WF

WEST AFRICA

Officer Block 2 and Enlisted Block 3

An Introduction to the West Africa Region

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED OPERATIONAL CULTURE LEARNING

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Introduction

One must distinguish between the study of regions, countries, and cultures. Chapters 1 through 6 in this document introduce a region and provide some information about its countries and their relationships. They do not introduce a culture or cultures. Those chapters simply provide knowledge about the region and the environment in which people with different cultures live.

Regions and states do not have a single culture; instead they have multiple, diverse cultures. Cultures are not necessarily bound by national borders. There may be multiple cultures in a single state, while people sharing a single culture may live in more than one state.

The case study in Chapter 7 is about one specific culture in the region. Building upon the information provided in chapters 1 through 6, Chapter 7 introduces one of the many cultures in the West Africa region, using concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document.

Why This Region Matters to You as a Marine

West Africa is considered a priority region for the U. S. because of the growing threat posed by extremist groups and terrorism. Conflict, poverty, disease, and terrorist recruitment in this region could affect U.S. homeland security as was seen during the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in 2014 when one infected Liberian national made it through to a major U.S. city.[1] The United States Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM) posture statement from March 2013 highlights the partnership between the United States and 10 North and West African nations. The goal of the partnership is to support counter-terrorism efforts under the umbrella of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP)[2], which is evidenced in the region's bolstered engagement in Mali under the Africa-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).[3]

The United States is actively training forces in this region to mitigate threats to civilian and regional security.[4] The Marine Corps deploys forces in support of U.S. AFRICOM missions.[5]

U.S. forces often work alongside the French Army and partner nations in counter-terrorism operations, especially in Mali. Other operations in this region include countering drug trafficking and mitigating humanitarian disasters. Recent humanitarian crises include a drought-induced food crisis in 2009, and the Ebola virus outbreak in 2014.

U.S. military Ebola medical support team in West Africa (Source: 59th Medical Wing, U.S. Air Force)

Americans are generally perceived as neutral when it comes to the strategic posture of West African nations. However, the U.S. has long-term relationships with partner nations in this region, supporting efforts to stem threats.

The most significant threats in this region include Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali.[6] U.S. military assistance ranges from training missions to logistical assistance and intelligence sharing.

In 2013 the U.S. sent 10 service members to support French and African troops in Mali engaged in a mission to stem the threat of extremists in northern Mali after the ousting of the democratically elected president in 2012.[7] Then, in 2014 the U.S. sent 80 troops to Nigeria and Chad to help find approximately 200 girls kidnapped by Boko Haram.[8] Additionally, a public health crisis emerged in West Africa that involved the outbreak of EVD in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The U.S. deployed approximately 3,000 Marines to aid in the effort in support of Operation United Assistance: a USAID-led operation to contain the spread of the deadly virus.[9]

Chapter 1

Geographic Overview

Why a Geographic Overview Matters to You as a Marine

Geographic features include physical and biological factors tied to the location, topography, climate, soil, environmental hazards, flora, and fauna. These features influence human and social characteristics such as beliefs, behaviors, social organization, economy, and politics, to name a few. This is not to say that geography determines how people and societies behave, but rather that it has varying effects on what they believe and do.

The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, and coasts have had great influence on where people live, what crops can be raised, and what modes of transportation are suitable.

Climate and weather influence how people dress, work, and earn a living. Natural disasters such as hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes can devastate a region and dislocate a great number of people.

Global Location

West Africa lies between latitudes 4°N and 28°N and longitudes 15°E and 16°W. This region is bordered by the Sahara Desert to the north, dense tropical forests of Cameroon to the east, the Gulf of Guinea to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west.

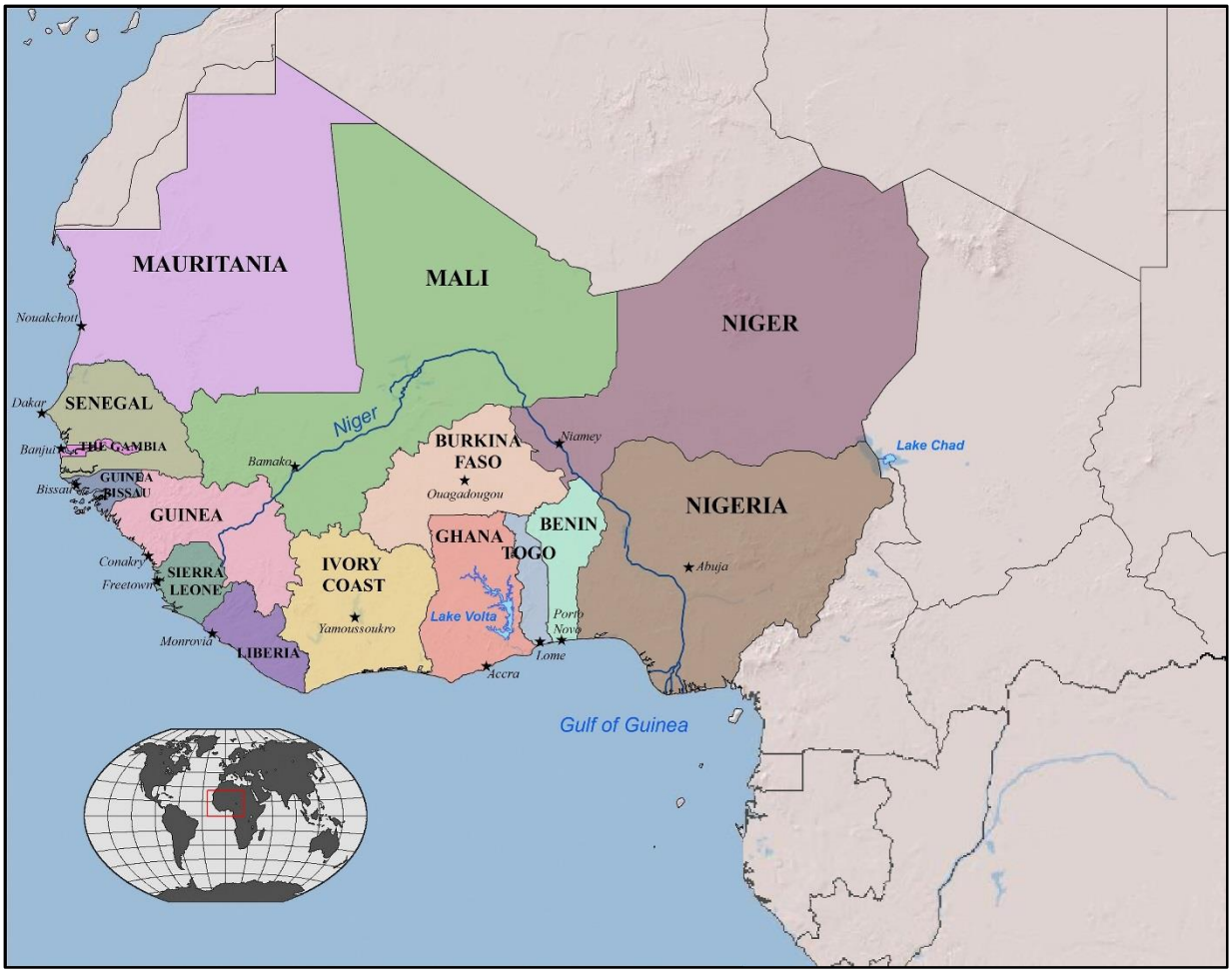
The Atlantic coastline curves around Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia (officially referred to as "The Gambia"), Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The Sahara Desert encroaches into northern Mali and Mauritania.

This region has a population of about 312 million people in a land area of 2.4 million sq. mi (6 million sq. km) which is roughly three-fifths of the land area in the United States.[10] By comparison, the U.S. population is approximately 319 million.[11]

Countries

The West Africa region, for the purposes of this module, includes the following countries:

- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea Bissau
- Liberia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone
- Togo



Map of West Africa Region (Source: Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL)

Topography

Topography has an important impact on cultural, political, and social structures in West Africa. The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, coasts, and boundaries have contributed to population density, economic activity, and cultural diversity. The terrain in West Africa is made up of flat, barren plains and a coastal belt. Additionally, this region also has some of Africa's longest rivers, including the rivers Gambia, Senegal, Niger, Volta, and Benue. In addition to the rivers and wetlands, this region is home to a vast forest canopy. The Guinean forests of West Africa extend from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.[12] The flora in this region is similar to that of Central Africa, which also has dense tropical forests. There are over 785

Guinean Forests of West Africa (Source: Microsfere)

bird species, 1100 mammals, 510 fresh water fish, and 9000 plant species, including the oil palm, which is a major household commodity used in cooking throughout the region.[13] The forest also supports the livelihoods and economic systems of the population.

Besides the forests and riverine networks, this region is defined by the Sahara Desert, which has gradually engulfed much of Mauritania and northern Mali. The encroachment of the desert – a phenomenon known a "desertification" -- impacts the climate, economy, and security of the region. The topography of West Africa and its impact on all sectors of life will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Land

Land in West Africa is a commodity, and an integral part of agricultural production. Although this region is defined by its forests, riverine areas, and desert ecosystem, a significant portion is suitable for agriculture for domestic consumption, as well as cash crops such as cacao and rubber.

The desert environment in Mauritania and northern Mali is unsuitable for agriculture, so pastoral communities have adapted to the environment. Communities use irrigation and wells to irrigate crops, and they have developed sustainable farming systems to ensure a consistent harvest. However, the pastoral lifestyle has additional challenges owing to livestock disease and its accompanying mortality rates. Additionally, there is a constant struggle for resources between communities and animals, forcing the nomadic tribes, such as the Tuareg in Mali - who have turned to sedentary agriculture - to have to share the water they use for their farms with elephants.

Recommended Reading:

For more on the geography in this region, see:

Sahel, West Africa by Sharon E. Nicholson (Florida State University) http://www.met.fsu.edu/people/nicholson/papers/sahel95.pdf

Small scale rice farming (Source: USAID)

While agricultural production and settlement are central to land use, land is also used as a commodity. Land is bought, sold, and passed on as an inheritance. Land is a high-value commodity in this mineral-rich region as governments grant farming and mining concessions to foreign companies. Consequently, in the land around the Niger River, which flows through several countries, concessions for large-scale industrial farming have had a disproportionate impact on the local communities.[14]

Recommended Reading:

For more on the issues in the oil rich Niger Delta see:

The Niger Delta crisis: Issues, Challenges and Prospects. https://www.eisf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/0070-Afinotan-Ojakorotu-2009-Niger-Delta.pdf

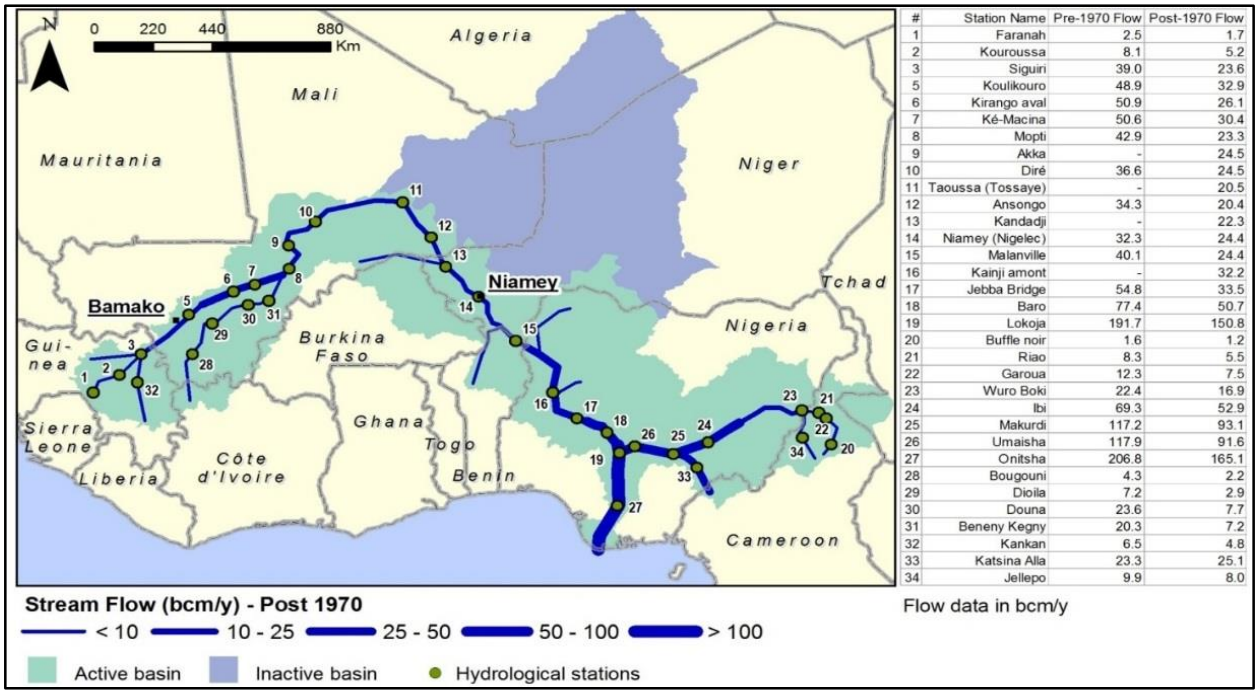
Although large industrial farming projects hire local labor, the local people seldom derive much benefit from the value of the land; this is because they often lack the contract negotiation skills needed to maximize a mutually beneficial

deal.[15] This has led to conflict over land and resources generated from the land. Issues between local and foreign oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are a good example of this.

Traditionally, tribal chiefs were responsible for land allocation, but customary land allocation structures are generally no longer in use. In fact, customary land allocation structures are very contentious and many times lead to direct conflict. However, traditional leaders are instrumental in mediating land disputes in rural areas.

Waterways

West Africa is home to several waterways that support both agriculture and hydropower. The rivers in this region flow across several countries. The Niger flows 2,600 mi (4184 km) through Benin, Guinea, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, and Cameroon; and then drains into the Atlantic through the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta is Africa's largest: 150 mi (241 km) long and spreading along 200 mi (321 km) of the coastline.



#	Station Name	Pre-1970 Flow	Post-1970 Flow
1	Faranah	2.5	1.7
2	Kouroussa	8.1	5.2
3	Siguiri	39.0	23.6
5	Koulikouro	48.9	32.9
6	Kirango aval	50.9	26.1
7	Ké-Macina	50.6	30.4
8	Mopti	42.9	23.3
9	Akka	-	24.5
10	Diré	36.6	24.5
11	Taoussa (Tossaye)	-	20.5
12	Ansongo	34.3	20.4
13	Kandadji	-	22.3
14	Niamey (Nigelec)	32.3	24.4
15	Malanville	40.1	24.4
16	Kainji amont	-	32.2
17	Jebba Bridge	54.8	33.5
18	Baro	77.4	50.7
19	Lokoja	191.7	150.8
20	Buffle noir	1.6	1.2
21	Riao	8.3	5.5
22	Garoua	12.3	7.5
23	Wuro Boki	22.4	16.9
24	Ibi	69.3	52.9
25	Makurdi	117.2	93.1
26	Umaisha	117.9	91.6
27	Onitsha	206.8	165.1
28	Bougouni	4.3	2.2
29	Dioila	7.2	2.9
30	Douna	23.6	7.7
31	Beneny Kegny	20.3	7.2
32	Kankan	6.5	4.8
33	Katsina Alla	23.3	25.1
34	Jellepo	9.9	8.0

Flow of the Niger River in West Africa (Source: IntechOpen)

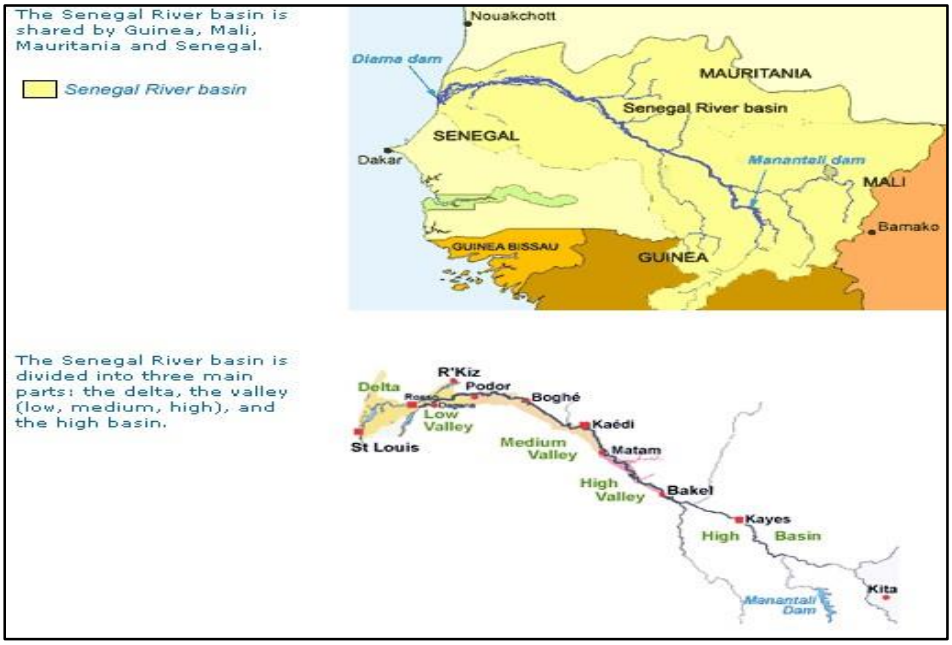
The Niger is the longest river in West Africa and the third longest in Africa, after the Nile and the Congo.[16] This river is of strategic importance in this region as it has a significant number of hydrological power stations that provide electricity to a vast population area. Because of disproportionate amounts of rainfall in the region's dryer zones, the waters of the Niger River are regulated by dams which bolster irrigation for farms in drier zones. Additionally, the river is used extensively for fishing and to generate hydropower. Mali, for example, receives 59 in. (1,500 mm) of rainfall in the south to less than 1.9 in.

The Gambia River flows through Gambia into the Atlantic Ocean. It is the only river in this region that is used to ferry oceangoing cargo. It is also of strategic importance to Gambia, a country that is an east-west long strip of land almost completely surrounded by Senegal.

(50 mm) in the north, where agricultural activity is best supported by irrigation.[17] The chart below shows the total land area adjacent to the Niger River or within the Niger Basin.

Niger Basin Countries				
Country	**Total area of the country (km^2)**	**Area of the country within the basin (km^2)**	**As % of total area of basin (%)**	**As % of total area of country (%)**
Guinea	245,857	96,880	4.3	39.4
Côte d'Ivoire	322,462	23,770	1.0	7.4
Mali	1,240,190	578,850	25.5	46.7
Burkina Faso	274,000	76,621	3.4	28.0
Algeria	2,381,740	193,449	8.5	8.1
Benin	112,620	46,384	2.0	41.2
Niger	1,267,000	564,211	24.8	44.5
Chad	284,000	203,39	0.9	1.6
Cameroon	440	89,249	3.9	18.8
Nigeria	770	584,193	25.7	63.2

Source: Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)



The Senegal River (Source: UNESCO)

Another significant waterway is the Senegal River. This river originates in the south and provides extensive perennial flow and floods after the rainy season. Before reaching the Atlantic Ocean, the rich silt brought down the Senegal River during the flood season primes areas for cultivation and pasturage in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal.

One other significant waterway, the Volta River, flows through six counties in this region — Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali. Like the Senegal River, the Volta drains into the Atlantic Ocean.[18] The Volta River hosts three massive hydroelectric power plants -- Akosombo, Kpong, and the Bui – that provide electricity to several neighboring countries. The Volta is primarily

used for hydro-power production across six countries. The reservoir is also a source of food and water in addition to serving municipal water systems (commercial and domestic purposes) as well as for tourism, and irrigation."[19]

The waterways in West Africa also feed millions of people whose diet largely consists of fish and rice. Rice farming and fishing also contribute to economic growth.

