of life. Calling themselves the Military Council for Justice and Democracy, the officers released the following statement:

"The national armed forces and security forces have unanimously decided to put a definitive end to the oppressive activities of the defunct authority, which our people have suffered from during the past years."[[33]](#cite_note-33)

The Military Council later issued another statement naming Colonel Vall as president and director of the national police force, the *Sûreté Nationale*. Vall, once regarded as a firm ally of the now-ousted president, had aided Taya in the coup that had originally brought him to power, and had later served as his security chief. Sixteen other officers were listed as members of the Council.

Though cautiously watched by the international community, the coup came to be generally accepted, with the military *junta* organizing elections within a promised two-year timeline. In a [referendum](/wiki/Referendum) on 26 June 2006, Mauritanians overwhelmingly (97%) approved a new constitution which limited the duration of a president's stay in office. The leader of the *junta*, Col. Vall, promised to abide by the referendum and relinquish power peacefully. Mauritania's establishment of relations with [Israel](/wiki/Israel)[Template:Spaced ndashit](/wiki/Template:Spaced_ndash) is one of only three Arab states to recognize Israel[Template:Spaced ndashwas](/wiki/Template:Spaced_ndash) maintained by the new regime, despite widespread criticism from the opposition. They considered that position as a legacy of the Taya regime's attempts to curry favor with the West.

Parliamentary and municipal elections in Mauritania took place on 19 November and 3 December 2006.

### 2007 presidential elections[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Sidi_Mohamed_Ould_Cheikh_Abdallahi.jpg)[Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi](/wiki/Sidi_Ould_Cheikh_Abdallahi) Mauritania's first fully democratic presidential elections took place on 11 March 2007. The elections effected the final transfer from military to civilian rule following the military coup in 2005. This was the first time since Mauritania gained independence in 1960 that it elected a president in a multi-candidate election.[[34]](#cite_note-34) The elections were won in a second round of voting by [Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi](/wiki/Sidi_Ould_Cheikh_Abdallahi), with [Ahmed Ould Daddah](/wiki/Ahmed_Ould_Daddah) a close second.

### 2008 military coup[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) On 6 August 2008, the head of the presidential guards took over the president's palace in Nouakchott, a day after 48 lawmakers from the ruling party resigned in protest of President Abdallahi's policies.[Template:Which](/wiki/Template:Which) The army surrounded key government facilities, including the state television building, after the president fired senior officers, one of them the head of the presidential guards.[[35]](#cite_note-35) The President, Prime Minister [Yahya Ould Ahmed Waghef](/wiki/Yahya_Ould_Ahmed_Waghef), and Mohamed Ould R'zeizim, Minister of Internal Affairs, were arrested.

The coup was co-ordinated by General [Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz](/wiki/Mohamed_Ould_Abdel_Aziz), former chief of staff of the Mauritanian Army and head of the presidential guard, who had recently been fired. Mauritania's presidential spokesman, Abdoulaye Mamadouba, said the President, Prime Minister, and Interior Minister had been arrested by renegade Senior Mauritanian army officers and were being held under house arrest at the presidential palace in the capital.[[36]](#cite_note-36)[[37]](#cite_note-37)[[38]](#cite_note-38) In the apparently successful and bloodless coup, Abdallahi's daughter, Amal Mint Cheikh Abdallahi, said: "The security agents of the BASEP (Presidential Security Battalion) came to our home and took away my father."[[39]](#cite_note-39) The coup plotters, all dismissed in a presidential decree shortly beforehand, included Abdel Aziz, General Muhammad Ould Al-Ghazwani, General Philippe Swikri, and Brigadier General (Aqid) Ahmad Ould Bakri.[[40]](#cite_note-40)

