



Mauritania



Background The Amazigh and Bafour people were among the earliest settlers in what is now Mauritania and among the first in recorded history to convert from a nomadic to agricultural lifestyle. These groups account for roughly one third of Mauritania's ethnic makeup. The remainder of Mauritania's ethnic groups derive from Sub-Saharan ethnic groups originating mainly from the Senegal River Valley, including descendants of former enslaved peoples. These three groups are organized according to a strict caste system with deep ethnic divides that impact access to resources and power dynamics.

A former French colony, Mauritania achieved independence from France in 1960. Mauritania initially began as a single-party, authoritarian regime and experienced 49 years of dictatorships, flawed elections, failed attempts at democracy, and military coups. Ould Abdel AZIZ led the last coup in 2008, was elected president in 2009, and was reelected in 2014. Mohamed Ould Cheikh GHAZOUANI was elected president in 2019, and his inauguration marked the first peaceful transition of power from one democratically elected president to another, solidifying the country's status as an emerging democracy. International observers recognized the elections as relatively free and fair. GHAZOUANI is seeking re-election in June 2024 for a second, and final, five-year term.

The country is working to address vestigial practices of slavery and its hereditary impacts. Mauritania officially abolished slavery in 1981, but the practice was not criminalized until 2007. Between 2005 and 2011, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) launched a series of attacks killing western tourists and aid workers, attacking diplomatic and government facilities, and ambushing Mauritanian soldiers and gendarmes. Although Mauritania has not seen an attack since 2011, AQIM and similar groups remain active in the Sahel region.

Capital name: Nouakchott

Government type presidential republic

Area total: 1,030,700 sq km
land: 1,030,700 sq km
water: 0 sq km

Climate desert; constantly hot, dry, dusty

Natural resources iron ore, gypsum, copper, phosphate, diamonds, gold, oil, fish

Population total: 4,328,040 (2024 est.)

Population growth rate 1.92% (2024 est.)

Ethnic groups Black Moors (Haratin - Arabic-speaking descendants of African origin who are or were enslaved by White Moors) 40%, White Moors (of Arab-Amazigh descent, known as Beydane) 30%, Sub-Saharan Mauritians (non-Arabic speaking, largely resident in or originating from the Senegal River Valley, including Halpulaar, Fulani, Soninke, Wolof, and Bambara ethnic groups) 30%

Religions	Muslim (official) 100%
Languages	Arabic (official and national), Pular, Soninke, Wolof (all national languages), French
Executive branch	chief of state: President Mohamed Ould Cheikh el GHAZOUANI (since 1 August 2019) head of government: Prime Minister Moctar Ould DIAY (since 2 August 2024)
Legislative branch	legislature name: Parliament (Barlamane)
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Cissé Mint Cheikh Ould BOIDE (since 15 September 2021)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); John T. ICE Chargé d'Affaires (since July 2024)
Economic overview	lower middle-income West African economy; primarily agrarian; rising urbanization; poor property rights; systemic corruption; endemic social and workforce tensions; wide-scale terrorism; foreign over-fishing; environmentally fragile
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$33.069 billion (2024 est.) \$31.434 billion (2023 est.) \$29.514 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$6,400 (2024 est.) \$6,300 (2023 est.) \$6,100 (2022 est.)
Exports	\$3.955 billion (2023 est.) \$4.132 billion (2022 est.) \$3.18 billion (2021 est.)
Exports - partners	China 25%, Switzerland 14%, Canada 12%, UAE 9%, Spain 7% (2023)
Exports - commodities	gold, iron ore, fish, processed crustaceans, copper ore (2023)
Imports	\$5.271 billion (2023 est.) \$5.77 billion (2022 est.) \$4.312 billion (2021 est.)
Imports - partners	China 19%, UAE 14%, Morocco 6%, Spain 6%, France 5% (2023)
Imports - commodities	refined petroleum, raw sugar, palm oil, wheat, soybean oil (2023)

Population Pyramid