Additionally, oil drilling in the Niger Delta has contributed to Nigeria's emergence as a strategic player in the geopolitics of this region.

Climate and Weather

West Africa is characterized by relatively constant year-long temperatures, with an average of 64ºF (17.7ºC). In July, however, daytime temperatures can rise as high as 138º F (3.8ºC), then drop to as low as 39ºF (3.8ºC) at night. From May through June, colder water in the Atlantic Ocean generates monsoons that sometimes pummel the region with strong winds and heavy rainfall.[20] Additionally, the El Nino effect created by warm waters in the Pacific Ocean impacts climatic patterns in West Africa: this weather phenomenon forces some governments to set contingency plans to ensure they are able to meet seasonal food targets.[21]

In 2010, Niger was among the countries that experienced some of the world's hottest temperatures on record.

The average rainfall ranges between 1,830-3,434 mm (72-135 in.) across the region; but rainfall levels are much lower -- between 500-800 in. (12700 - 2032 mm) – in the coastal areas of Ghana and Senegal.[22] The rainy season is between March and November, with the highest rainfall between June and August.[23]

Climate variability between the wet and dry seasons affects food production. Onset and duration of the rainy season fluctuates from year to year and across the region, often impacting the planting and harvesting of crops. Populations have adapted to the annual cycle of wet and dry seasons: they survive long periods of drought by saving surplus grain for the anticipated dry seasons -- especially in Mauritania and Mali.[24]

However, these reserve food supplies are not always enough. In 2011 a food shortage caused by low rainfall, high grain prices, and a massive influx of refugees required humanitarian assistance intervention. The United Nations and USAID worked with other aid organizations to provide food aid to this affected region.[25]

Another important feature in this region's climate is the *harmattan*, a hot dry windstorm that blows southward from the Sahara. The winds reduce visibility and create overcast skies as they blow fine dust; the powdery air affects livestock and agriculture. The *harmattan* season is from November to March.[26]

Sandstorms are a safety hazard and may also cause maintenance problems in vehicles, generators, and computers and other electronics, thereby impeding logistics and communication.

Environmental Hazards

Drought

The most significant environmental events in West Africa are droughts. Expert opinions differ on the causes of persistent famine in this region; many experts believe anthropogenic causes (the mismanagement of natural resources) have accelerated the rate of desertification in this region. However, the other main school of thought relies on scientific observations that conclude that oceanic temperatures are to blame for the shifting climatic patterns and recent droughts.[27]

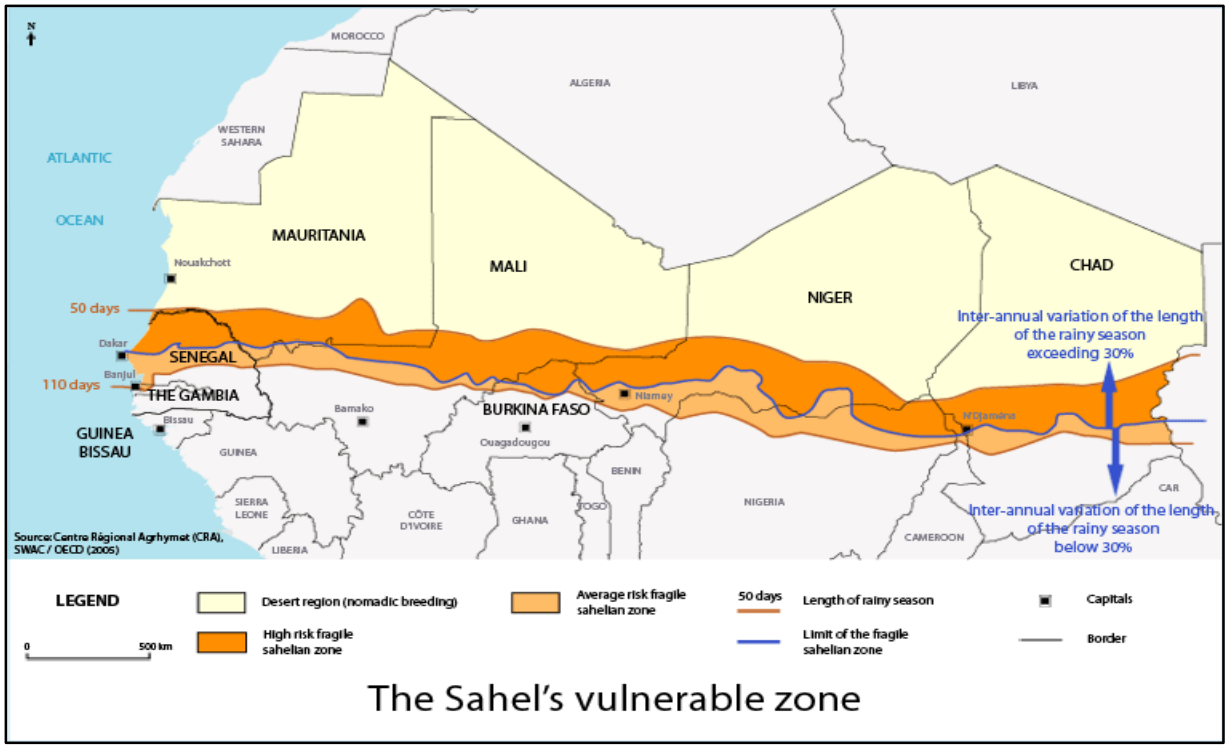
The U.S., through USAID, is working with countries in this region to build resilience in order to mitigate, adapt to, and reduce the risks associated with drought conditions in Niger and Mali.[28]

One relatively recent example of this is from 2010, when a drought in Mali created a humanitarian emergency that was made worse by the 2012 political crisis. Over 300,000 Malians displaced by this crisis sought refuge in Mauritania, Niger, and Algeria. The international response, led by the United Nations World Food Program (UNWFP), helped drought victims in Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, northern Nigeria, and Cameroon.[29]

Recommended Reading:

For more on drought in this region, see:

Translating Famine Early Warning into Early Action: A Sahel Case Study by Paul Melly (Chatham House) http://www.stabilityjournal.org/article/view/sta.bs/96#cc-by



Drought-prone zones in the Sahel which also includes countries in the West Africa region (Source: USAID)

Flooding

There are several rivers that run though West Africa, including the Senegal River - which flows into Mauritania and Mali - and the Niger River - flowing through Niger, Mali, and Nigeria. Flooding in this region is caused by heavy rains that cause these rivers to overflow their banks due to poor drainage systems. The lack of adequate drainage in most cities in this region exacerbate flood conditions –there is a marked increase in infections as a result of water borne diseases such as Cholera and vector borne diseases like Malaria increase during the rainy season.

In 2010, when the Niger River overflowed its banks, 5,000 people lost their homes.[30] In 2012, flooding by the same river displaced over 500,000 people in Niger alone.[31] Flooding resulting from above-average rains in 2012 impacted southwestern Mauritania, Senegal, northern Burkina Faso, and in many parts of the Niger River basin.

Flooding in Dakar, Senegal (Source: IRIN)

Additionally, flooding affects people's access to clean drinking water — this region's water supply is already limited due largely to man-made pollutants like raw sewage, untreated industrial waste, and agricultural run-off. Further, because of inadequate drainage and plumbing systems (especially in rural areas), flooding intensifies an already fragile water situation which is certain to continue the demand for outside assistance from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Deforestation

West Africa has a vast expanse of forest, making timber a major resource. Logging is conducted on a large scale. The Guinean forests extend across eight countries — Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Guinea.[32] These forests include Tropical and Subtropical Moist Forests (TSMF) that are predominantly in Liberia and Sierra Leone; TSMF forests also grow in freshwater swamps in coastal regions.[33] Logging, mining, and agriculture pose the highest threats to TSMF forests. The environmental impact due to commercial and commercial activities in this ecosystem destroys vulnerable species of flora and fauna, destabilizes climatic conditions and eventually impacts food production.

After civil wars ended in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 1990s, communities adopted logging as an income lifeline – both legally and illegally. However, illegal unregulated logging in this region has taken the place of illicit diamond mining which was at its peak during the civil wars. Unregulated logging thus led to the resurgence of criminal cartels that had earlier made a living through the sale of blood diamonds (diamonds mined in conflict environments). To curb their resurgence and to streamline the timber sector, all commercial logging licenses in Liberia are issued by the government; however, there have been abuses of this system, with officials sometimes granting licenses illegally.[34]

There are a few efforts in West Africa to stem deforestation: the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia have been tracking and monitoring legally sourced timber in order to "map" where lumber profits go. However, there are still rampant abuses of the system in Liberia, many perpetrated by corrupt agents in the forestry sector.[35]

Logging in the Congo Basin (Source: SciDev.net)

The high rate of unemployment in West Africa has attracted many small-scale loggers to the region. These loggers are much like Africa's so-called "artisanal miners," itinerant young workers who earn a few dollars a day sifting stream beds and hand-dug pits for flakes of gold and other sought-after minerals. Small-scale loggers earn a living in the informal timber industry, supplying local carpenters with lumber for the making of furniture and other wood-based products. Because most rural households use charcoal or wood for cooking, loggers make a good income supplying consumers with firewood. However, indiscriminate logging has opened up the region to criminal activity - including the smuggling of rare timber.

Chapter 2

Historical Overview

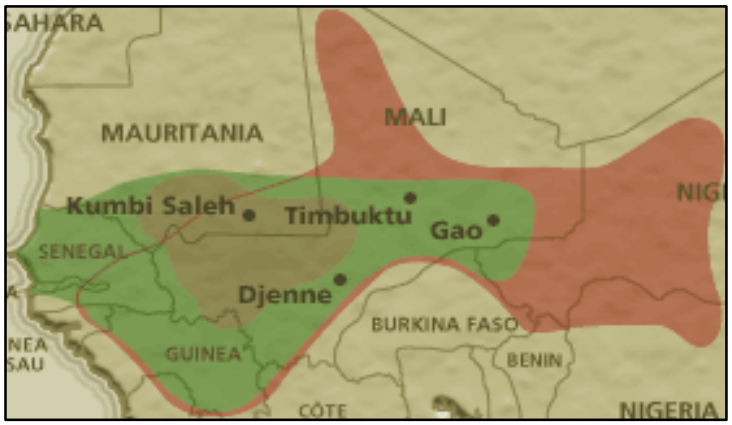
Why History Matters to You as a Marine

History provides a knowledge of how people, institutions, and states in a region evolved into what they are today. It also provides insights into people's collective memory about their group and others. In other words, history not only shapes a region's current affairs, but also tells us something about the roots of individual and group identities.

History does not predict how groups, institutions, and states in a region may behave in the future. Instead, it provides insights into what is possible and probable.

Pre-Colonization

Historically, West Africa served as a trade link between North Africa, the Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Africa. Recorded history in West Africa documents the rise of three empires: the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire, and the Songhai Empire, all centered in what is now Mali.[36] The Ghana Empire began in the eighth century AD and lasted through the tenth century. Unlike the empires that followed, the Ghana Empire was not established by Muslims, but by Africans. Trade drove development of the Ghana Empire, helping it expand from modern southwest Mali into Mauritania and Senegal. The rulers of the Ghana Empire enjoyed good relations with Muslim traders from the north, but never fully adopted the Muslim faith. West African traders exchanged gold, cotton fabric, metal ornaments, and leather goods for copper, horses, salt, cloth, and beads.[37]



The Kingdoms of Western Sudan: Ghana, Mali and Songhai Empires (Source: Smithsonian Institution)

Muslim Berbers invaded from North Africa and conquered the Ghana Empire in 1076. The Berbers ruled until the rise of the Mali Empire. The Mali Empire lasted from the 1200s to the 1400s and began its decline in the late 1300s when King Suleiman was in power as a result of numerous secessionist disputes. The Empire was ruled by various kings; famous among them, Sunjata Ali and Mansa Musa.

Sujanta Ali is remembered for unifying the 12 Mandika kingdoms, whose 12 kings were reassigned to their territories as governors. Ali is remembered for expanding the kingdom through violent conquest.

Mansa Musa is the most famous of the kings: he made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, and later established the city of Timbuktu.

Today, the Mali Empire is remembered for elevating the city of Timbuktu into a major Islamic spiritual crossroads; at the height of its glory, this city was a world-renowned center of learning. Malian rulers adopted Islam early in the Empire's development and possessed great wealth, mostly in the form of gold. Mansa Musa lavished gifts of gold when he made his *Hajj* to what is now Saudi Arabia, thereby earning the respect of Arab kings.[38]

The last great empire, the Songhai, rose in the 1400s during the Mali Empire's internal disintegration. The Songhai and Mali Empires were similar in several ways: like the Mali Empire, the Songhai was both a trading empire and an Islamic state; the Songhai Empire covered a region similar to the Mali Empire, but also included the northwestern corner of what is now Nigeria. In addition to internal problems like those suffered by the Mali Empire, the Songhai Empire was attacked by North African invaders from Morocco backed by British artillery mercenaries. Overpowered, the Songhai army fell to the North Africans, thus precipitating a sharp decline of the Songhai Empire in the early 1600s.[39]

The most significant event in the pre-colonial era was the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade in 1444. The sudden demand for slave labor largely came from colonial plantations operating in the "new world" of Brazil, the Caribbean, and North America. Portuguese slave ships exchanged West African slaves for European goods, sugar, and cotton.[40] The trade routes between Africa, Europe, and the Americas were lucrative and triangular: slaves from the Ghana coast were first sent to European slaving ports in London, Liverpool, and Bristol; and then moved on to labor-hungry plantations in the Americas.[41]

Colonization

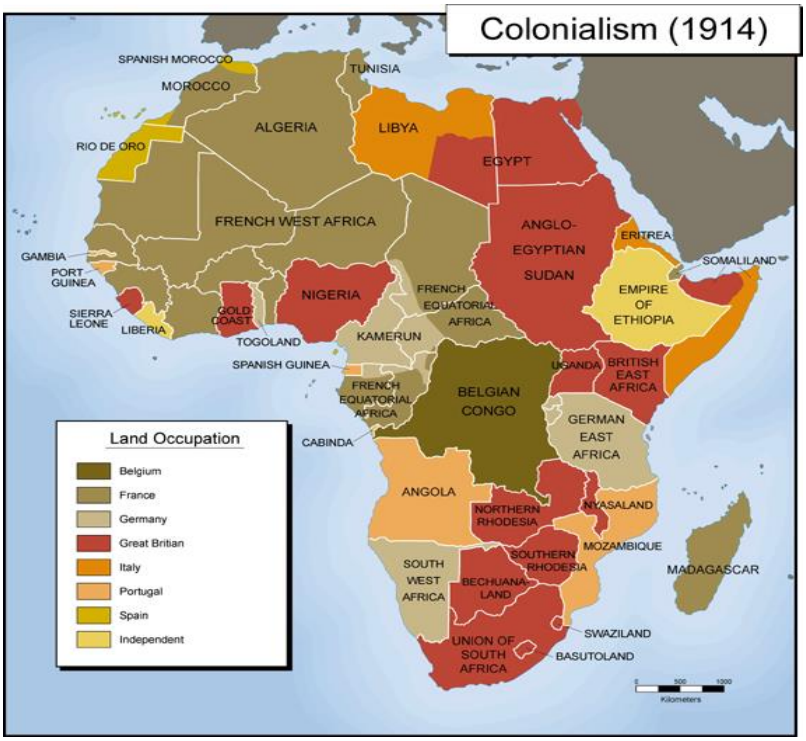
Throughout West Africa, outside influences—notably trade and interaction with Arabs—shaped religion, language, and other aspects of the region's culture. These experiences, coupled with ongoing social and political changes continue to define regional history and politics. While Islamic and Arab influences date back to medieval times, West Africans have also adopted many customs from the European countries that colonized them from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s.

The French began exploring this region in the 1880s and within ten years had made serious efforts to occupy its interior.

France's conquest of West Africa progressed along the course of the Niger River. The French ruled through traditional African authorities who acted on their behalf – a process called assimilation – where the colonial government created a society similar to that in France, including governance, language, and culture[42].

The colonial government in French-West Africa territories upset the order of the existing governance structures by deposing existing chiefs and appointing new ones according to the level of their collaboration. Naturally, the new chiefs supported the colonial government's interests which antagonized the local population. Subsequently, a resistance movement led by Samory Touré, a

famous West African born in present-day Guinea, organized an indigenous army of 30-35,000 men. He instilled military discipline and a sense of camaraderie that enabled his forces to resist the French Army.[43] Touré led several battles to resist French occupation in West Africa but was eventually captured by the French army and exiled in French-Congo (now Gabon), where he died in 1898.[44]



The Colonies of Africa (Source: Michigan State University)

Despite the French defeat, France's influence in the region persists: many police departments in former French colonies (notably Mali and Niger) are modeled on the French *gendarmerie*. The French *Gendarmerie Nationale,* one of the oldest institutions in France, is the model for the military command structure of many West African armies.[45]

The British, who colonized Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia, administered these countries though so-called "indirect rule." In indirect rule, the colonial government took the role of advisor, and sometimes supervisor, of local indigenous authorities, such as the chieftaincy.

Although the British government left intact indigenous forms of governance, including the method of appointing the local chief (the "emir" of the council of elders), they interfered in the affairs of the local communities where and when it suited them. Additionally, although the local authority collected taxes from their subjects, a percentage was retained by the British government.

For example, the Fulani of northern Nigeria were ruled by an emir who closely collaborated with the colonial government. On the British side there was a governor of Nigeria, Sir Donald Cameron, who was represented by a political advisor who worked directly with this emir. While the colonial administration made efforts to 'modernize' the indigenous institution, the main friction point was that the colonial administrator expected the emir to render his allegiance to the colonial power. In actuality, the emir was already loyal to the Sultan of Sokoto, the traditional Nigerian ruler to whom all emirs in the region owed their allegiance. This system of governance was used with slight modifications across all British colonies in Africa.[46]

The formal demarcation of Africa for colonization took place at the 1884 Berlin Conference, where European nations agreed to end the slave trade and partition the African continent amongst themselves. The process that they used involved drawing arbitrary borders on a map, ignoring the cultural and linguistic boundaries already established by African societies. Under the terms of the Conference of Berlin, West Africa was partitioned as follows:

- Great Britain: Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone
- France: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo
- Portugal: Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau
- Independent: Liberia (Freed Slaves from the Americas were resettled in Liberia)

The impact of the colonization era can still be seen in regional infrastructure, culture, education, and language. French is the official language in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. English is the official language in Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Portuguese is spoken in the island nations of Cape Verde and in Guinea-Bissau alongside French. Arabic is also widely spoken in Mauritania and is a secondary language in Mali. The use of Arabic in this region is linked to the spread of Islam, the region's geographic proximity to North Africa, trade links, and the emergence of Arabic literacy in Mali.[47] The prevalence of these non-indigenous languages has further shaped culture and education and defined the social structure in this region. Those who speak a language other than their mother tongue are considered to be more affluent.

Another by-product of colonial rule was the construction of transport networks in the region to boost trade. In order to transport goods to coastal areas for overseas shipment, the various European colonists established a complex network of roads and bridges. The transportation routes, in turn, were soon dotted with towns and urban centers. The British colonial government constructed the Lagos-Ibadan Railway line, 119 mi. (193 km) long, and the Kano-Maiduguri railroad, 397 mi. (640 km) long by 1964.[48] Today, there are networks of roads, airports, and railroads that connect the major cities. However, the northern part of this region is still underdeveloped and largely inaccessible, with many porous borders.

Post Colonization

Most countries in this region gained independence in the 1960s after the formation of many indigenous political organizations that demanded self-rule and a change of governance at the local and national level. From these movements emerged West Africa's first generation of national leaders.