### After the coup[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[thumb|Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz in his hometown,](/wiki/File:Mauritania-aziz-in-his-home-city-Akjoujt-15mar09_1.jpg) [Akjoujt](/wiki/Akjoujt), on 15 March 2009 A Mauritanian lawmaker, Mohammed Al Mukhtar, claimed that many of the country's people supported the takeover of a government that had become "an authoritarian regime" under a president who had "marginalized the majority in parliament."[[41]](#cite_note-41) The coup was also backed by Abdallahi's rival in the 2007 election, Ahmed Ould Daddah. However, Abdel Aziz's regime was isolated internationally, and became subject to diplomatic sanctions and the cancellation of some aid projects. It found few supporters (among them Morocco, Libya and Iran), while Algeria, the United States, France and other European countries criticized the coup, and continued to refer to Abdallahi as the legitimate president of Mauritania. Domestically, a group of parties coalesced around Abdallahi to continue protesting the coup, which caused the junta to ban demonstrations and crack down on opposition activists. International and internal pressure eventually forced the release of Abdallahi, who was instead placed under house arrest in his home village. The new government broke off relations with Israel. In March 2010, Mauritania's female foreign minister Mint Hamdi Ould Mouknass announced that Mauritania had cut ties with Israel in a "complete and definitive way."[[42]](#cite_note-42) Since the coup, Abdel Aziz insisted on holding new presidential elections to replace Abdallahi, but was forced to reschedule them due to internal and international opposition. During the spring of 2009, the [junta](/wiki/Military_junta) negotiated an understanding with some opposition figures and international parties. As a result, Abdallahi formally resigned under protest, as it became clear that some opposition forces had defected from him and most international players, notably including France and Algeria, now aligned with Abdel Aziz. The United States continued to criticize the coup, but did not actively oppose the elections.

Abdallahi's resignation allowed the [election](/wiki/Mauritanian_presidential_election,_2009) of Abdel Aziz as civilian president, on 18 July, by a 52% majority. Many of Abdallahi's former supporters criticized this as a political ploy and refused to recognize the results. They argued that the election had been falsified due to junta control, and complained that the international community had let down the opposition. Despite marginal complaints, the elections were almost unanimously accepted by Western, Arab and African countries, which lifted sanctions and resumed relations with Mauritania. By late summer, Abdel Aziz appeared to have secured his position and to have gained widespread international and internal support. Some figures, such as Senate chairman [Messaoud Ould Boulkheir](/wiki/Messaoud_Ould_Boulkheir), continued to refuse the new order and call for Abdel Aziz's resignation.

In February 2011, the waves of the [Arab Spring](/wiki/Arab_Spring) [spread to Mauritania](/wiki/2011–2013_Mauritanian_protests), where thousands of people took to the streets of the capital.[[43]](#cite_note-43) In November 2014, Mauritania was invited as a non-member guest nation to the G20 summit in Brisbane.

## Society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

### Demographics[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|School children in Mauritania](/wiki/File:Madrasah_pupils_in_Mauritania.jpg)

Mauritania recorded a population of 3,537,368 in its 2013 national census.[[44]](#cite_note-44)

### Ethnic groups[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

* 70% "[Moors](/wiki/Moors)", or Beidane/Haratines ([African](/wiki/Category:African_people)/[Arab](/wiki/Arab_people)/[Berber](/wiki/Berber_people))[[45]](#cite_note-45)\*30% Other African (non-Arabic speaking Africans: Wolof, [Bambara](/wiki/Bambara_people), [Toucouleur](/wiki/Toucouleur_people), [Fula](/wiki/Fula_people), [Serer](/wiki/Serer_people), [Soninke](/wiki/Soninke_people))[[45]](#cite_note-45)<ref name=fields-2009>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>

Mauritania's population is composed of several ethnic groups: the Moors (African or Arab) or *Beidane;* the [*Haratins*](/wiki/Haratin)*,* descendants of freed sub-Saharan black slaves who have grown up in this society; the Soninke; the [Serer](/wiki/Serer_people) (generally farmers and stock-breeders);[[46]](#cite_note-46) and the Hal-pulaar or Fulas, who include settled farmers called Toucouleur and nomadic stock-breeders.

### Religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Bar box](/wiki/Template:Bar_box) [Template:Further](/wiki/Template:Further) [thumb|Camel market in Nouakchott](/wiki/File:Nouakchott_camel_market2.jpg) The country is nearly 100% Muslim,[[45]](#cite_note-45) most of whom are Sunnis. The minority Sufi brotherhood, the Tijaniyah, has had great influence not only in the country, but in Senegal and Morocco as well. The [Roman Catholic Diocese of Nouakchott](/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Diocese_of_Nouakchott), founded in 1965, serves the 4,500 Catholics in Mauritania. There are extreme restrictions on freedom of religion and belief in Mauritania; it is one of thirteen countries in the world which punishes atheism by death.[[47]](#cite_note-47)

### Languages[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

The predominant spoken languages in Mauritania are [Hassaniya](/wiki/Hassaniya), [Pulaar](/wiki/Fula_language), [Soninke](/wiki/Soninke_language), [Imraguen language](/wiki/Imraguen_language), [Wolof](/wiki/Wolof_language), [Serer](/wiki/Serer_language)[[46]](#cite_note-46) and [French](/wiki/French_language) (widely used in the media and among educated classes, see [African French](/wiki/African_French)). [Modern Standard Arabic](/wiki/Modern_Standard_Arabic) is the official language.[[48]](#cite_note-48) [Zenaga](/wiki/Zenaga_language), a [Berber language](/wiki/Berber_languages), was once spoken throughout much of Mauritania, but now is almost totally replaced by Hassaniya. Only about 200 to 300 speakers may be left.

### Health[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Life expectancy](/wiki/Life_expectancy) at birth was 61.14 years (2011 estimate).[[45]](#cite_note-45) Per capita expenditure on health was 43 US$ (PPP) in 2004.[[49]](#cite_note-49) Public expenditure was 2% of the GDP in 2004 and private 0.9% of the GDP in 2004.[[49]](#cite_note-49) In the early 21st century, there were 11 physicians per 100,000 people.[[49]](#cite_note-49) Infant mortality is 60.42 deaths/1,000 live births (2011 estimate).[[49]](#cite_note-49) The obesity rate among Mauritanian women is high, perhaps in part due to the local standards of beauty, in which obese women are considered beautiful while thin women are sometimes regarded as "sickly".[[50]](#cite_note-50)

### Education[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main)

Since 1999, all teaching in the first year of primary school is in [Literary Arabic](/wiki/Literary_Arabic); [French](/wiki/French_language) is introduced in the second year, and is used to teach all scientific courses.[[51]](#cite_note-51) The use of [English](/wiki/English_language) is increasing.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

Mauritania has the [University of Nouakchott](/wiki/University_of_Nouakchott) and other institutions of higher education, but the majority of highly educated Mauritanians have studied outside the country. Public expenditure on education was at 10.1% of 2000–2007 government expenditure.[[49]](#cite_note-49)

### Urbanization[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[Template:Largest cities of Mauritania](/wiki/Template:Largest_cities_of_Mauritania)

## Administrative divisions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Template:Regions of Mauritania Image Map](/wiki/Template:Regions_of_Mauritania_Image_Map) The government bureaucracy is composed of traditional ministries, special agencies, and [parastatal](/wiki/Parastatal) companies. The Ministry of Interior spearheads a system of regional governors and prefects modeled on the French system of local administration. Under this system, Mauritania is divided into 15 regions ([*wilaya*](/wiki/Wilaya) or *régions*).