Country	Colonial Power	Year of Independence
Benin	France	1960
Burkina Faso	France	1960
Cape Verde	Portugal	1975
Côte d'Ivoire	France	1960
Gambia	Britain	1965
Ghana	Britain	1957
Guinea	France	1958
Guinea Bissau	Portugal	1974
Liberia	Never Colonized	
Mali	France	1960
Mauritania	France	1960
Niger	France	1960
Nigeria	Britain	1960

Senegal	France	1960
Sierra Leone	Britain	1961
Togo	France	1960

Source: Encyclopedia Britannica

Ghana became the first nation in Africa to gain independence, thereby paving the way for others in the region. Although the 1950s and 1960s produced a strong sense of nationalism, self-governance brought on its own share of challenges: determining the modes of governance from the village level through the national level, training indigenous peoples to take over vital sectors such as health and education, and building a professional military.

For some West African countries, the years following independence were marked by intense internal upheaval: cross-border conflicts, insurgencies, and humanitarian crises were precipitated by political instability, poverty, extremism, and competition over resources. In other countries, however, independence led to significant and positive changes, including infrastructure development, development of governmental structures in education and health, and an expanded political field, which has allowed for voting systems and multi-party democracy.

The most crucial challenges in the post-colonial era have been in the areas of security and healthcare: acts of terrorism and massive outbreaks of EVD have necessitated the deployment of foreign militaries and aid organizations to the region. The United States is keen to build the capacity of nations in this region in order to stem the spread of extremist elements operating in the remote north – especially in Niger and Mali. These regional security issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Traditional Rulers

West Africa after the Berlin Conference

Oil drilling becomes main economic driver

Libyans celebrate declaration of liberation

Rise of Islam & Arab culture from North Africa.

700-1100

Rise of Ghana Empire, which extended across Mauritania & Mali.

Mali & Songhai Empires across present-day Mauritania, Mali, & Senegal.

1700-1884

Arab explorers & trans-Sahara trade accelerated the spread of Islam as Christian missionaries reached interior.

The Berlin Conference banned slave trade & partitioned Africa for Colonization

1884- 1890

Scramble for Africa. West Africa was colonized by England France and Portugal.

Cecil Rhodes, the great imperial expansionist

European countries set up systems of governance.

1890-1914

Resistance movements grow; French Parliament accords representation to a few colonies

Countries gain independence.

1930-1950

1950-1960s

Governance structures formed; *Coups d'état* drive debate on political power. Military dictatorships solidify

Economic development projects - Mineral resources become major income earner

1960s

1960-1980

The rise of extremist groups after the events of 9/11 in the U.S.

1990s

2000-2005

Civil war in Sierra Leone destabilizes Liberia. Conflict diamonds fuel the war, International Criminal Court indicts Liberia President.

Political instability hits the region. The Arab Spring (2011) led to an influx of small arms in the region. *Coup d'état* in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali as well as Tuareg insurgency.

2010- 2014

Economic progress subsectors emerge in film industry (Nollywood in Nigeria) Religious tourism (Nigeria)

2014- Ongoing

Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in 3 countries leads to deployment of US Marines to region. Nigeria held election amid threats by Boko Haram.

Chapter 3

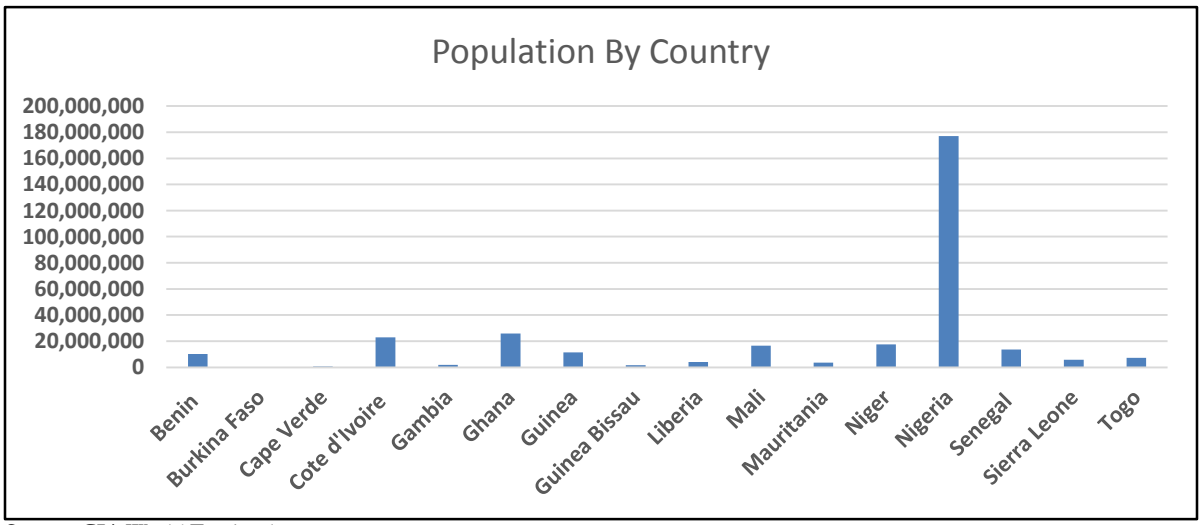
People and Society

Why People and Society Matter to You as a Marine

Many missions across the range of military operations require Marines to understand and work with foreign populations. Knowing the people in the region -- including their ethnicities, languages, and religions, as well as their social entities -- enables Marines to create a mental picture of the human dimension of the region.

Demographics

In 2014, West Africa had an estimated population of approximately 312 million people across 17 countries.[49] Most people in this region live in rural areas; however, rapid population growth will likely increase urbanization. West Africa is a major contributor to the rapid population growth in Africa. West Africa's population grows at an annual rate of 2.6 percent, more than double the global rate. Additionally, the United Nations (UN) predicts that Africa's global population will increase to 2.2 billion (24 percent) of the world total population by 2050. Niger's population, for example, is predicted to increase from 18 million to 69 million people by 2050.[50] Currently, Nigeria is the region's most densely populated country, with approximately 177 million people, as depicted in the chart below.[51]



Source: CIA World Factbook

Migration is also a notable feature affecting the demographics of this region. Populations migrate to and from countries for seasonal work. Apart from internal conflict (which has displaced tens of thousands of people from Mali), this region has the highest number of intra-regional migrants in this region. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the total migrant population in 2009 was 8.4 million people.[52] In addition to regional migration, there are approximately 65-120,000 sub-Saharan Africans who transit across the region to North Africa for employment opportunities.[53]

Migrants from Africa to Europe (Source: IRIN)

Religion

John Mbiti, famed African author and theologian, succinctly summed up spiritual life in Africa: "Africans are notoriously religious."[54] Religion plays a significant role in all aspects of life in West Africa. It shapes values and identity. The major religions practiced in the region are Islam, Christianity, and animism (nature worship), sometimes called "traditional beliefs." Islam is practiced widely in this region and has a majority following in Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Gambia, Guinea and Mali. In each of these countries, there are minority populations of Christians; however, Christianity is the predominant religion in southern Nigeria and in Ghana.


Mosque in Niamey, Niger (Source: Wikipedia)

Islam

Commerce and conquest helped to spread Islam throughout West Africa. Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Fulani, brought their religion with them when they migrated into this region from North Africa. The northern part of Nigeria has a significant Muslim population supported by geographic proximity to Niger and Chad, both of which have majority Muslim population. Founded in the early seventh century in western Arabia, Islam teaches that there is one God, Allah, and that the Prophet Mohammad is his messenger. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the final divine revelation of God and guides their spiritual practice.

Muslims in West Africa adhere to the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad and practice it within the five Pillars of Islam:

1. Profession of one's faith (*shahada*) [shah-hah-duh].
2. Prayer (*salat*) five times a day.
3. Giving alms (*zakat*). *Zakat* requires giving 2.5% of a person's money each year, and a varying percentage for other assets held for the entire year.
4. A pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*).
5. Fasting during *Ramadan* (*sawm*).

TACTICAL TIP: When deployed to this region during the month of Ramadan, be mindful of fasting: do not eat, drink, or smoke in public; and do not offer a Muslim food during this time. Note that you may need to adjust your program to accommodate a flexible working schedule.

A majority of Muslims in this region are Sunni whose practice is referred to as Sufism. Sufism promotes inclusiveness and is considered moderate, unlike Wahabism and Salafism, the other two major factions of Islam. Wahabi doctrines were adopted by the early leaders of Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi, and the closely related Salafists, demand literal and strict interpretation of the Quran and the *Hadith,* the traditional sayings of the Prophet Mohammad. Sufism is practiced under three Sufi orders (*tariqah)*: *Qadriyya, Muridiyya*, or *Tijaniyya*. Tijaniyya is the most widely spread, and is dominant in this region.[55]

The practice of Islam was initially limited to Trans-Saharan traders who traded with North Africans along the salt routes.[56] This trade facilitated Islam's growth in the region through the use of Islamic moral precepts in the development of contracts and extensions of credit. Trade also facilitated formal learning in schools that taught the reading of the Quran and the Arabic language. Additionally, the rulers of the Mali and Songhai Empires, which ruled between the 1200s and 1600s, adopted Islam. As a result, the population blended Islamic practices with traditional religious practices. Sonni Ali, who ruled the Songhai Empire between 1465 and 1492, persecuted Muslims who practiced polytheism.[57] These ancient kingdoms facilitated the construction of mosques and cities like Timbuktu in Mali.[58] Although the presence of extremist groups in this region has only become evident in the past 20 years, the first known *jihad* (a holy war, to protect the Islam against a perceived enemy)[59] in this region, the *Sharr Bubba* led by Nasir al-Din, occurred in Mauritania in the seventeenth century.[60]

Recommended Reading:

For more on the first Jihad in this region, see:

Michael A. Gomez, "Pragmatism in the Age of Jihad: The Precolonial State of Bundu," African Studies Series, No. 75 Cambridge University Press (1992).

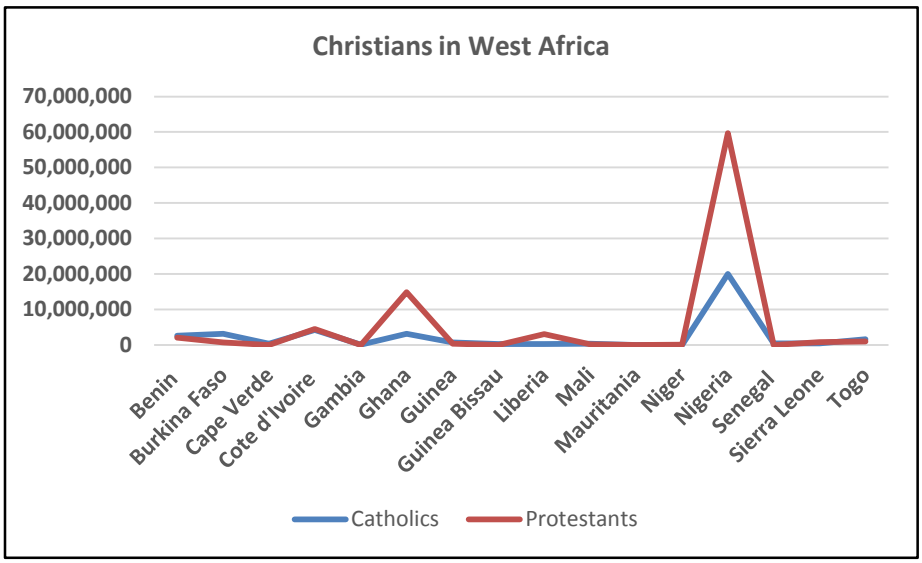
Christianity

Christians in West Africa are a minority, with Nigeria having the largest Christian population in Africa at approximately 80 million people.[61] The two most common Christian denominations in this region are Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Many Christians in this region practice a fusion of Christianity and other beliefs. This hybrid form of Christianity includes elements of "traditional" worship styles and rituals. These elements continue to influence followers of mainstream Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church in the region today.

Nigeria has the fastest-growing Christian population; Christianity is making headway in the public arena through social programs to include building and running universities. Nigeria has approximately 129 universities, of which 50 are privately run, and 14 being run by churches.[62] This is significant especially because of the power the churches wield in society, both politically and economically.

Much like the Christian missionaries who first arrived in this region in the early 1800s, the evangelical movement is expanding its reach using social programs, and playing a role in policymaking at the national level in the areas of education and health. While the political landscape in Africa mandates

the courting of village elders and chiefs in order to achieve political success, it has lately become equally important for political leaders to seek support from the Christian clergy.



Christian population in West Africa (Source: Pew Research, Religious and Public Life Project)

Superstitious beliefs permeate almost all organized religions in West Africa. Although Catholicism is widely practiced, individual actions are dictated by a set of beliefs from both Catholicism and traditional beliefs. For example, it is common to see an individual wearing a rosary around his neck as well as a traditional charm band on another part of his body. Communities today rely on their religious experiences to guide their daily lives, from family decision-making to influencing decisions at a community-level.

Animism

Animism practices or traditional beliefs are widely practiced in West Africa. Animists believe that the universe contains three worlds: the past, present, and future. These are parallel worlds that cross each other. Animists – or "traditional believers" – tend to seek harmony between these worlds. There are no animist holy texts or official places of worship. Instead, the rituals are considered part of their ethnic identity. Each ethnic group has its own animist creation story, creator-god, spirits, and rituals. Beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery, and magic are evident in this region, though specific rituals and beliefs vary across tribes. Child soldiers recruited into the militia believe that they can repel bullets after being anointed with protective water by a witch doctor.

TACTICAL TIP: Traditional beliefs and superstitions are part and parcel of religious practice in West Africa. Charms are used to keep evil spirits away and rituals are undertaken to dedicate or pay homage to ancestors. At the same time, it is common for people to share their faith in the work place. It is not uncommon to be invited to a Bible study with the host military members at lunch break or for an *Iftar* feast to open a Ramadan fast.

Animism is a communitarian concept, meaning that the community suffers or benefits from the consequences of each person's individual actions. The ancestors are also believed to be participants in the present world and can pass on good or evil to the community. Elements of animistic rituals have influenced Islam and Christianity in this region.

According to the World Bank, 63 percent of sub-Saharan Africans live in rural areas.[63] Although organized religion (Islam and Christianity) has been accepted by many rural Africans, traditional spiritual beliefs persist in these areas.

> "Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life…Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being…What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole." [64]

African traditional beliefs tend to share common themes:

- Universal forces created the earth and remain present
- Spirits fill the natural world and mediate between the past and future
- These spirits determine the course of present life, which often leads to a fatalistic view of events

Traditional (animist) concepts are used to give meaning to significant events. For example, during the 2014 EVD outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, traditional beliefs hindered prevention and treatment efforts. Reports from the region revealed a widespread belief that the virus was not real and that the disease was brought about by witchcraft. This was more common in rural villages, which are still tied strongly to traditional beliefs. These superstitious beliefs hampered diagnosis and prevention efforts, and eventually led to a campaign to sensitize the population on the factual specifics of the EVD outbreak. In order to ensure that their response to the outbreak was successful, multinational organizations and U.S. troops operating in West Africa under the auspices of Operation United Assistance had to consider the animist rituals, beliefs, and symbols that the indigenous people erroneously associated with this deadly epidemic.

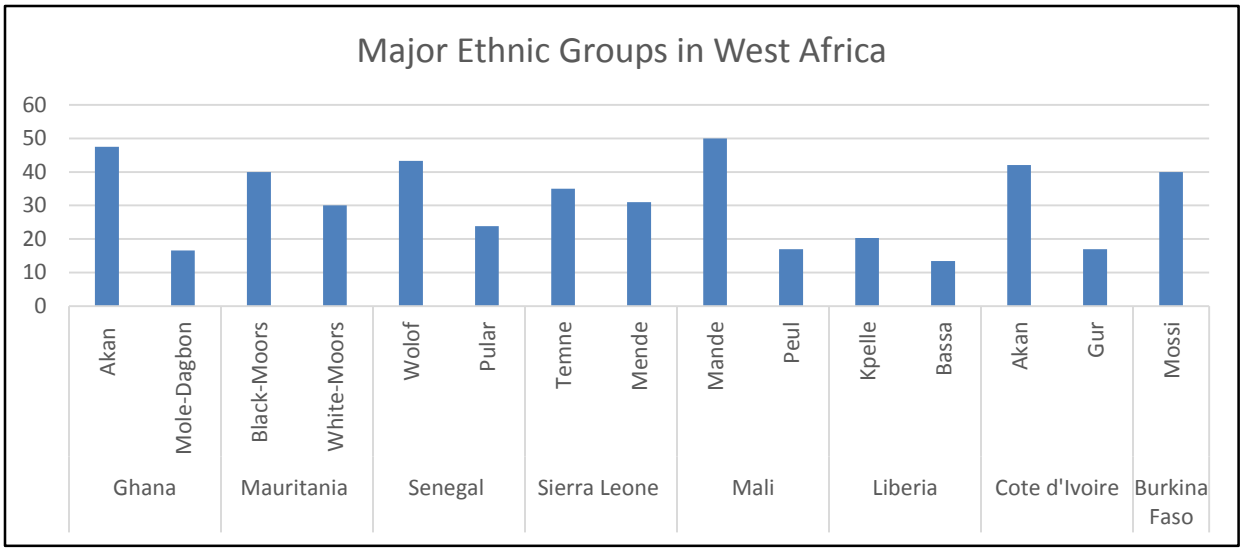
Ethnic Groups

West Africa is home to numerous tribes. The major tribes in this region are: the Tuareg and the Mande (including the Bambara, Malinke, and Soninke) of Mali, the Hausa of Niger, the Wolof of Senegal, the Moors of Mauritania, and the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo of Nigeria. Each tribe has its own distinct language, which in part defines its identity.

The two main ethnic groups in West Africa are the indigenous black Africans and Arabs. In many parts of this region, religious and commercial exchange with North Africa -- along with intermarriage, migration, and settlement – spread the Islamic religion and North African cuisine and modes of dress. For example, a majority of Mauritanian people are of Arab descent; in Algeria and northern Mali, many people are ethnically identifiable as Tuareg Arabs.

Throughout this region, people have strong loyalties to their extended families. Concentrations of members of an ethnic group often create a climate of ethnic favoritism. Government officials are expected to take care of their kinsmen with jobs or special favors, often at the expense of other ethnic groups. This sometimes creates public discontent and has frequently precipitated insurgencies led by groups excluded from receiving basic governmental services. Nigeria has over 250 tribes and over 500 languages and dialects; however, three of the tribes constitute approximately 70 percent of the population — Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.[65] These tribes are differentiated by language, region,

and culture— with the Hausa-Fulani inhabiting the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the South. The Hausa-Fulani are predominantly Muslim, the Yoruba consist of both Muslims and Christians, and the Igbo consist of a majority Christian population.



Source: CIA World Factbook

Ethnicity is a divisive factor in this region today, as it was after independence when the Biafra war broke out and battle lines were drawn between ethnic tribes. One of the strategies used to control ethnic conflict during the colonial period in Nigeria involved segregating the major tribes into areas labeled as *Sabongari* in the north and *Abakpa* in the east.[66] The segregation policy prohibited members of one tribe from buying land outside their designated territory, which also limited mobility. This led to prejudice between the tribes, and future ethnic tensions brewed over scarce resources.[67] The Biafra war was a political conflict, 1967-70, pitted the main ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo, the Yoruba, and the Hausa against each other, when the Igbos threatened to secede.[68] Today, ethnicity plays out in different forms: in politics, ethnic and regional allegiances control governments; in local economies, ethnicity is at the root of nepotism, corruption, and patronage networks that manipulate business practices in both the public and private sectors.

An example of this dynamic can be seen in the Ijaw ethnic group. The Ijaw inhabit the oil-rich Niger region which accounts for 80% of Nigeria's national revenue. Tensions over distribution of resources in this region have impacted the relationship between the central government and the Ijaw communities. Poverty and marginalization of communities in the south have led to the rise of insurgency groups in the Niger Delta.[69] Thus, when the former President Goodluck Jonathan, who is from the Niger Delta region, ascended to the Presidency in 2010, it was presumed that he would grant political favors exclusively to that region. Although Jonathan's record of fairness is a subject of debate, many locals feel that he has not done enough to alleviate poverty in southern Nigeria. More importantly, he failed to appoint individuals from the Niger Delta region to positions in his government.

In Mauritania, over 20,000 refugees have been repatriated from Senegal since 2008. Refugees have been flooding into Mauritania since a 1989-90 conflict erupted between Mauritanian herders and Senegalese farmers along the border. This conflict escalated existing tensions between white Moors (*Beydanes*) and black Mauritanians, leading to the expulsion and forced migration of up to 60,000 black

Mauritanians to Senegal and Mali. In Senegal, the Mauritanian community resisted the term "refugee" because they had not fled their homeland: they had been forcibly removed.

Mauritanians also felt alienated and exploited for labor by the Senegalese. Though many Mauritanians have returned to their homeland under a repatriation agreement, their status is still a friction point: in Senegal, they were designated as "refugees"; upon returning to Mauritania, they were no longer considered citizens, but classified as "revenants" – people who "chose to come back".[70] Their situation is further complicated because -- despite a Mauritanian ban on slavery in 1981 -- racism and discrimination are heaped upon revenants because of the "slave caste" system that discriminates against indigenous black Africans.[71]

African slavery predates the presence of European and Arab merchants in this region. Slaves were considered property and the owners traded them, gifted them, and freed them at will.[72] Current-day hierarchical social structures in West Africa continue to make allowances for slaves. One example of this is in Mauritania, where the old slavery practices cross all ethnic groups, even today. Mauritania has two major ethnic groups – Arab Berbers, known as the Moors in the north; and black African groups in the south, including the Pular, Soninke, and Wolof. Although Mauritania officially banned slavery in 1981, there are widespread reports that the practice continues.

In Mali, people identify themselves more with their ethnic group than with their region. There are twelve linguistically defined ethnic groups in Mali alone, including the Tuareg.[73] Political affiliations, however, are not ethnically divided, and political parties do not champion ethnic causes. Thus, ethnicity has a minimal role in politics in Mali. Nevertheless, there are cross-cutting links between ethnic groups that unify them into a cohesive unit.

One distinct phenomenon in Malian society is the kinship tie between ethnic groups. The *sinankunya* or "cousinage" relationship is a kinship tie established between ethnic groups, families, or clans. This relationship can best be described as a "joking relationship" where ritual teasing is acceptable between extended family members, clans, and ethnic groups. In essence, members of a family, including cousins or members of an ethnic group, can mock or tease members of another ethnic group, family, or clan without consequences.

These verbal confrontations are used to break the ice or ease tensions. Linked families or ethnic groups seldom fight. For instance in Mali, there is a cousinage relationship between the Dogon and the Bozo ethnic groups, and rudeness and insults are commonplace in opening a conversation. Mocking dialogues are used to further link the groups together. Listening to an opening dialogue, especially in ceremonies like weddings and funerals, offers an insight on the relationships between families, clans, or ethnic groups. Any conflict between groups that have a cousinage tie is resolved amicably. This social system has enhanced cohesion between groups. Nonetheless, for various reasons, the only persistent ethnic conflict in this region remains in the northern parts of Mali and Niger, where the Tuareg live.

The Tuareg are not part of the cousinage system. The Tuareg people are commonly referred to as the "Blue Men of the Desert" because of the color of their clothing.[74] Tuareg speak *Tamasheq*, and are ethnically related to the Berbers of North Africa. They inhabit northern Mali, Niger, Algeria, and Libya. They are organized in tribes and clans that are further stratified by castes of nobles, freemen, and slaves.

Slavery, or the vassal caste, is an important part of the Tuareg culture and economy, as slaves provide labor in the salt trade, trade caravans, and animal husbandry. Tuareg do interact with other tribes, especially because they need foods outside their native meat and milk diet. For centuries the Tuareg have traded with other tribes for grain; historically, the Tuareg taxed communities around the Niger valley, and taxes were remitted in the form of grain, gold, or slaves.

The Tuareg are perceived as a threat in the region. They are considered bandits who have no respect for borders or trade networks. They are ridiculed for being un-Muslim because they charge interest on unpaid debts, and because their women do not cover themselves. Analysts point out that ethnic tensions in the north may ignite ethnic conflict in southern Mali, especially because of the migration of Tuareg and Arab Malians to the south in search of economic opportunities.[75]

Languages

Nelson Mandela succinctly summed up the power of language in communication when he said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart."[76]

The cultural diversity in West Africa is further magnified by the several languages spoken within each country. Arabic, French, and English are the three most commonly used languages.

Official languages reflect the region's history of European colonization and its religious and economic exchange with the Arab world.

These languages are:

- French: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo
- Arabic: Mauritania
- English: Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria Liberia, and Sierra Leone
- Portuguese: Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau

Students are taught French, Arabic, English, and Portuguese in the countries where these languages are officially spoken; but the language that they speak on a daily basis often defines their social class: people who use English, French, or Portuguese in informal settings are usually considered more affluent.

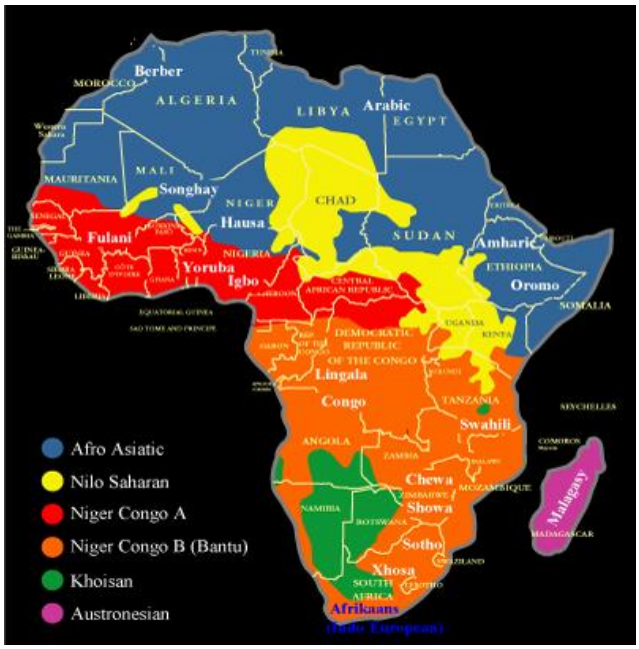
Rural communities tend to use tribal languages and dialects. Apart from the educated, most rural populations are not fluent in the country's official languages. Indigenous languages help maintain tribal and ethnic identities, and are mostly passed on orally. Many do not have a written code. Fluency in indigenous languages is almost at 100 percent oral (not written) in the rural areas, though this is less common in urban areas.

In Mali, while 50% of Malians are part of the Mande ethnic group, nearly 80% of the country speaks Bambara, which serves as the language of day-to-day life and commerce. A majority of the people in Niger are Hausa and speak the Hausa language; but the Djerma language is also spoken in the country.

Some of the major indigenous African languages spoken in West Africa are Hausa in Niger and Nigeria, Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria, and Wolof in Senegal.

Language Groups in Africa (based on similarity of linguistic structure):

- **Afro-Asiatic:** Also known as the Hamito-Semetic language family is spoken in northern Africa. It includes Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Ancient Egyptian, Omotic, and Semetic.
- **Nilo-Saharan:** These are languages spoken in North Africa, the Sahel, Sudan, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria. They include Old Nubian and Arabic.
- **Niger-Congo A:** These are spoken in West Africa. Examples include Yoruba, Igbo, and Fula.
- **Niger-Congo B:** These are spoken by the Bantu group, which originated from Cameroon and spreads across East, Central, and Southern Africa. Examples are Shona and Zulu, but the most common is Swahili.
- **Khoisan:** These are spoken by the Khoi Khoi in Southern Africa and the San (Bushmen) of the Kalahari in Namibia. It is commonly identified by its "click" sound.
- **Austronesian:** These are spoken in the island nations of Mauritius and Madagascar. One example is Malagay.



Language Groups in Africa by Country (Source: Nations Online)

Family Structure

The concept of family in West Africa is different from that of the West. The extended family is an important unit in all countries in this region. Polygamy is widely practiced which expands the reach of the "immediate family." In a polygamous home, labor is split between the wives and children, especially in rural areas where the household economy is heavily reliant on agriculture. In urban areas, the extended family shares a home, and the man becomes the main income earner while the wives manage the home together.


Nuclear Family Common in Urban Areas (Source: USAID)

In the social structure, authority is based on kinship, and the head of the family is usually the eldest male member. The tribe, clan, and family are taken into consideration in decision-making. There are advantages to the large familial homestead. For instance, in times of war, the larger homesteads can better protect themselves from their enemies. Larger homesteads also have a larger workforce, important because most of the countries rely on agriculture, fishing, and rearing livestock for their livelihoods. Nomadic tribes rely on their family members to graze and water their livestock.

TACTICAL TIP: Family is very important. However, the extended family, in parts of this region, has been heavily impacted by war and poverty. In many cases, one or more of your counterparts may have lost a close family member through war, famine, or disease. Use your judgment when making inquiries about relations. Additionally, note that the concept of "brother/sister" may not refer to a blood relative. Therefore, when your counterpart takes a day off to bury his/her "brother," do not make inquiries, or demand proof of a genetic link.

The division of labor is distinct; women are responsible for domestic chores including basic food supply for the family. In urban areas, most families are monogamous, but the extended family is consulted on important occasions such as a birth, marriage, and death. Members of the extended family residing in urban areas are relied upon for financial assistance by family members residing in rural areas.

It is common for members of the extended family in rural areas to send their children to the city to reside with more affluent members of the extended family. Additionally, the modern family structure has been affected by war, the high rate of migration, and displacement. This is most evident in northern Nigeria, Chad, and Mali. Other factors have impacted the family unit structure including diseases: EVD, lassa fever, typhoid, and malaria. These effects, however, have not diminished the value of the family unit in society.

Income Distribution

The extraction of minerals—mainly gold, bauxite, and iron ore—plays a crucial role in the economy of West Africa. Nigeria extracts and exports oil; Benin, Mali, Ghana and Burkina Faso are also oil producers. Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire are diamond producers, while Guinea and Gambia have vast deposits of bauxite.

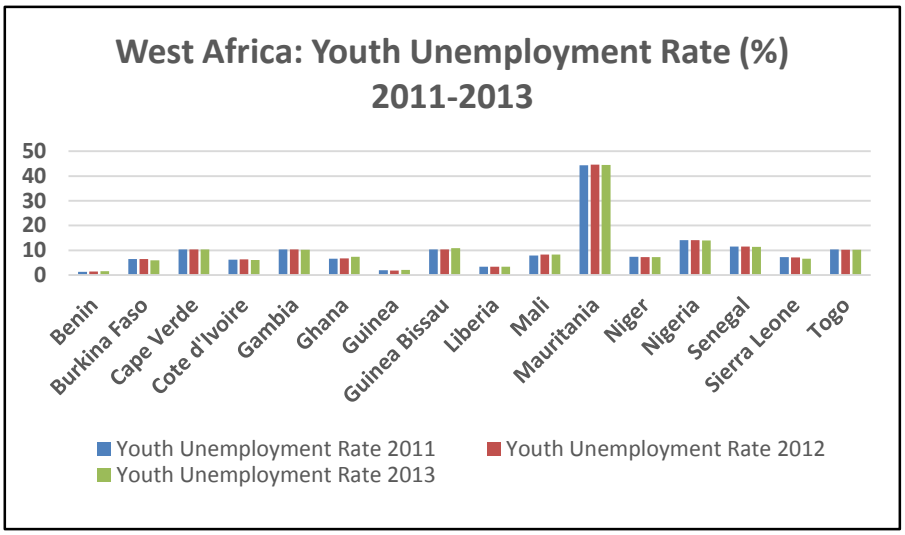
The gap between the rich and the poor is widening due to corruption and the absence of government accountability, which in turn deprive the population of viable and continuous income streams. Additionally, low pay for civil servants, government bureaucracy, lenient record-keeping, and a lack of transparency all abet corrupt behavior.[77] As a result, citizens are forced to pay bribes to government employees in order to obtain public services.[78] For example, although there is a growing class of micro-level entrepreneurs who conduct their businesses in the informal sector, the price of staying in business is high due to inflated licensing costs that factor in bribes for public servants.

The economic gap between urban and rural populations is growing. Available data paints a stark picture: a majority of rural West African families live on less than a dollar a day, whereas urban families bring in more income, yet very often remit a share of this money to their families in the countryside.[79] Much of the rural population living in West Africa engages in subsistence agriculture and pastoralism. Nigeria is an exception, due to increased training in economic sectors ranging from the technical trades to cinematography and the use of social media for communication and research.

As in many African countries, there is an income deficiency for those ready to enter the workforce but are unable to find jobs. Youth unemployment in West Africa is high and poses a stability risk. Although unemployment and underemployment in this region are difficult to measure, the youth bubble is evident. In Mali for example, approximately 300,000 people join the job market each year, and unemployment is highest among 15-39-year-olds.[80] Both skilled and unskilled youth lack opportunities and resources to sustain livelihoods, and many end up working in the informal sector. Thousands remain unproductive and are thus susceptible to mobilization and recruitment efforts by terror groups such as Boko Haram, in northern Nigeria, and AQIM, in Mali and Niger.

Youth unemployment is a threat to stability in Africa (Photo by Tommy Trenchard; Source: IRIN)

This chart depicts the percentage of the male labor force between the ages of 15 and 24 without work but available for employment.



Source: World Bank

Education

Traditionally, education in Africa has been an informal process lasting throughout a person's lifetime. Participation in work, community celebrations, religious traditions, and rites of passage guide a person's educational development.

Formal education was introduced in the pre-colonial era by missionaries; by the 1950s, most missions had established a school. However, only a few advance past primary school.

The literacy rate in West Africa varies — the literacy rate is lower in countries that have gone through periods of conflict. For example, in 2012, Sierra Leone

USAID is working to boost access to education in West Africa (Source: USAID)

reported 44 percent of people 15 and above were literate, an improvement considering the impact of the ten year conflict there (1991-2000) on the education sector.[81] Even in the most stable economies, such as that of Nigeria, the quality of education has improved, yet is far from perfect, especially in the area of information technology.

Technical and vocational schools offer a few specializations, but annual enrollment in these schools is low. Through USAID, the U.S. has boosted primary school education in the region, increasing both access to, and the quality of, education.[82]

In most West African countries, the quality of a person's education reflects their socioeconomic background. Wealthy parents send their children to private schools, while poor children must attend underfunded public schools, some of which have poorly-trained teachers. For example, the student-instructor ratio is deficient which is problematic because it impacts enrollment rates for the youth. The shortfall is also a challenge to policy makers who have to address the youth bulge and employment options for a young workforce. Although there are various programs in place to enhance youth employability, many do not offer skills training to meets market-relevant needs.

Other factors that interfere with education include natural disasters, civil conflict, famine, and drought. In northern Nigeria, a general lack of security has forced the closure of schools; for example, after approximately 200 girls were kidnapped from a school in 2014 by the terror group Boko Haram.[83] Another event that impacted the education sector was the EVD outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In all three countries, schools were closed at the height of the outbreak for up to eight months.[84]

Healthcare

West Africa is considered a high-risk area for vector-borne diseases such as malaria, and waterborne diseases like typhoid and hepatitis A.[85]

USAID works to boost primary healthcare at the community level (Source: USAID)

By global standards, medical capabilities in this region are below average. This was evident during the onset and consequent management of the EVD outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The EVD outbreak is the worst medical emergency to have hit the region in recent history. Some of the major chronic challenges facing the health sector include: inadequate access to healthcare and emergency facilities, a lack of essential medicines, and insufficient capacity to respond to outbreaks.[86]

The EVD outbreak (the first case was reported in 2013 – and the last case was treated in 2015) exposed the vulnerable state of the public health infrastructure in the impacted countries and in the region. The lack of technology and trained personnel in these countries are products of persistent governance challenges:

- Sierra Leone endured a brutal ten-year conflict that left the country in a dilapidated state.
- Guinea became a haven for refugees escaping Liberia during the civil war.
- The Liberian conflict required the deployment of U.S. Marines to Monrovia in 2003.[87]

Ebola impacted countries (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

All three of these countries have made significant progress in the areas of peace and security, yet their health sectors are still underdeveloped and underfunded.

The spread of the Ebola virus was attributed to the state of an adequately staffed healthcare system, coupled with a non-existent diagnostic reporting structure, ill-equipped facilities, and limited access to health care, especially in the rural areas. This hindered the diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of the outbreak and led to international intervention to stem the spread of the disease.

Unlike East, Central, and Southern Africa, where millions of dollars in donor aid have been invested to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, the HIV infection rates in this region have been relatively low, and thus, fewer resources have been invested to boost the healthcare infrastructure.[88] Experts point to this as part the reason why the health sector was ill-prepared for the EVD outbreak in 2014.

West Africa: EVD Cases 2014-2015			
Country	**Total Cases (Suspected, Probable, and Confirmed)**	**Laboratory-Confirmed Cases**	**Total Deaths**
Guinea	3,404	2,988	2,241
Liberia	9,555	3,150	4,283
Sierra Leone	11,794	8,508	3,712
Nigeria	20	19	8
Total	**24,774**	**14,665**	**10,244**
As of March 2015 (Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)			

The U.S. deployed Marines to Liberia under the auspices of Operation United Assistance in support of the USAID mission to halt the spread of EVD -- which at that time was poised to become a global threat. U.S. forces trained health workers, equipped mobile labs, built Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs), and supplied over a million sets of personal preotective gear.[89] The outbreak led to over 10,000 deaths in the region and significantly impacted regional economies.

Although the EVD outbreak in West Africa was eventually contained, the U.S. continues to support a capacity building effort in the region's health sector under Operation Onward Liberty (OOL), which aims to improve the ability of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) to respond to similar emergencies. Teams from OOL also offer engineering and medical skills training.[90]

Another disease that has had a considerable impact on the population includes lassa fever - which is a hemorrhagic viral disease similar to EVD. It is common in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Liberia. Each year, lassa fever infects 100-300,000 people, and claims close to 5,000 lives.[91] EVD, lassa fever, cholera, malaria, and typhoid all disproportionately infect the poor, spreading quickly in high-density areas that lack running water and basic sanitation.

TACTICAL TIP: Vector-borne diseases transmitted by pathogens and parasites are common in sub-tropical regions and in areas without access to safe drinking water. The most common diseases in this region in are malaria, typhoid, and cholera. When deployed to this region, Marines may need prophylactic drugs, should use mosquito nets, and drink treated water.

Notwithstanding the regional poverty, there are countries in this region with better healthcare, notably Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Nigeria's success in tackling EVD in 2014, for example, can be attributed to the country's preparedness and quick response. Nigeria declared EVD a national emergency as soon as the first case was diagnosed, and soon after began screening people for symptoms of the disease at all borders, airports, and other national entry points. The Nigerians also established an incident-management system at the state and national levels to manage cases, and quarantine and monitor anyone who had been in contact with infected persons.[92] In villages, many health centers were equipped with testing laboratories that could quickly identify infectious disease.

Nigeria's proactive response to the emerging Ebola crisis is instructive because the country's rapid actions were ***not*** taken by officials in neighboring countries where the disease quickly became an epidemic. In Guinea, for example, the first case of EVD appeared in December 2013; however, three months would pass before any action was taken, thereby enabling this deadly virus to cross Guinea's borders into Sierra Leone and Liberia.[93]

The U.S. has invested millions of dollars to stop the spread of EVD and to build capacity in the most impacted (and at-risk) countries. America is investing in West Africa's healthcare sector in the hope that recipients of this support will be better equipped to handle future health emergencies.