Control is tightly concentrated in the executive branch of the central government, but a series of national and municipal elections since 1992 have produced limited [decentralization](/wiki/Decentralization). These regions are subdivided into 44 [departments](/wiki/Departments_of_Mauritania) (*moughataa*). The regions and capital district (in alphabetical order) and their capitals are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Capital** | **style-"width:30px;"| #** |
| [Adrar](/wiki/Adrar_Region) | [Atar](/wiki/Atar,_Mauritania) | 1 |
| [Assaba](/wiki/Assaba_Region) | [Kiffa](/wiki/Kiffa) | 2 |
| [Brakna](/wiki/Brakna_Region) | [Aleg](/wiki/Aleg) | 3 |
| [Dakhlet Nouadhibou](/wiki/Dakhlet_Nouadhibou_Region) | [Nouadhibou](/wiki/Nouadhibou) | 4 |
| [Gorgol](/wiki/Gorgol_Region) | [Kaédi](/wiki/Kaédi) | 5 |
| [Guidimaka](/wiki/Guidimaka_Region) | [Sélibaby](/wiki/Sélibaby) | 6 |
| [Hodh Ech Chargui](/wiki/Hodh_Ech_Chargui_Region) | [Néma](/wiki/Néma) | 7 |
| [Hodh El Gharbi](/wiki/Hodh_El_Gharbi_Region) | [Ayoun el Atrous](/wiki/Ayoun_el_Atrous) | 8 |
| [Inchiri](/wiki/Inchiri_Region) | [Akjoujt](/wiki/Akjoujt) | 9 |
| [Nouakchott-Nord](/wiki/Nouakchott-Nord_Region) | [Dar-Naim](/wiki/Dar-Naim) | 10 |
| [Nouakchott-Ouest](/wiki/Nouakchott-Ouest_Region) | [Tevragh-Zeina](/wiki/Tevragh-Zeina) | 10 |
| [Nouakchott-Sud](/wiki/Nouakchott-Sud_Region) | [Arafat](/wiki/Arafat,_Mauritania) | 10 |
| [Tagant](/wiki/Tagant_Region) | [Tidjikdja](/wiki/Tidjikdja) | 11 |
| [Tiris Zemmour](/wiki/Tiris_Zemmour_Region) | [Zouérat](/wiki/Zouérat) | 12 |
| [Trarza](/wiki/Trarza_Region) | [Rosso](/wiki/Rosso) | 13 |

## Geography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|right](/wiki/File:Mr-map.png) [thumb|Mountains in the](/wiki/File:Mauritanie_-_Adrar2.jpg) [Adrar](/wiki/Adrar_Region) region. Desert scenes are characteristic of the Mauritanian landscape. [thumb|](/wiki/File:Bareina,_Mauritania.jpg)[Bareina](/wiki/Bareina), a village in southwestern Mauritania

At [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert),[[44]](#cite_note-44) 90% of which is desert, Mauritania is the world's 29th-largest country (after [Bolivia](/wiki/Bolivia)). It is comparable in size to [Egypt](/wiki/Egypt). It lies mostly between latitudes [14°](/wiki/14th_parallel_north) and [26°N](/wiki/26th_parallel_north), and longitudes [5°](/wiki/5th_meridian_west) and [17°W](/wiki/17th_meridian_west) (small areas are east of 5° and west of 17°).

Mauritania is generally flat, with vast arid plains broken by occasional ridges and cliff-like outcroppings. A series of scarps face south-west, longitudinally bisecting these plains in the center of the country. The scarps also separate a series of sandstone plateaus, the highest of which is the [Adrar Plateau](/wiki/Adrar_Plateau), reaching an elevation of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). Spring-fed oases lie at the foot of some of the scarps.

Isolated peaks, often rich in minerals, rise above the plateaus; the smaller peaks are called guelbs and the larger ones kedias. The concentric [Guelb er Richat](/wiki/Guelb_er_Richat) (also known as the Richat Structure) is a prominent feature of the north-central region. [Kediet ej Jill](/wiki/Kediet_ej_Jill), near the city of [Zouîrât](/wiki/Zouîrât), has an elevation of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) and is the highest peak.

Approximately three quarters of Mauritania is desert or semi-desert. As a result of extended, severe drought, the desert has been expanding since the mid-1960s. To the west, between the ocean and the plateaus, are alternating areas of clayey plains (regs) and sand dunes (ergs), some of which shift from place to place, gradually moved by high winds. The dunes generally increase in size and mobility toward the north.

## Economy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|Graphical depiction of Mauritania's product exports in 28 color-coded categories](/wiki/File:Mauritania_treemap.png)

Despite being rich in natural resources, Mauritania has a low GDP. A majority of the population still depends on agriculture and livestock for a livelihood, even though most of the nomads and many subsistence farmers were forced into the cities by recurrent droughts in the 1970s and 1980s. Mauritania has extensive deposits of iron ore, which account for almost 50% of total exports. With the current rises in metal prices, gold and copper mining companies are opening mines in the interior.