West Africa: USG Humanitarian Disaster Response to Ebola Outbreak (US$)	
USAID	612,276,220
DOD	359,555,000
CDC	152,257,373
Total	**1,124,088,593**
As of March 2015 (Source: USAID)	

Chapter

4

Government and Politics

Why Government and Politics Matter to You as a Marine

Most people live in states governed by formal and informal institutions. Marines need to learn how power and authority are distributed in the state by studying the formal and informal structures of governments in the region. Additionally, Marines need to understand how people, groups, and institutions exercise power and authority—in other words, what comprises politics in a culture.

Political Systems

Most countries in West Africa gained independence between 1957 and 1975, and national movements began to shape the political landscape. In this region ethnic groups, religions, and traditional leaders have all influenced the evolution of national political and legal systems.

Though West African countries have functional national and local governments, they rely on informal leadership structures to meet the needs of the population. Traditional elders and chiefs, as well as non-governmental actors, are instrumental in delivering services.

Subordinate to the national (or central) government, there are government bodies that are typically structured in three tiers; these three levels of governance are intended to give citizens a greater degree of self-rule. In the top tier, there are provincial governments (similar to state governments in the U.S.). In the middle tier, county-like district governments exist. Occupying the bottom tier of governance are town or village councils.

A USAID official consults a village chief (Source: USAID)

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, a traditional chief exercised political leadership at the provincial, district, and village levels. Today, central and local governments perform these functions, effectively removing the political and economic power of most chiefs. Additionally, national governments in this region use traditional authority as a form of indirect government. This system of indirect government is used in Niger's and Mali's rural communities to defuse the conflicts between the northern communities and the politically dominant southern communities.[94]

Many chiefs and other traditional leaders inherit their titles. When national governments are unstable or ineffective, the rural populations turn to traditional leaders—a form of government that has worked for generations.

In farming communities, a leader's power comes from his ability to manage and resolve conflict. In remote areas, particularly those neglected by central governments, chiefs continue to rule and provide governance.[95] Chiefs have a finger on the pulse of their community; they continually engage in conflict resolution and are consulted by elected leaders. Traditional structures aim to restore harmony within the community.

Negotiation and consensus are very important in the region; village chiefs and councils of elders specialize in peacemaking. A *griot,* a local historian and poet, is considered a "wise man" in the village community and often serves as a peacemaker in the Bambara and Mandinka cultures. Many governments in this region recognize that informal negotiation and problem-solving play a critical role. In Mali officials often include traditional peacemakers in their own problem-solving efforts.

By contrast, formal government structures are also vital in governing. Although there have been challenges in effecting control over the vast, remote, northern territories, regional governments have succeeded in working together to counter extremism and humanitarian crises, such as droughts.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional body whose role is to ensure economic integration. However, it is also instrumental in ensuring peace and stability in the region. ECOWAS has played a diplomatic and military role in restoring stability in troubled hot spots since its inception in 1975. For example, after an uprising forced the President of Burkina Faso to step down in 2014, ECOWAS played a key role in steering the country's military towards a civilian interim government within weeks.[96] In Mali, ECOWAS was instrumental in putting together a force to intervene after militants took over northern Mali in 2012, and the organization continues to manage the situation.[97]

One of the major shortfalls of government in this region is corruption, which can trigger unrest. Countries such as Sierra Leone and Nigeria have vast natural resources and earn large amounts of revenue, but the benefits do not translate to development at the local level.

TACTICAL TIP: The term "corruption" does not have a direct translation in many African languages. This is because reciprocity and gift-giving are cultural concepts that are expected as forms of gratitude. In most African countries, it is difficult to conduct business without a "facilitation fee."

The following table ranks countries based on levels of corruption in the public sector. A country's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries and territories in the index. The index includes 175 countries, with a higher rank indicating high levels of corruption. According to the data, Guinea Bissau, ranked 126, was perceived to be the most corrupt in the region with widespread bribery, impunity, and unresponsiveness of public institutions; while Cape Verde, ranked at 42, is the least corrupt.[98] By comparison, the U.S. ranked 17 in the same index.[99]

Corruption Perception Index 2014: West Africa	
Country	**Ranking (of 175)**
Benin	80
Burkina Faso	85
Cape Verde	42
Côte d'Ivoire	115
Gambia	126
Ghana	61
Guinea	145
Guinea Bissau	161
Liberia	94
Mali	115
Mauritania	124
Niger	103
Nigeria	136
Senegal	69
Sierra Leone	119
Togo	126

Corruption Perception Index (Source: Transparency International)

Nationalism

Nationalism in this context refers to the feeling of kinship and belonging based on shared values and beliefs, which usually translates to a group identity.[100] Colonization fomented disaffection and resistance; because people were prevented from organizing country-wide resistance, local communities galvanized and mobilized ethnically. In West Africa, resistance movements often began at the grassroots. This is because regional populations first identify themselves as members of a tribe, and secondly identify themselves as citizens of a nation. When West African colonies gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, the national flags became symbols of national pride. However, national self-governance has had its share of challenges, and national pride soon began to erode in many of these emerging democracies.

Nationalism in West Africa can also be viewed through the prism of language and linguistics. Although local languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Bambara, and Tamasheq are among the many indigenous languages spoken in this region, Arabic, French, and English have been used to promote national cohesion in a region that is ethnically diverse with hundreds of linguistic groups. However, language has also been a source of contention because in many cases, indigenous languages are marginalized.

National pride is unquantifiable in the region, especially due to poverty and other socioeconomic issues—even in nations that have enjoyed relative stability.[101] However, the region, in addition to each individual country, is united by soccer. In 2014, Nigeria played in the World Cup in Brazil. Although the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) suspended Nigeria after a dispute over bonuses, its national team still inspires youth in the region and remains a source of national pride.

Football, as it is popularly known, has a wide fan base in the region, especially because there are hundreds of West African players on European leagues. Fans across the region wear European team shirts, avidly listen to radio broadcasts of soccer matches, and will sometimes set up a television powered by car batteries and accept a small fee to villagers keen to watch popular matches. Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire have some of the best teams in Africa.

Rule of Law

Most countries in this region are currently undergoing institutional reforms aimed at strengthening the judiciary.

Sierra Leone is a good example of progress and adherence to the rule of law in the aftermath of its gruesome ten year civil war (1991-2002). Like other countries that have undergone conflict, judicial structures were dominated by executive power and a culture of impunity. The war left Sierra Leone's judiciary in ruins, incapable of delivering justice for victims. However, the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Justice Commission, were set up to address injustices and human rights abuses, among other atrocities committed during the war.

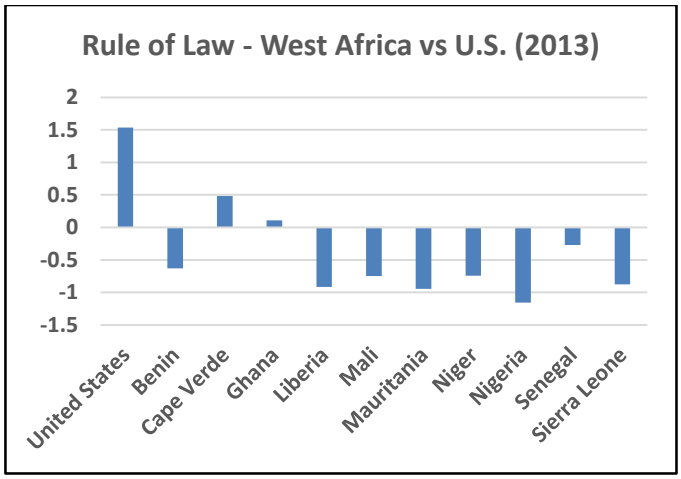
Access to justice in Sierra Leone was minimal after the war; however, USAID and other international partners have played a role in enhancing justice by educating auxiliary legal officers and personnel in the police and judiciary. The training effort aims to improve public access to the courts, and reduce inefficiencies within legal systems.[102]

West Africa is plagued with a number of legal issues, including child labor and traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). Rates of FGM are high in many West African countries: Sierra Leone (94 percent), Gambia (79 percent), Burkina Faso (74 percent), and Mauritania (72 percent).[103] Although FGM has been outlawed in Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo, enforcement to deter the practice is still lacking, especially in the rural areas.[104] There are efforts on several fronts to inform communities about the harmful effects of FGM; the goal of these efforts is to completely eradicate this barbaric practice.

In Nigeria, corruption and a culture of exemption by public servants been major hindrances to the rule of law. Although democratic structures exist and the judiciary has a wide reach, bribery and other corrupt practices have compromised access to justice and legal processes.[105]

Other hindrances to the rule of law in this region include armed conflict and political instability. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire have all experienced armed conflict in the recent past, and their judicial structures are in need of reform.

The following chart compares public confidence in the rule of law in West African countries and the United States.[106]



Source: World Bank

The World Bank's assessment of the rule of law reflects perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in, and abide by, the rules of society, and, in particular, the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Measures of governance performance rank from "weak" (approximately -2.5) to "strong" (approximately 2.5).

Political Conflicts

West Africa has had a violent political history. Challenges to governance have precipitated conflict in several countries in this region. In 2011, a Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali, followed by a military coup that overthrew President Amadou Touré, opened up the Mali people to new threats. The prevailing instability facilitated the rise of extremist groups, such as the Islamist group *Ansar al-Din* (Arabic for "Defenders of the Faith," a splinter group of AQIM), which took control of northern Mali in March 2012.[107]

The issue of presidential term limits has been a friction point in countries like Togo and Burkina Faso. Though Togo is a small country in terms of size, the political situation there is a good example of the overall political climate in the region. President Gnassingbe Eyadema came to power through a *coup d'état* in 1967, and sustained one-party political rule for 24 years. At the time of Evadema's death, he had been in power for 38 years; soon after, his son, Faure Gnassingbe, took over the position as president.[108]

In 2014, Blaise Compaore, then-president of Burkina Faso, was forced to step down after a popular uprising forced him to abandon his intention to extend his term in office.[109] Compaore had been in power for 27 years, and had been pushing for a constitutional amendment that would have enabled him to retain power indefinitely.[110]

Yahya Jammeh, president of Gambia, is another example of a West African political strongman flouting term limits. Jammeh has ruled this tiny country since 1994.

Even in relatively stable countries, political challenges pose a threat to peace and security. Election seasons in the region are sometimes synonymous with crisis.

In 2015, for example, Nigeria's elections were postponed after the military establishment decided that an unstable security situation in the northern part of the country made it unsafe for many Nigerians to go to the polls. The public was generally accepting of the postponement of the election, but some political parties said that the measure was an attempt by Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent president, to postpone his inevitable departure from office.

Because Nigeria is the most populous country in the region -- and because it has had a history of political violence -- the African Union, among other regional players, intervened and sought assurances from President Jonathan that he would eventually hold free and fair elections.[111] Nigeria indeed held a peaceful and secure election on March 28, 2015.[112]

Successful & Attempted *Coups d'etat* in West Africa	
Country	**Year**
Côte d'Ivoire	1999, 2002
Guinea Bissau	2003
Mauritania	2005, 2008
Guinea	2008
Niger	1999, 2010
Mali	2012
Guinea Bissau	2012
Gambia	2014
Source: Africa Development Bank, BBC News	

In addition to the abovementioned friction points, there have been approximately 40 attempted or successful *coups d'état* in this region. Most of these overthrows have triggered civil war, as is the case in Sierra Leone; this war eventually spilled over Sierra Leone's borders into Liberia and Guinea.

The civil war in Sierra Leone began in 1991. It was triggered by years of misrule exacerbated by economic ills. The conflict pitted frustrated citizens against a small but wealthy political class that had looted the country of revenue generated by the country's lucrative diamond industry.

Diamond exports once accounted for $200 million in annual revenue for Sierra Leone; by the 1980s, government officials claimed that they were only able to collect $100,000 each year.[113]

Bowing to international pressure, Siaka Stevens, who ruled as Sierra Leone's president for 17 years, peacefully handed over power in 1985 to Joseph Momoh, a trusted army general.[114] Sierra Leone's new government maintained the networks of government officials helping themselves to diamond profits. Lacking government funds, Sierra Leone's vital public services – notably health and education – went into decline.

Sierra Leone's civil war is unique because it involved a series of internal *coups d'etat,* coupled with influences from some of the country's regional neighbors.

Sierra Leone's deteriorating economic and social situation created an opportunity for rebel groups to rise up and gain strength. These groups were aided by Charles Taylor and Blaise Compaore, the then-presidents, respectively, of Liberia and Burkina Faso.

Taylor and Compaore facilitated the training of Sierra Leonean rebels and mercenaries in Libya; this pair of West African leaders later supported the rebel-led government in Sierra Leone in order to help themselves to profits from the country's diamond industry.

In 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) –a group led by Foday Sankoh and supported by Liberian President Charles Taylor--invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia and took control of the diamond mining district. Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea became key components of an Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), sponsoring military intervention to defend Momoh's regime and halt RUF's advance into the capital city of Freetown. The government of Sierra Leone, led by Momoh, was unable to dislodge RUF from the diamond mining areas. The army ousted Momoh, installing army captain Valentine Strasser as president in 1992. Strasser was

toppled by another army leader, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio in 1996, who paved the way for democratic elections the same year.[115]

West Africa has made tremendous progress in democratic governance, including the peaceful handover of power in Nigeria after the 2015 elections. However, the impact of political conflicts in this region can still be felt, as there are sectors of the regional economy that have not recovered from the mismanagement of rogue regimes. This was the case in Liberia and Sierra Leone, both of which were hardest hit by the 2014 EVD outbreak. The rapid spread of this disease was largely due to a dilapidated health infrastructure and high levels of poverty, especially in rural areas.

Chapter

5

Economic Overview

Why Economy and Infrastructure Matter to You as a Marine

The goods and services that people exchange, the infrastructure that people use to move them, and the formal and informal structures that make exchange possible all play critical roles in daily survival. A thorough understanding of a region is impossible without knowledge of its economy. This is because the region's political, social, and cultural trends reflect and shape economic developments and trends.

Nature of Economic Systems

The economic systems in this region are built on formal and informal sectors. The informal economic sectors include fishing, pastoralism, and agriculture. Manufacturing, oil drilling, and mining are the main economic drivers of the formal sectors. Additionally, minerals such as diamonds, gold, bauxite, and iron ore play a crucial role in West Africa's economies. Ghana and Mali are the main distributers of gold in this region.[116]

While mining plays a key role in the regional economy, logging is a fast growing industry, especially because of the expanse of forest covering the region and the number of unemployed who have turned to artisan logging. The Guinean forests extend from Guinea to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.[117] Additionally, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and more recently Mauritania extract and export oil.

The traditional economic system is evident today in rural and Saharan communities where subsistence production is localized. It is often cashless and goes unregulated by the central government. One such example is the traditional economy of the Tuareg, which functions across the boundaries of Libya, Mali, and Niger. Tuareg caravans were historically the backbone of the Sahara trade, transporting goods such as salt and gold across North Africa, West Africa, and the Sahel. Today, the Tuareg still buy grains such as sorghum from farmers along their nomadic routes. They also buy surplus crops from local farming communities in order to have an adequate supply of food during the dry season.[118]

Subsistence farming in the region is vital to the local economies. Farmers sell excess produce in markets which, in turn, increases the reach of cash-based local economies.

Informal financial systems such as *hawala* are used extensively in this region.[119] *Hawala* is a parallel banking system that exists outside of formal structures.[120] Hawala banking is based

Hawala is popular because it is fast, cheap, and reliable. *Hawala* functions outside regulation; it does not leave any record and is not subject to taxation.

on trust; families often use this informal banking system to remit money across great distances to family or friends. Although rural communities, especially in Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger, have relied on *hawala* for decades, a negative light has lately been cast on *hawala* because the system has been exploited by terrorists and traffickers of weapons, drugs, and human beings.

Many West African governments are working to strengthen formal financial institutions by imposing a system of taxation -- principally to counter money laundering and the financing of regional terror groups.[121]

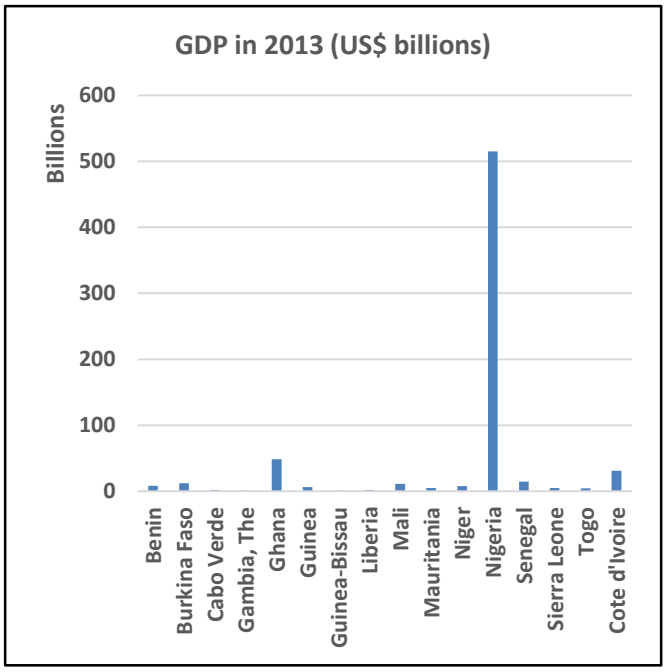
The other type of economic system in this region is the market economy, which relies on consumer choices. However, instability and the presence of aid organizations providing assistance to displaced populations – often in the absence of a functional government -- have created a hybrid economy. For instance, the EVD outbreak inhibited the flow of commerce and created shortages of basic items. USAID and the World Food Program provided food aid to the impacted countries as part of a holistic approach to dealing with the outbreak. Other international aid organizations ran a "cash for work" program that offered daily wages for short-term work, as well as other cash allowances such as hazard pay. Typically, these payments are made in U.S. dollars, which infused hard currency into the local economy, and caused a temporary surge in income for the duration of the crisis.[122]

Emergency situations can artificially stimulate the economy when and where there is a post-crisis program designed to absorb temporary workers into a subsector. These programs, unfortunately, can also trigger inflation and price distortion. Emergency aid programs, despite the best of intentions, can also alter the local culture by displacing indigenous institutions traditionally responsible for responding to a crisis.[123] For example, it may be difficult to organize volunteers in a subsequent emergency when the pool of potentially free labor is accustomed to being paid in U.S. dollars.

Economic Trends

Although the countries in this region rely on agriculture, pasturage, fishing, manufacturing, drilling, and mining, their economies vary widely in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) growth. Economic indicators show West Africa as a region with a lot of potential, but one whose growth is hindered by corruption, a harsh investment climate, armed conflict, and an absence of the capacity for governments to accurately measure growth.

For example, Niger needs viable structures to research, document, and monitor economic indicators for policymaking purposes. In a cash-driven economy, where alternative systems like *hawala* exist, it is difficult to accurately depict economic trends.



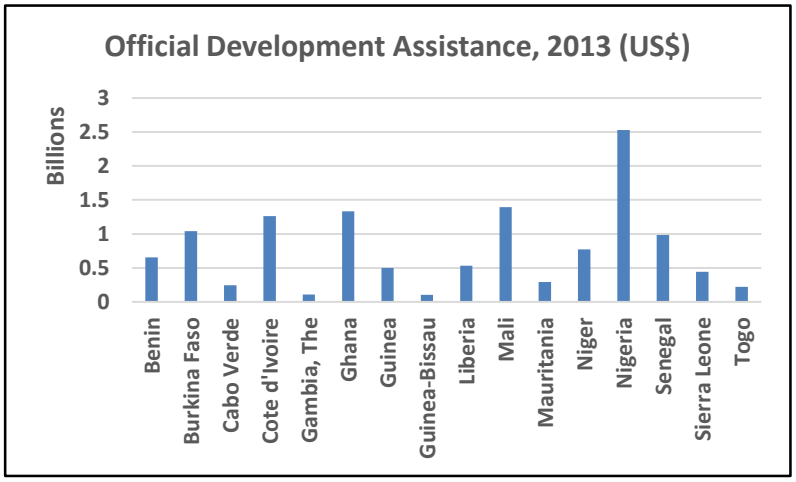
Source: World Bank

Nigeria, one of the most stable countries in this region, derives most of its wealth from oil,

but corruption and unequitable distribution of resources has led to clashes in the oil-rich Niger Delta, and although new industries are opening up, Nigeria's poverty rate has worsened from 65 percent in 1996 to 69.5 percent in 2008. Generally, poverty is higher in rural areas (73.2 percent) than in urban areas (61.8 percent).[124]

Several factors restrict the region's economic development. These factors include: environmental threats, such as drought and locust invasions that have endangered agricultural potential;[125] increased migration from rural to urban areas; and the ongoing tensions in the Niger Delta. Natural disasters have also amplified food insecurity and worsened poverty.

There are four main outside contributors to the GDP in this region, including: foreign direct investment (FDI), which is the amount of capital invested into a local enterprise by a foreign entity; official development assistance (ODA), which is the total donor investment as aid – as in the case of an humanitarian emergency; remittances; and debt relief initiatives.[126]



Source: World Bank

External financial resources in the form of ODA and FDI have been on the rise in recent years.

The region's GDP has been boosted significantly by remittances from workers living abroad. When nationals from this region migrate to neighboring countries or Europe, they typically send a portion of their earnings back to their families at home. Many families depend on this income to live. Remittances to Mali have steadily increased over time; in 2013, they reached over $530 million.[127] Niger received $153 million in remittances, while Nigeria received $21 billion in remittances.[128] Like in many countries in Africa, remittances exceed ODA and FDI; on average, remittances are 1.7 times more than FDI flows, and over six times higher than ODA.

According to official data, Nigeria has received $1.7 billion in ODA and $22.4 billion in FDI in 2012.[129] However, informal banking and money transfer systems such as *hawala* bring in millions of unaccounted dollars; this phenomenon significantly increases the amount of cash in circulation throughout the region.[130]

Natural Resources

West Africa is endowed with vast natural wealth. Diamond fields cover 7,700 square miles, approximately a quarter of Sierra Leone, which is also a significant producer of bauxite (an aluminum source), gold, and iron ore.[131]

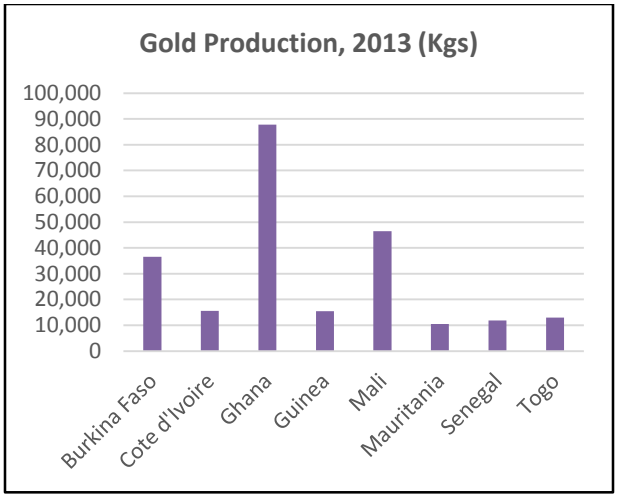
Nigeria is the largest oil and natural gas producing country in Africa,[132] and Niger is the fourth largest uranium producer, having two significant mines which account for 7.5% of the world's uranium.[133] Additionally, gold production has consistently increased in Ghana, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Mauritania is becoming a major gold producer in the region as well.

Recommended Reading:

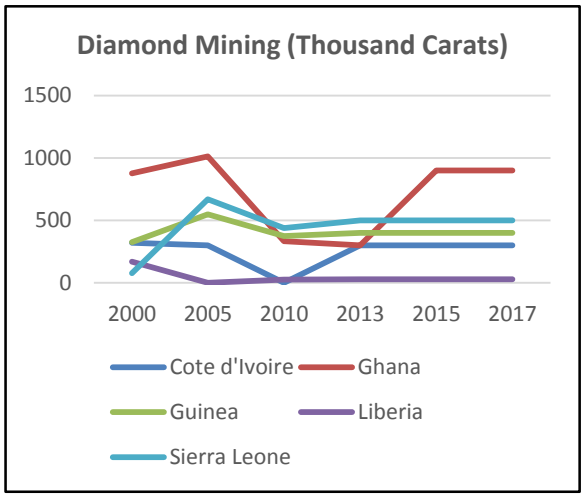
For more on the history, certification and membership of the Kimberley Process see: http://www.kimberleyprocess.com/en/about

Streamlined mining operations and improved accountability have increased government income from the diamond industry. In Sierra Leone, where rebels relied on illegal proceeds from diamond mines to sustain the civil war, the Kimberley Process -- named after the city of Kimberley in South Africa -- has been instrumental in stopping the trade in "conflict diamonds." [134] The Kimberley Process tracks diamonds from the mine to the marketplace, ensuring that revenues are accurately accounted for.

Bringing transparency to the West African diamond industry has been essential to the recovery of economies in conflict and post-conflict countries such as Sierra Leone.[135]



Source: USGS Minerals Yearbook 2010



Source: USGS Minerals Yearbook, 2010

In Nigeria, drought, desertification, corruption, and instability in the Niger Delta have undermined healthy economic growth. Nigeria's energy industry has been the focal point of political instability as opposing groups vie for control of the resource-rich Niger Delta region. Natural resources found in the Delta include petroleum, natural gas, tin, lead, and coal. However, oil drilling is the most lucrative economic activity in the region; the petroleum industry is largely managed by international oil companies, including ExxonMobil and Shell.[136]

The Niger Delta covers 43,243 sq. mi. (112,000 sq. km) and has a population of approximately 32 million people from 40 ethnic groups.[137] Although most people living in this region are fishermen or farmers, the poverty level in the Niger Delta is below the national poverty level, with most living on less than $2 a day.[138] By contrast, oil revenues in 2013 were approximately $69.9 billion (13.4% of the GDP). Corruption and patronage-driven politics have stunted economic development. This situation, combined with a high rate of unemployment and underfunded education, health, and infrastructure

programs, has created an economic climate in the Delta region conducive to criminal activity and prone to conflict.[139]

In sum, the state of affairs in Nigeria's oil sector has created unsatisfactory economic growth. This has led to a series of events – including the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers -- that have escalated the threat level in the region.

Many economists say that West Africa exemplifies the so-called "natural resource curse." The "natural resource curse" refers to the pace of economic growth – usually slower -- in resource-rich nations, compared to resource-poor nations.[140] The economic growth in resource-rich countries is often measured in terms of anticipated profits; the expectations among the population in these countries are also usually very high. In reality, anticipated profits from the exploitation of national resources sometimes do not take into account various expenses that often cut into profits: licensing and regulatory fees, exploration expenses, the initial costs associated with setting up mining or oil drilling operations, overhead costs for production, and export taxes.

Public distrust in the natural resource industries in Nigeria and Sierra Leone stemmed from a lack of government transparency (including full disclosure of profits) and mismanagement. This distrust has historically served as a trigger for conflict.

Many West African countries have made institutional reforms that have streamlined the diamond mining industry – notably the introduction of the Kimberley Process in Sierra Leone.[141] Streamlining these processes has boosted the national economy by ensuring the transparent flow of profits back into the national treasury.

Agriculture

Agricultural production in West Africa accounts for 35% of the region's GDP.[142] However, the region has experienced many environmental challenges, notably declining rainfall. In a region where cultivation is timed with the seasons, most crops are grown during the rainy season and harvested at the beginning of the dry season.[143]

TACTICAL TIP: Marines who deploy to this region and have food allergies should be aware that peanuts and peanut butter are common additives in the local cuisine across this region.

Most families in rural areas engage in subsistence farming; they plant wheat, sorghum, millet, cowpeas, and rice to meet the needs of their families, then sell the surplus at the local market. Crops such as groundnuts (peanuts) are grown and consumed locally across the region as a major part of the cuisine.

Notwithstanding the challenges, agricultural production in this region has increased in recent years. Cash crops rose from 19 million tons in 1980 to 38 million tons in 2006.[144] This is mostly due to the introduction of new farming techniques, such as irrigation. The arid northern regions of West Africa are home to pastoral communities, where livestock is a major commodity and status symbol, especially in Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. Small stocks are kept domestically for dairy farming, while larger stocks are moved about with herders who sometimes cross national borders in search of better pasture.

The three major cash crops in this region are cocoa, cotton, and palm oil. Palm oil is a household commodity in West Africa. Today, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are two of the world's largest cocoa exporters, while Senegal and Cape Verde export bananas and fish.

> "Export subsidies encourage the overproduction of cotton, which in turn induces a downward pressure on world cotton prices. This pressure lowers the export earnings of cotton-dependent countries such as Mali."
> **Source: The Cotton Sector in Mali (OECD)**

A woman prepares her commodity for sale (Source: USAID)

Rice is grown in most countries in this region and is a dietary staple. Most of the output is consumed domestically or in the region, but many countries need to import it to meet demand.

Another major regional export is cotton, which is grown in Mali and Nigeria. Mali is the largest producer of cotton in the region, with output accounting for 8% of its GDP. On average, Mali produces 600–800,000 tons of cotton a year, generating up to $5.3 million a year.[145] Significantly, a quarter of Malian households rely on cotton for their livelihoods. However, cotton subsidies in developed countries have encouraged cotton over-production, thereby limiting Mali's export earnings.[146]

Informal Economy

West Africa lacks sufficient formal jobs to meet the employment demands of new arrivals to its cities. Many people work as unregistered street vendors, which forms the backbone of labor for West Africa's urban marketplaces. A large number of these workers in the urban informal economy are self-employed laborers working in industries from textiles to construction. Some employees face dangerous working conditions, and most lack the benefits and job security that come with a job in the formal economy.

Informal commerce is the economic engine in most of the economies in the region. In the Nigerian city of Lagos, for example, there is a bustling underground electronics market, with vendors importing cell phones and computers from China through regional transit points and selling them locally. In Nigeria, where oil revenues keep the government afloat, there is no urgency to regulate informal entrepreneurial industries. The informal sector in Nigeria is said to be approximately two-thirds of the size of the formal economy, and it is growing.[147]

The transportation industry, including non-motorized transportation, is exploited by cross-country smugglers who rely on locals to carry goods across borders into neighboring countries. The trade of contraband items includes cigarettes, illegal arms, and drugs. Additionally, human trafficking and kidnappings are common, which has given rise to a new social class comprised mainly of entrepreneurs who handle logistics for the movement of illegal merchandise or negotiate ransom payments. Drugs transshipped through Africa usually arrive in Guinea-Bissau, pass through the Maghreb, and end their journey in Europe.

Terror groups also engage in kidnappings for the purpose of getting money from ransoms. However,

the use of *hawala* has made it difficult to track the financing of terrorism in this region. As a result, thousands of dollars change hands between smugglers, middlemen, and local porters every year. Many families depend – legitimately--on payments made through *hawala* for their daily subsistence.

The fact that much of the region's economy operates outside the tax system puts a drain on government treasuries, especially in the non-oil-producing countries. Corruption plays a big role in people's decisions to work outside the formal economy, because people believe that a substantial portion of tax revenues will go into government officials' pockets instead of paying for legitimate government services. Corruption and high tariffs are the greatest hindrances to the flow of goods in the region.

Infrastructure

Transportation

FDI has benefitted the telecommunication and transportation infrastructure in urban areas throughout the region. Although rail transportation is limited in this region, air transportation is adequate and has boosted trade ties. However, air and rail travel are still too expensive for the general population, and most people travel by bus and taxi between major cities and villages.

Most roads in West Africa still consist of two lanes. There are few divided highways, most of which are found in major cities. During the rainy season roads are extremely dangerous; traveling at this time of the year can only be done safely with off-road-capable vehicles. Both gas and diesel are available, though the quality is sometimes poor, especially in rural areas and land-locked countries.

TACTICAL TIP: Poor infrastructure will challenge most missions in this region. It is important to plan ahead and to be prepared for all eventualities. There is often no power and limited access to resupply.

All countries in this region have at least one international airport that accommodates international, national, and local flights. In most countries, private airlines fly out of the many smaller airports that dot the region.

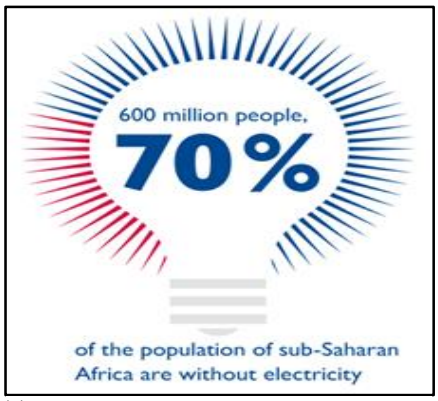
Utilities

Wood and charcoal provide the majority of the region's energy needs and are used mainly for domestic purposes by a majority of the population. Oil and electricity are used widely in urban centers.

Rivers play a critical role supplying the region's electric power. Electricity generated by hydroelectric dams is usually inexpensive. The Kandadji Dam is a major hydroelectric power plant on the Niger River; it provides electrical power to Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

Other dams on the Niger River include the Kainji, Jebda, and Lagdo; all of which need rehabilitation, but also contribute to the total megawatts (MW) generated for power needs in the region. The Akosombo, Kpong, and Bui dams are all on the Volta River; together, these dams supply 1580 MW of electricity to Ghana, which is still insufficient to meet the needs of its population.

There is a need to power the rural areas, as well as bridge the demand and supply gap in urban centers. Thus, the U.S. launched the Power Africa Project to increase access to power in sub-Saharan Africa by utilizing alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, hydropower, natural gas, and geothermal resources.[148] This will have a significant impact on the quality of life, as well as the cost of living in this region.



The U.S. plans to bridge the power gap in Africa (Source: USAID)

Water level drops in lakes and rivers due to drought have seriously impacted the generation of hydroelectric power, despite initiatives in place to boost output. This, in addition to limited access to electricity, outdated equipment, poor maintenance, and increased demand, contributes to power shortages and frequent power outages. Many businesses, upper-class residents, and expatriates have diesel-fueled power generators to augment their spotty supply of electricity.[149]

Communication

The quality of service delivered by the region's landline telephone system is poor. However, wireless communications systems can match the standards set by any Western mobile telephone service. Several European cell phone companies operate in West Africa. Cell phones and Internet cafés have proliferated in the past decade. Mobile telephone service is a particularly reliable source of communication in most urban centers.


Cell phones have changed the way communities interact (Source: USAID)

Internet connectivity, however, is poor. This is due to limited landline communications and the slow roll-out of fiber-optic broadband services. Limited public access to the Internet has slowed economic development in the region. Nonetheless, wireless communication solutions are facilitating better access to the World Wide Web. This is especially the case for people living in cities or near cell phone towers that follow major roadways.

Although most families in urban centers have access to television and international media outlets, the best way to communicate to the masses is through text messaging. In fact, many established news outlets across the continent are competing with social media — particularly Twitter - which is also accessed via the short message service (SMS) platform.

In rural areas, poverty and limited power infrastructure are responsible for limiting public access to television and the Internet. Phones are also competing with the radio, and are better suited for delivering public service announcements. In 2013, Malian election officials were deployed to polling stations throughout the country to monitor voting processes and results via text messaging.

Freedom of the press in West Africa countries is nominal at best, though the situation is considerably better in Nigeria. Although governments do not practice outright censorship, the manner in which

facts and opinions are reported is often affected by media outlet ownership (much of the media in West Africa is owned by the government or politicians), arbitrary regulations, strict defamation and security laws, violence, and harassment of journalists. Journalists and publishers often practice "self-censorship" for fear of reprisal from government organizations, representatives, or politicians. Non-state actors, such as businesses and criminal organizations, may also intimidate journalists.[150]

English-Language Mass Media

Countries where English is an official language, like Nigeria, have English-language TV, radio, and newspapers. English-language media, especially newspapers and online news outlets, may be found in other countries as well.

Chapter

6

Regional Security Issues

Why Regional Security Issues Matter to You as a Marine

A thorough understanding of a region is difficult without an awareness of its most significant security challenges. These challenges tend to affect not only relations between states in the region, but also the behavior of its people and the choices they make. Regional security issues encompass a host of topics ranging from wars between states, to insurgencies, organized crime, weak institutions, and systemic corruption. Some security issues involve violence, while others weaken states and societies, and have the potential to turn low-level conflicts into violent confrontations.

Introduction

West Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions in Africa because of its geography and environment. Because this region borders on the Sahara Desert, the environmental challenges, porous borders, and enduring humanitarian crises have made the region vulnerable to a host of threats. These threats include terrorism, human trafficking, and a thriving illegal arms trade. Together, these threats pose a security challenge to the United States.

Ebola in West Africa (Source: CDC)

Limited resources make it difficult to secure remote sections of the border between Niger and Mali; as a result, this part of West Africa is a haven for terrorist groups linked to Al Qaeda. Boko Haram, a terror group operating in northern Nigeria, has degraded the country's security situation, while an unprecedented public health emergency has threatened to destabilize much of the region.

This region's variable climate increases its vulnerability to conflict. For example, northern Nigeria has suffered from poor rainfall and drought, which exacerbates the social and economic needs of communities; people in northern Nigeria compete for land, water, and pasturage. Additionally,

northern Nigeria has been prone to religious tensions aggravated by socio-economic conditions and the presence of the terror group, Boko Haram. Between 2011 and 2015, Boko Haram was responsible for approximately 20,000 deaths in Borno State alone.[151] Furthermore, political protests erupted in 12 states of northern Nigeria after the announcement of the 2011 presidential election results, which led to the deaths of approximately 800 people.[152] Often, conflicts in northern Nigeria, whether political or ethnic, take on a religious dimension, increasing the volatility of the situation and impacting neighboring countries.

Though *coups d'état* are occurring less often, they have not entirely ceased in this region. In Niger, a military junta overthrew the government in 2010 and installed a civilian-run transitional government. Niger's new government put a variety of democratic structures in place, and announced its intention to hold elections in early 2011.

Northern Mali fell to rebels after a group of Mali's armed forces mutinied to protest an alleged ineffective military strategy, a food shortage, lack of ammunition, and inferior weapons. The military's unhappiness also stemmed from their belief that limited resources contributed to their inability to suppress a Tuareg insurgency.[153] Since then, Mali has navigated out of the crisis and held elections in 2013.

In 2014, Burkina Faso's president was forced to resign after violent protests and the torching of the national parliament building.[154]

The uprisings in northern Africa in 2011 referred to as the "Arab Spring," had a significant impact on the region. Trade in small arms proliferated, and illegal immigration to Europe surged. Because this region was already battling extremist threats from groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and Boko Haram, the influx of small arms after the uprisings elevated the threat from the terrorists. There is evidence that weapons plundered from Libyan arms stockpiles after the 2011 fall of President Muammar Qaddafi were used one year later by Tuareg insurgents operating in northern Mali.[155]

The U.S. has offered training assistance to the militaries of Nigeria, Niger, and Mali in an effort to strengthen counterterrorism operations.[156] The aim is to build the capacities of the military services in this region in order to enable them to deal with diverse security threats.[157]

The following sections will focus on the security challenges in this region that have a direct impact on U.S. strategic goals in West Africa.

This region is complex, conflict-prone, and is faced with numerous security issues. Our discussion will focus on four root causes of this instability:

- Terrorism
- Organized Crime & Terror Financing
- Insurgencies
- Maritime Security

Terrorism

West Africa has been fighting terror and crime for the past decade. Chief among the concerns in this region is the possible emergence of terror cells emboldened by the deteriorating security situations, and the flood of Libyan weapons flowing into West Africa. This section will cover two of the most dangerous terror groups in this region.