The country's first [deepwater port](/wiki/Deepwater_port) opened near [Nouakchott](/wiki/Nouakchott) in 1986. In recent years, drought and economic mismanagement have resulted in a buildup of foreign debt. In March 1999, the government signed an agreement with a joint [World Bank](/wiki/World_Bank)-[International Monetary Fund](/wiki/International_Monetary_Fund) mission on a $54 million enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF). The economic objectives have been set for 1999–2002. Privatization remains one of the key issues. Mauritania is unlikely to meet ESAF's annual GDP growth objectives of 4%–5%.

[Oil](/wiki/Petroleum) was discovered in Mauritania in 2001 in the offshore [Chinguetti field](/wiki/Chinguetti_field). Although potentially significant for the Mauritanian economy, its overall influence is difficult to predict. Mauritania has been described as a "desperately poor desert nation, which straddles the Arab and African worlds and is Africa's newest, if small-scale, oil producer."[[52]](#cite_note-52) There may be additional oil reserves inland in the [Taoudeni basin](/wiki/Taoudeni_basin), although the harsh environment will make extraction expensive.[[53]](#cite_note-53)

## Human rights[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main)

The Abdallahi government was widely perceived as corrupt and restricted access to government information. Sexism, racism, [female genital mutilation](/wiki/Female_genital_mutilation), child labour, [human trafficking](/wiki/Human_trafficking_in_Mauritania), and the political marginalization of largely southern-based ethnic groups continued to be problems.<ref name=ussdhr07>[Mauritania. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2007](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100493.htm), US State Department, 11 March 2008. Retrieved 20 March 2012.</ref>

Following the 2008 coup, the military government of Mauritania faced severe international sanctions and internal unrest. [Amnesty International](/wiki/Amnesty_International) accused it of practicing coordinated torture against criminal and political detainees.[[54]](#cite_note-54) Amnesty has accused the Mauritanian legal system, both before and after the 2008 coup, of functioning with complete disregard for legal procedure, fair trial, or humane imprisonment. The organization has said that the Mauritanian government has practiced institutionalized and continuous use of torture throughout its post-independence history, under all its leaders.[[55]](#cite_note-55)[[56]](#cite_note-56)[[57]](#cite_note-57)

### Discrimination against black population[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

Since independence, critics have said that Mauritania's society has been characterised by discrimination against black populations, mainly Fula and Soninké. These ethnic groups have been seen to contest the political, economic, and social dominance of [Moors](/wiki/Moors). Mauritanian blacks allegedly face discrimination in employment in the civil service, the administration of justice before regular and religious courts, access to loans and credits from banks and state-owned enterprise, and opportunities for education and vocational training. Armed groups such as the now-exiled [FLAM](/wiki/FLAM) have carried out low-level rebellions in the southern part of Mauritania because of these continuing discriminatory practices.

### Modern slavery[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Template:Rquote](/wiki/Template:Rquote)

[Slavery](/wiki/Slavery_in_contemporary_Africa) persists in Mauritania. Although nominally abolished in 1981, it was not illegal to own slaves until 2007. According to the US State Department *2010 Human Rights Report*,[[58]](#cite_note-58) abuses in Mauritania include:

...mistreatment of detainees and prisoners; security force impunity; lengthy pretrial detention; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrests; limits on freedom of the press and assembly; corruption; discrimination against women; female genital mutilation (FGM); child marriage; political marginalization of southern-based ethnic groups; racial and ethnic discrimination; slavery and slavery-related practices; and child labor.

The report continues: "Government efforts were not sufficient to enforce the antislavery law. No cases have been successfully prosecuted under the antislavery law despite the fact that 'de facto' slavery exists in Mauritania."