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is the main transnational terror group in this region. The AQIM began as an offshoot of the *Armed Islamist Group,* an insurgent group that fought against the Algerian government in the 1990s and later rebranded into the Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).

The group evolved into AQIM after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S.[158] West Africa's geographical location and the region's loose security environment also contributed to the expansion of AQIM. The porous nature of the borders and lack of infrastructure, as well as the unsecured northern areas bordering Algeria and Libya, have been a challenge for the security forces in Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. Additionally, depressed socio-economic conditions, such as poverty and high unemployment, have created an environment ripe for crime, radicalization, and the growth of terror cells.[159]

Porous borders, a dispersed population, and high levels of poverty make the northern parts of this region highly conducive to recruitment by Islamic terror groups. However, most Muslims in this region are tolerant, and the Sufi culture does not mesh with the extremist Salafist creed that Al Qaeda professes. Additionally, most countries have resisted the Salafi version of Sharia law that AQIM seeks to impose.[160]

Though AQIM does not pose a direct threat to the U.S., its activities affect the U.S. strategic posture in the region. Additionally, AQIM's relations with other groups in the region, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in northern Mali, gives the group additional reach into West Africa.[161]

AQIM's partnership with MUJAO has emboldened this group, thus raising alarm in the rest of the region, especially because the group was supporting *Ansar Al Dine,* the radical Islamist Tuareg group that advanced into Mali's capital, Bamako. The threat was worsened by the presence of weapons flowing into the region from Libya.

Although the U.S.–backed TSCTP has been working with partner nations in the West Africa and the Sahel to counter violent extremism, AQIM is still active and is viewed as a regional threat.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram is a jihadist group founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf. It has waged a terror campaign in northern Nigeria since 2009. The group's ideology is rooted in a Sunni Salafist branch of Islam as it fights to implement *Sharia* (Islamic law) in Nigeria.[162]

Boko Haram operates in the northern states of Yobe, Kano, Bauchi, Borno, and Kaduno. The group has evolved into an armed insurgency characterized by suicide bombings, shootings, and bomb attacks.

Boko Haram became operationally active in December 2003, when approximately 200 militants attacked several police stations in Yobe, near Nigeria's border with Niger. By January 2004, Nigerian security forces had successfully put down this uprising. Between 2004 and 2009, Boko Haram repeatedly engaged in a low-intensity conflict with Nigerian security forces.

Sectarian violence in northern Nigeria has escalated since Boko Haram came onto the scene. In 2011 alone, over 600 people were killed in various attacks. Terrorism-related casualties in Nigeria were double the rate of the previous year during the first four months of 2012. One of the deadliest attacks killed more than 200 people in Kano, Nigeria.[163]

Sectarianism refers to adhering to a particular sect (political, ethnic, or religious), leading to conflict with those of different sects or possessing different beliefs. In Northern Nigeria, this has been manifest in frequent clashes between Christians and Muslims.

Boko Haram has reportedly expanded its operations into Cameroon and Chad, thereby posing a graver threat to Nigeria and to regional security. Further, the U.S. State Department designated the group as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2013, which is a significant step towards weakening the group in the context of the U.S. broader fight against terror.[164] This designation aims at isolating the group by raising public awareness, and enables a coordinated international response to the group and their activities.[165] The 2014 kidnapping of 250 school girls in northern Nigeria, and the subsequent public campaign to rescue the girls, drew the attention of international actors, including the U.S., which sent a team to assist the Nigeria military in tracking and rescuing the girls. Unfortunately, efforts to rescue the girls were hindered by various challenges common to this region, including the terrain. To date, the kidnapped girls have not been rescued.

Terror activities in the region are impacting the political landscape, as seen in the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria: many candidates promised to finally deal with the security threat posed by Boko Haram. Eventually, the election was postponed so that the military could secure territories in northern Nigeria and make it safe for voters to go the polls.[166]

Chad and Niger have finally yielded to international pressure and are now helping Nigeria to defeat Boko Haram. The two countries have taken this step in order to prevent the terror group from crossing the Nigerian border into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

The threat posed by Boko Haram in the region continues to be high, especially after the group renamed itself "Islamic State's West Africa Province" (ISWAP) in 2015, aligning itself with the Islamic State (IS).[167]

Organized Crime and Terror Financing

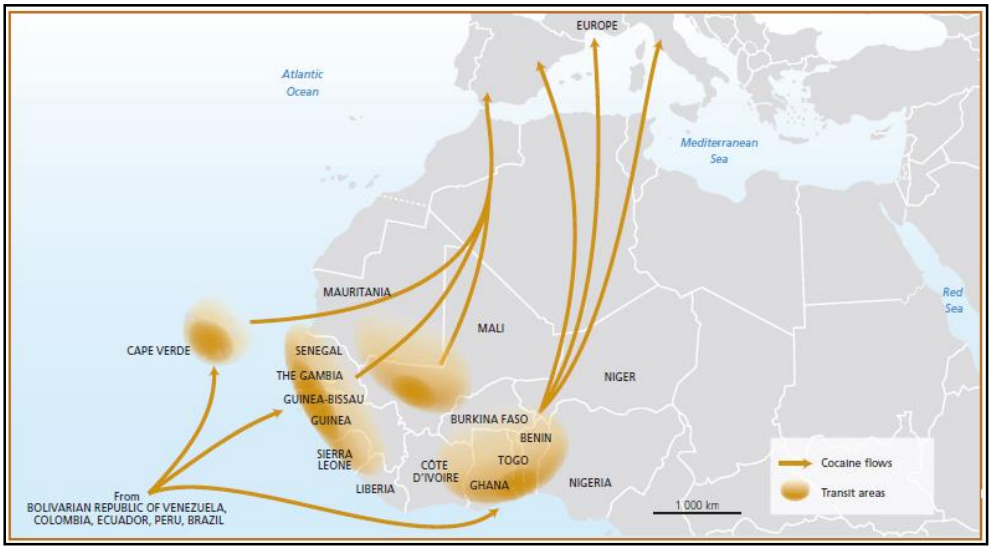
Narcotrafficking

The AQIM, more than any other terror group in this region, has been sustained by drug cartels that smuggle cocaine through West Africa from Latin America.[168] Prior to the arrival of the drug trade in

West Africa and the Sahel, contraband consumer goods, such as alcohol and cigarettes, were smuggled through the regions many porous borders, and were once a key component of the informal economy.

Lately, criminal networks have expanded their operations to include the movement of arms; this has further worsened conditions for local populations, and has enabled AQIM to successfully challenge counterterrorism operations mounted by regional governments.[169]

Narcotrafficking in this region is a major financier of terrorism. Illegal drugs from South America are transshipped though West Africa to Europe. This region became a popular transshipment zone after law enforcement officials cracked down on traditional trafficking routes.[170]



Drug Flows Through West Africa (Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

Smugglers coordinate logistics with regional networks and corrupt politicians in order to move illegal drugs and weapons. Most narcotrafficking activities in West Africa are connected to armed extremist militias, such as Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), an off-shoot of AQIM.

Drug Seizures in West & Central Africa (in Kg.)						
Heroin and Morphine	**Cocaine**	**Cannabis Herb**	**Cannabis Plant**	**Cannabis Resin**	**Amphetamines**	**Ecstasy**
107.6	14,578.9	207,820.0	928.4	10,426.0	517.7	3.5
Source: UNODC (Estimate as of 2008)						

Note that the figures in the table above only represent UN estimates; they should only be used as a reference for the types of drugs trafficked through this region. Notwithstanding, narcotrafficking poses a significant threat and contributes directly to terrorism in this region.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates the value of these criminal activities to be $3.8 billion annually.[171] Reports also point to the financial muscle of AQIM (derived from the illegal drug trade) and how it is used to influence groups such as Boko Haram.

Kidnapping for Ransom

In addition to narcotrafficking, groups like AQIM have kidnapping foreign nationals to exert political leverage and to obtain ransom money. Kidnappings surged in Mali after the 2012 *coup d'état*, and dropped sharply after French forces drove AQIM out of the capital city of Timbuktu. The U.S. provides support to African militaries as part of a coordinated effort to counter kidnapping threats posed by AQIM and other extremist groups in this region.[172]

In Mali, there has been a rise in these kidnappings; this has created an entire class of ransom negotiators who charge a hefty fee to secure the release of a kidnap victim. AQIM has been grabbing and ransoming Westerners traveling through the region. Money paid for the release of these kidnap victims is used to recruit new members and to fund AQIM training camps.[173] According to sources, AQIM received an average of $5.4 million in ransom per hostage in 2011[174]. It is estimated that in 2011, AQIM kidnapped 60 foreign nationals.[175]

Recommended Reading:

For more on crime in this region, see:

People's perspective of organized crime in West Africa and the Sahel (Institute for Security Studies) http://www.idsa.in/backgrounder/TheLibyanCrisisandWestAfricanSahel_140812.html

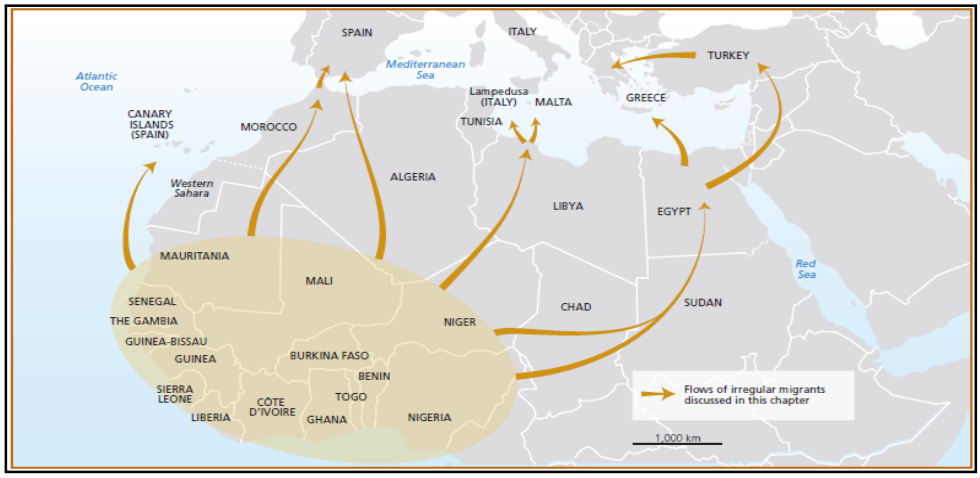
The oil industry in the Niger Delta in Nigeria has been the focal point of a contentious battle between local communities and Nigeria's central government over money derived from oil. As a result, foreign oil workers are routinely kidnapped by local militia groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). In addition to demanding money, the kidnappers seek political recognition and the renegotiation of memorandums of understanding between the oil companies and the local communities. Although oil companies such as Shell have engaged the community with community outreach projects in health and education, the central government has often failed to meet the needs of local communities. The Niger Delta still lags behind other parts of the country in terms of infrastructure development; the regional environment has also suffered several oil spills. Sadly, the failure of the central government to adequately support local governments in the Niger Delta has created an increase in kidnappings for ransom.[176]

Human Trafficking

In addition to kidnapping, human trafficking also contributes to terror financing. West Africa is frequently used as a human trafficking source, transit area, and destination point.

Although official human trafficking statistics for all of the countries in this region are not available, it is estimated that there were over 1300 men, women, and children trafficked for working farms and mines in Mali alone.[177] Additionally, migrant workers are smuggled through this region to Europe in search of better opportunities. In October 2013, a boat carrying migrants from North Africa capsized, killing 360 people. These migrations are facilitated by regional instability, weak governance, corrupt customs officials (particularly along the West and North African borders), and criminal cartels who coordinate cross border smuggling.[178] Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Libya, and Sudan are source countries for irregular migration and are linked to smuggling routes that converge in Libya, the main port used to smuggle migrants to Europe.[179]

The initial stimulus for migration flows to Europe was to fill vacancies in the fishing and agriculture sectors. The profit potential then attracted smugglers who began to hire sailors to ferry workers from Tunisia and Libya to Italy. Soon after, however, both Libya and Italy increased maritime patrols, causing a decline in the movement of illegal human cargo.



Flows of migrants (Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

Following the fall of Qaddafi in 2011, Libya once again became the point of exit for many migrant workers looking for opportunities in Europe. Although the European community has escalated efforts to curtail migrant smuggling, the unstable political situation in Libya and the depressed economic environment in West Africa continues to drive the market for migrant smuggling.[180]

All of these criminal enterprises pose a risk to regional security. Further, the prevalence of the use of traditional banking systems, such as *hawala,* is used extensively in this region. [181] Although rural communities -- especially in Nigeria, Sudan, and South Sudan -- have relied on *hawala* for decades, its exploitation by criminals and terror groups has cast a negative light on this informal financial system. The hallmark of this banking and money transfer system is that it is paperless and untraceable. *Hawala* relies on trust. Each year, millions of dollars are routinely remitted through the region using this informal banking system.[182]

> Although international institutions argue that terrorist financiers are employing "new modalities," the opposite is true. Terrorist financiers are reverting to traditional ways, such as *hawala* - trade based money-laundering and cash couriers, particularly in countries with non-existent or weak national anti-money laundering systems - to move their funds to finance their terrorist activities.
>
> **- U.S. Dept. of State**

Insurgencies

The Arab uprising in Libya led to an increase of militias in the region. Additionally, criminal gangs, jihadist groups, and revolutionary groups have emerged. On a broader scale, Libya's unsecured borders have helped create smuggling routes for arms that have found their way into the hands of different terrorist groups in West Africa. These weapons have been acquired by insurgent groups, drug dealers, and gunrunners.[183] The political transition in Libya and the future of regional security in West Africa relies heavily on the ability of regional governments to stem the threat posed by well-armed insurgent groups. The following two insurgencies have had impact on regional stability in recent years.

Mali: The Tuareg Insurgency

The Tuareg are a seminomadic people descended from the Berbers who are indigenous to North Africa. The Tuareg live in the Saharan parts of Niger and Mali, and geographical areas inhabited by minority groups such southwestern Libya, southeastern Algeria, northern Burkina Faso, and northern Nigeria.[184] Their grievances relate mainly to under-representation in government and the military, neglect within society, and high poverty rates.[185]

The Tuareg started migrating to Libya for economic reasons following Mali's and Niger's independence in 1960. In the 1980s Libya attracted more Tuareg when Libyan President Qaddafi aggressively recruited them to his Islamic Pan-African Legion. The Legion was to be the military cornerstone in his vision of a united Muslim state in North Africa.[186]

Following several failed military campaigns, the Islamic Legion was disbanded and the Tuareg were eventually absorbed into the Libyan army under special brigades.[187] Qaddafi also offered the Tuareg rebels aid and shelter, as their significant desert fighting skills made them more appealing to the regime in Libya.[188]

Qaddafi recruited the Tuareg again as mercenaries during the 2011 Libyan civil uprising. After the fall of Qaddafi's regime, the Tuareg rebels returned to Mali, now armed with significant combat experience and weapons looted from Libya.[189]

In October 2011, a coalition of political factions, including the Tuareg from Libya, merged to create the *Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad* (MNLA).

MNLA served as a political military-platform used to fight for independence from Mali.[190] Concurrently, a group of officers in the Malian government led a military *coup d'état* on March 21, 2012.[191] The MNLA-led fighters took advantage of the ensuing chaos to seize control of all of the major northern towns, and to declare the secession of the region as the independent country of Azawad.[192]

Tuareg leaders in the Mali peace talks in Algiers, 2012 (Source: AFP via Voice of America)

In May of the same year, MNLA and the *Ansar Al Din* Islamic rebel group agreed to merge forces and establish an Islamic state; however, *Ansar Al Din*, backed by AQIM, turned against the MNLA and seized control of the territory.[193] This prompted French intervention to restore governance in Mali. U.S. AFRICOM provided support to the French and African-led International Support Mission to Mali.

Nigeria: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)

In Nigeria, the inhabitants of the oil-rich Niger Delta region do not trust the central government because the oil revenues have not converted into economic development, and the per capita household income continues to be low. This has led to violence directed at the foreign-run oil

companies by militants from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

MEND was organized in 2006 under a banner of "economic justice" on behalf of the 30 million residents of the Niger Delta region.[194] Soon thereafter, the group launched attacks on expatriate employees of the oil companies working in the area. MEND has claimed responsibility for oil spills that have polluted the environment and disrupted the crude oil supply.[195]

In 2008, MEND renewed its guerrilla campaign against the Nigerian security services and foreign energy companies to acquire a greater share of oil and gas revenues. Over time, this group perpetrated kidnappings for profit and offered itself as a hired militia.

Although MEND's principal commanders accepted the terms of the Nigerian government's 2009 amnesty program, suspected MEND militants have since been linked to at least eight attacks in the Delta region since 2010.[196] Unlike other militant groups in the Niger Delta, MEND does not have a centralized structure but has managed to attract frustrated young men who are unemployed.

MEND's main tactic is kidnapping for ransom extorted from foreign oil companies operating in the region.[197] Though the Niger Delta conflict effectively ended in 2011, tensions persist and fighters are largely engaged in the theft of oil. They have also been accused of engaging in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.[198]

Maritime Security

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

Special Purpose Marine Air and Ground Task Force Crisis Response Africa, (SPMAGTF-CR-AF) training Senegalese Marine Commando on aquatic combat marksmanship (Source: Defense Images)

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines piracy as any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship in the high seas or in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State.[199]

Piracy is an ongoing threat in this region; it occurs in the northeastern part of the tropical Atlantic Ocean between Cape Lopez in Gabon just south of the West Africa region, and north and west of Cape Palmas in Liberia. This area, also referred to as the Gulf of Guinea, has seen acts of piracy increase from 44 incidents in 2011 to 62 incidents in 2012.[200] The volatile Gulf of Guinea is at the heart of the piracy problem in West Africa, along with the deteriorating security situation in the Gulf of Aden and in Somalia in East Africa.[201]

Recommended Reading:

The Marine Corps also participated in APS on an annual basis. For more on this see: http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/security-cooperation-programs/africa-partnership-station

A large share of recent pirate attacks targeted vessels carrying petroleum products; this is because there is a booming black market for fuel in West Africa.

Because Nigeria is the largest oil producer in this region, thousands of barrels of petroleum are shipped through the Gulf of Guinea each year. Many insurgent groups, such as MEND in the Niger Delta, are known to profit from acts of piracy. Profits derived from these activities are used to purchase weapons and equipment. Reports also indicate that Boko Haram has also used illegal proceeds from piracy to acquire weapons.[202]

Piracy negatively impacts the economy of the region because of the high insurance risk for oil tankers passing through the Gulf of Guinea; the cost for additional insurance is reflected in higher oil prices.

Fighting piracy is a priority in this region. The U.S. Naval Forces Africa's (NAVAF) Africa Partnership Station (APS) is focused on building maritime safety with partner naval forces, and improving security. NAVAF APS does this by increasing maritime awareness, response capabilities, and infrastructure.[203]

Illegal Fishing in the Gulf of Guinea

The waters off the coast of West Africa are among the world's richest fishing areas. However, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing accounts for up to 40% of fish caught in the region. This illegal fishing trade has an estimated value of $10-23 billion a year.[204]

This loss of fish is detrimental for local communities because fishing is a leading economic activity and a source of nutrition; fish constitutes over 50% of the food protein in the typical West African diet.[205] IUU leads to reduced income-earning opportunities and exposes the population to malnutrition. Industrial fishing vessels operating in the coastal waters of Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Gambia regularly encroach on small-scale fishing grounds and employ fishing gear, methods, and techniques which are prohibited under international conventions. This is the case for vessels operating with valid fishing licenses as well as pirate fishing vessels.[206]

The fishing sectors in Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau are the most negatively affected by over-fishing and illegal fishing. Mauritania's offshore fish stocks are either over-exploited or fully exploited, to the detriment of local economies. In Mauritania, for example, fishing is a mainstay of the national economy. Recognizing the need to protect Guinea-Bissau's precarious fishing industry, the World Bank has implemented a five-year program to strengthen the country's capacity to govern and manage targeted fisheries, reduce illegal fishing, and increase local value of fish products.[207]

In addition to depleting fish stocks off the Gulf of Guinea, many illegal vessels operating in the Gulf of Guinea are prey to pirate vessels. (Navy ships and patrol boats seldom enter these waters.)[208] These illegal vessels are also sometimes used to smuggle weapons and drugs.