Only one person, Oumoulmoumnine Mint Bakar Vall, has been prosecuted for owning slaves and she was sentenced to six months in jail in January 2011.[[59]](#cite_note-59) In 2012, it was estimated that 10% to 20% of the population of Mauritania (between 340,000 and 680,000 people) live in slavery.[[60]](#cite_note-60) According to the Global Slavery Index 2014 compiled by [Walk Free Foundation](/wiki/Walk_Free_Foundation), there are an estimated 155,600 enslaved people in Mauritania, ranking it 31st of 167 countries by absolute number of slaves, and 1st by prevalence, with 4% of the population. The Government ranks 121 of 167 on its response to combating all forms of [modern slavery](/wiki/Modern_slavery).[[61]](#cite_note-61) The government of Mauritania denies that slavery continues in the country. In an interview, the Mauritanian Minister of rural development, [Brahim Ould M'Bareck Ould Med El Moctar](/wiki/Brahim_Ould_M'Bareck_Ould_Med_El_Moctar), responded to accusations of human rights abuse by stating:

I must tell you that in Mauritania, freedom is total: freedom of thought, equality – of all men and women of Mauritania... in all cases, especially with this government, this is in the past. There are probably former relationships – slavery relationships and familial relationships from old days and of the older generations, maybe, or descendants who wish to continue to be in relationships with descendants of their old masters, for familial reasons, or out of affinity, and maybe also for economic interests. But (slavery) is something that is totally finished. All people are free in Mauritania and this phenomenon no longer exists. And I believe that I can tell you that no one profits from this commerce.[[62]](#cite_note-62)

It is difficult to end slavery in Mauritania for the following reasons:

* The difficulty of enforcing any laws in the country's vast desert[[60]](#cite_note-60)\* Poverty that limits opportunities for slaves to support themselves if freed[[60]](#cite_note-60)\* Belief that slavery is part of the natural order of this society.[[60]](#cite_note-60)

## Culture[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[thumb|upright|](/wiki/File:Chinguetti-biblio.jpg)[Qur'an](/wiki/Qur'an) collection in a library in [Chinguetti](/wiki/Chinguetti) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Filming for several documentaries and films has taken place in Mauritania, including [*Fort Saganne*](/wiki/Fort_Saganne) (1984), [*The Fifth Element*](/wiki/The_Fifth_Element) (1997), [*The Books Under the Sand*](/wiki/The_Books_Under_the_Sand) (1997), [*Life without Death*](/wiki/Life_without_Death_(film)) (1997), [*Winged Migration*](/wiki/Winged_Migration) (2001), [*Heremakono*](/wiki/Heremakono_(film)) (2002), and [*Timbuktu*](/wiki/Timbuktu_(2014_film)) (2014).

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

* [Index of Mauritania-related articles](/wiki/Index_of_Mauritania-related_articles)
* [Outline of Mauritania](/wiki/Outline_of_Mauritania)

[Template:Portal bar](/wiki/Template:Portal_bar)

## Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

* [US State Department](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5467.htm)
* [Encyclopædia Britannica, Mauritania – Country Page](http://www.britannica.com/nations/Mauritania)

## Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

[Template:Refbegin](/wiki/Template:Refbegin)

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite web](/wiki/Template:Cite_web) [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)

[Template:Refend](/wiki/Template:Refend)

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]

[Template:Sister project links](/wiki/Template:Sister_project_links)

* [Template:Ar icon](/wiki/Template:Ar_icon) [République Islamique de Mauritanie](http://www.mauritania.mr/) (official government site).
* [Template:Fr icon](/wiki/Template:Fr_icon) [République Islamique de Mauritanie](http://www.mauritania.mr/fr/index.php) (official government site).
* [Template:CIA World Factbook link](/wiki/Template:CIA_World_Factbook_link)
* [Template:GovPubs](/wiki/Template:GovPubs)
* [Template:Dmoz](/wiki/Template:Dmoz)
* [Mauritania profile](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881985) from the [BBC News](/wiki/BBC_News).
* [Template:Wikiatlas](/wiki/Template:Wikiatlas)
* [Forecasts for Mauritania Development](http://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=MR)

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