Conclusion

West Africa continues to battle many security challenges, some of which have attracted international attention. France and the U.S. have offered assistance to countries in the region in the form of capacity building programs targeted at maritime security and counterterrorism operations.

However, the underlying causes of regional instability conflict persist: underdevelopment, poverty, and youth unemployment. Additionally, environmental conditions make this region vulnerable to drought and famine. Many times, the United States has taken the lead to rush food aid and other assistance to this region during times of crisis. USAID has also had a long history of supporting sustainable projects in West Africa.

Given the unstable security condition in this region -- and the growing threat of regional terrorism -- the U.S. will likely continue to be engaged in West Africa for many years.

Chapter

7

Case Study: The Culture of Tuareg 'Kel Tamasheq' in West Africa

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from West Africa, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

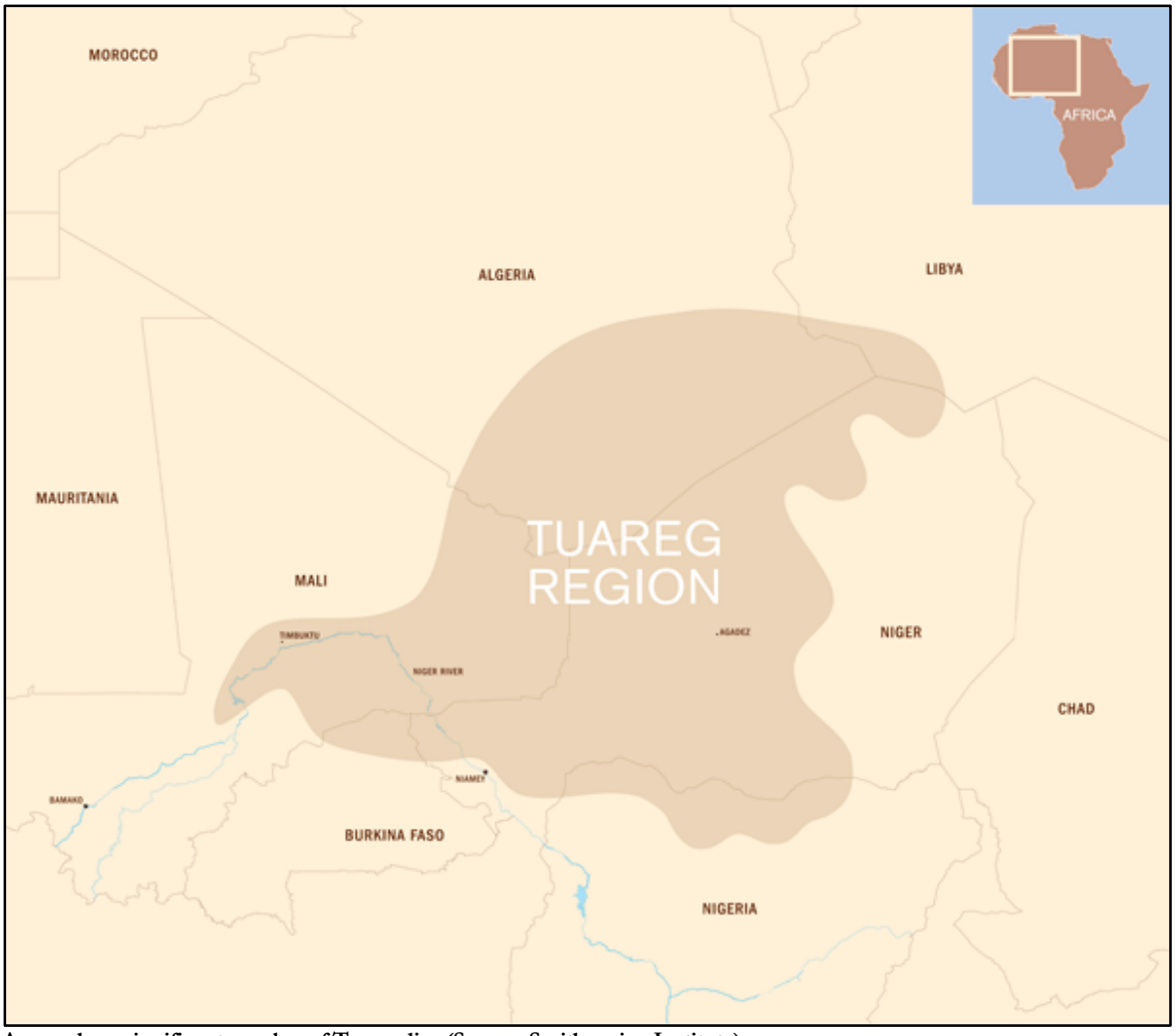
Introduction

The Tuareg, or *Kel Tamasheq or Tamacheq* (meaning *"the speakers of tamasheq,"* which is their language[209]) are seminomadic Berbers[210] who live in the Saharan parts of Niger and Mali. Small groups of Tuareg are also found in southwestern Libya, southeastern Algeria, northern Burkina Faso, and northern Nigeria.[211]

Tuareg from Algeria wearing the classical indigo turban (Source: Wikimedia)

The Tuareg, often referred to as "light-skinned Berber," are an ethnic and cultural minority in all the nations where they reside.

Although the Tuareg live within national boundaries inherited from the colonial era, the Tuareg identity is linked to a non-recognized stateless nation called "Azawad". The Azawad is comprised of Tuareg-populated territory in the Sahara, West Africa and the Sahel which transcends national borders. Azawad territory is mainly in northern Mali, northern Niger, and southern Algeria.[212] Tuareg are divided into confederations that span a range of five mountains, constituting the corners of a virtual parallelogram across these countries.



Areas where significant number of Tuareg live (Source: Smithsonian Institute)

While there are no accurate figures for the Tuareg population, official agencies estimate their numbers to be around 1.5 million.[213] The Tuareg themselves believe there are close to three million Tuareg collectively in all the countries where they live.[214]

The Tuareg language, typically referred to as Tamasheq, is closely related to regional dialects such as the Tamaheq, Tamacheq, and Temajeq. However, Tuareg living in cities are also fluent in the local *lingua franca* (i.e. French, Bambara, Hausa, or Arabic).[215]

Physical Geography

The Tuareg live in the arid and semi-arid zones of the Sahara and northern parts of West Africa, which experience very limited rainfall and have little vegetation cover. The majority of the rain comes during the rainy season between May and September.[216]

The water scarcity and dryness of the region make it difficult to grow crops without regulated irrigation systems, therefore the areas are primarily used for herding livestock. Thus, nomadic and semi-nomadic

lifestyles are well-suited to the region, as the ability to be highly mobile in the search for water is essential.

Further complicating the issue is the dry season's *harmattan winds*, or the *khamseen* (*khamsīn),* which is a hot, dry, dusty windstorm that blows south from the Sahara Desert, producing a fine dust that reduces visibility and causes overcast skies. This sandy windstorm causes problems for livestock and agriculture and contributes to desertification[217] as the winds cause soil erosion, particularly on overgrazed land.[218]

Despite the unforgiving nature of this environment, the Tuareg demonstrate variation in their response to these climatic changes. Some Tuareg maintain their seminomadic pastoralist lifestyle, others opt to become sedentary farmers, and other Tuareg favor migration to new countries.

During the rainy season, the Tuareg move frequently in search of the greenest pastures for their livestock. During the dry season they move further afield to find water but prefer to stay in the locality of their home territory.

Nomadic Tuareg (Source: Wikimedia)

Sedentary Tuareg villages have become more common in the region as a result of pasture areas being reduced by shorter rainy seasons and longer droughts[219]. This acceptance of a less nomadic lifestyle is a good example of the Tuareg's ability to adapt to an imposed environment change. However, even these newly sedentary groups usually abandon their villages during the harshest months of the dry season when water becomes scarce.

Land Ownership and Access to Wells

Due to their nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle, the land where the Tuareg have established a village is "owned" by whoever lives on it.

Although there is no need to purchase land, the building materials for tents and houses must be bought. Organic and peaceful agreements have been disrupted by arising disputes over the use of oases. Disputes over the rights to natural resources such as uranium (which was discovered and mined by the government on the Tuareg's traditional grazing lands) has lately became an issue, especially in Niger.[220]

Wells and access to water were traditionally the rights of whoever dug them. Traditionally, "ownership" of a wells is passed down through generations. As for the use of the well, Tuareg understand that anyone is welcome to draw water so long as there is sufficient water for everyone. However, during water scarcities, only the clan of the well owner is allowed to draw water. Moreover,

if the water scarcity worsens, only the well owner's extended family can draw water. During an extreme drought, only the owner and his immediate family can use water from the well.[221]

Changes in Tuareg life: Teshumara

Climate change and harsh waves of drought adversely affected the economy in West Africa; as a result, it was necessary for the Tuareg to adapt their way of life. Change was reflected in every aspect of Tuareg life from economics to social relationships to politics.[222] This new era for the Tuareg produced the term *Teshumara,* which is how the Tuareg refer the new social and cultural way of life that was shaped during the 1960-90s. The term is the Tuareg derivative of the French word *chômage*, which means "unemployment."[223] As you may notice, the meaning of the word confirms the economic aspect that originated this term.[224]

As it became more difficult for the Tuareg to sustain a living from pastoral nomadism, migration to new countries increased substantially.

The beginning of the 1960s witnessed a wave of many Tuareg youth migrating for economic reasons to Algeria and Libya.[225] Tuareg refer to these emigrants as *ishumar (sing. ashamor)* which means "unemployed."

The significant increase in the number of people looking for jobs outside the pastoral realm[226] and outside *Tamasheq*-speaking areas transformed the *Teshumara* from simply an economic way of life to its own culture.[227] In fact, the term went through several modifications and now refers to the trans-regional mobility of former pastoralists Tuareg residing in the borderlands of regions once occupied by them.

As the migrants integrated into their new host societies, they became sedentary, married, built houses and reduced their border crossings to annual family visits. In their new countries, *Ishumar* migrants were considered irresponsible due to their continuous cross-regional mobility; however, marriage and bearing children changed their social status, and made them respectable *Ishumar* in the eyes of those left behind.[228]

Diet

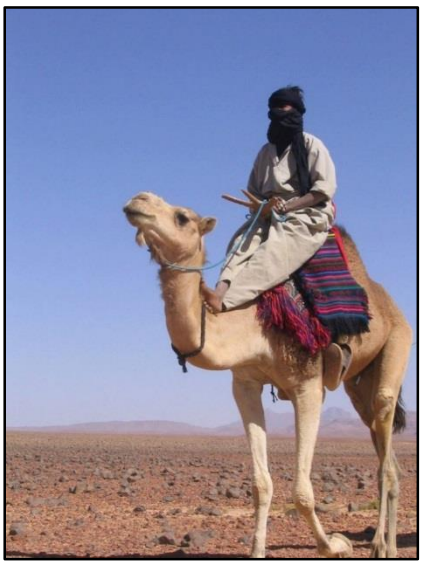
The Tuareg diet consists of non-meat protein and relies heavily on grains. They mainly consume milk, millet porridge, grains, wheat, and rice. Meat is a delicacy eaten on special occasions such as holidays and rites of passage.[229]

Eghajira, a very sweet, thick millet based beverage often mixed with goat cheese and dates, is consumed on special occasions.[230] When Tuareg cannot find fresh dairy products, they substitute milk with powdered milk, and butter with olive or peanut oil. The consumption of pork and alcohol is uncommon due to the deeply held Islamic beliefs of the Tuareg.

A central part of the Tuareg social life is the afternoon tea ceremony where three cups of mint tea must be drunk at each sitting. The first cup is said to be "as harsh as death," the second "as sweet as life," and the third "as light as love." All three must be served "hotter than hell."[231]

The Economy of the Culture

The Tuareg economic mainstay is nomadic pastoralism, supported by agriculture and trade[232].



Tuareg man (Source: Wikimedia)

Historically, Tuareg managed trans-Saharan trade routes and the trading of gold, ivory, salt, and slaves[233]. However, trading hubs such as Djenne, Gao, and Timbuktu collapsed in the sixteenth century following the development of the European maritime trade, which weakened the trans-Saharan commercial routes.[234] Tuareg people subsequently took up nomadic pastoralism and limited scale agriculture as alternative means of livelihood.[235]

Tuareg have always maintained a reciprocal relationship with neighbors who were sedentary farmers. The two groups enjoyed mutually beneficial trading relationships within which they bartered animal products and food crops.

In the postcolonial era, drought, conflict, and reduced rainfall have devastated the Tuareg herds; as a result, there are fewer animals to provide milk and meat. This limited the Tuareg's ability to barter and trade for goods. Therefore some Tuareg groups opted to settle into small villages in an attempt to live off of subsistence agriculture, growing traditional coarse grains like millet and sorghum.

Most Tuareg now combine livestock herding, oasis gardening, itinerant trading, and migrant labor[236]. Others produce arts and crafts for the tourist trade or work as security guards in the towns.

In the informal economy, the Tuareg's nomadic way of life, their intimate knowledge of the terrain, and their desert-survival skills, helped turn them into an active and powerful smuggling network in the region. Furthermore, their smuggling of illicit goods, drugs, illegal immigrants, hostages and -- most recently -- weapons from Libya brought them in close contact with terrorist groups operating in the region such as AQIM.

In the past, many *Ishumar* smuggled goods from Algeria and Libya, and sold them for *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA Francs) in Mali and Niger. They brought back the CFA Francs to Algeria, which suffered from a shortage in foreign currency at the time. CFA Francs were in high demand and were exchanged in the black market, which doubled the profits the *Ishumar* received from smuggling.[237]

"CFA Francs" is the same name for two different currencies used in Africa which are guaranteed by the French treasury. The two CFA Franc currencies are the West Africa CFA Franc and the Central Africa CFA Franc.

Social Structure

Clans and Class

Social and political structure is both diverse and intertwined, as Tuareg cluster into multiple interrelated social and political groupings which are referred to as confederations. This social-political

system can be described as a hierarchy, and the clan (*tewsit*) is considered the basic social structure, which is also divided into social classes or caste.

Caste identity is based on five social categories: the noble (*imushagh*) or the noble warriors; the religious expert *(ineslemen*); the vassal (*imghad*); the craftsman (*inadan*), also referred to as "blacksmith"; and the laborers or slaves (*Iklan*).[238] Although slavery was formally abolished in French West Africa back in 1905 and Tamasheq slaves were gradually emancipated since the 1940s, these classes and social classifications continue to have an impact on Tuareg society.

There are various groups inside and outside Tuareg society who are divided between those who want to abolish either the hierarchical relationships, the clans, or both; and others, who want to maintain the status quo and reinforce the different roles and classifications. Moreover, the previously held notions of work, class, and gender meant that noble women were not to engage in manual work.

The *Kel Adagh* Tuareg of Mali tried to live up to these perceived noble values, but as many persons of both noble and nomadic origins are now impoverished, formerly noble women are now forced to work and perform hard physical labor. To the Tuareg, this is considered both humiliating and physically challenging for the women involved.[239] On the other hand, educated Tuareg who went to universities and got prestigious jobs in government or international organizations now claim a new form of elite status. [240]

The noble (*imushagh*): They are racially described as white-skinned and distinguish themselves by a culture of honor and shame called *temushaghaor,* meaning "the way of the *imushagh*," which is common among the Mediterranean cultures.

The religious experts (*ineslemen*): A status of a group of free or noble Tuareg, also racially described as white-skinned and who specialize in religious affairs.

Vessal (*imghad*): This group consists of free, white-skinned Tuareg who are not considered noble but who try to live according to the t*emushaghaor* "the noble way of the life," It is believed that they are referred to as vassals because they were often described as dependent on the nobles for protection and rearing their cattle although there might be no truth behind this claim.

Craftsman (*inadan)*: this group is racially classified as "black," but free, and they are generally referred to as blacksmith. In the past, they enjoyed certain freedom that the "slaves," who are also black but not free, did not. This group did not adhere to the *temushaghaor* or the "noble way of life."

Slaves (*iklan*): This group is divided into several subgroups which were racially categorized as "black."

Marriage

In the Tuareg culture, marriage and bringing up children is equated to leading a useful life.[241] Furthermore, women are not accepted as full members of society until they marry and bear children.

Most Tuareg are traditionally monogamous, and many women have shown their opposition to polygamy by divorcing their husbands. Although Islam accepts polygamy, the practice was limited to religious members of the society, the *ineslemen*. Today, however, in some groups, polygamy is becoming more common among wealthy men especially if their wives are generally dependent on them, or do not have the means to oppose a husband's additional marriages.[242]

Tuareg woman (Source: Wikimedia)

Gender Relations

The Tuareg is both a patrilineal and matrilineal society which means that Tuareg's trace their descent using both their mother's and father's lineage. However, the majority of the clans are matrilineal as descent is traced from the mother. Also, property, wealth, and -- often -- political power are passed down through the maternal line.

In Tuareg pastoral communities, the women own the tent and the household items; these are things that she traditionally receives from her mother and female relatives during her wedding. The husband becomes her tenant, and he becomes homeless in the event of divorce.

In urban Tuareg societies, the man will build or rent a house before moving his wife into the home. The opposite is true of Tuareg living the pastoral life: the wife is the husband's tenant, and she becomes homeless if the marriage is dissolved.

Women in the Tuareg society often own or control land and production. They enjoy a considerable measure of freedom in their involvement in public life and politics, which is considered exceptional in the Muslim world. Women often share power with men and occupy some powerful roles in society, often alongside men. Tuareg women are therefore a powerful constituency within Tuareg communities.[243]

Female virginity is not highly prized among the Tuareg, and female sexual contact does not affect a family honor. These attitudes differ significantly from attitudes in much of the Muslim and Arab world. Extra-marital affairs are only considered shameful for an unmarried woman if she becomes pregnant.[244] Although virginity is still not related to honor, recently, many men individually reject a potential wife for what they view as "loose" sexual conduct or "knowledge of too many men" from their potential wives.[245]

The traditional Tuareg view of female beauty encouraged female fattening, as a portly female body was the standard of beauty and sex appeal. However, this practice is diminishing due to food shortages and lifestyle challenges associated with obesity. Like everything else, standards of beauty and sexual attractiveness have also changed due to the influence of Western standards.[246]

Political Structure

Traditionally, Tuareg are loyal to their individual clan, as this type of political and social organization suits their nomadic lifestyle. A supreme chief has a legal authority but little power today.

Beyond the clan, identity and loyalty is tied to the larger Tuareg population. Concepts of national identity or patriotism are yet to be adopted by most Tuareg; a vast majority of Tuareg do not identify themselves as citizens of any country.

Politically, the Tuareg are grouped into autonomous federations, which are broadly divided into northern and southern groups.[247]

As colonialism was winding down in this region during the 1950s, the Tuareg aspired for an independent state, called Azawad. The proposed state of Azawad would have been comprised of Tuareg-populated territory in northern Mali, northern Niger, southern Algeria and southern Libya. However, the Tuareg community has never mobilized, as a whole to achieve independent statehood.

Revenge as a Motive for Rebellion and Mobilization

In order to understand the first Tuareg rebellion, one must understand the concept of *egha* (revenge) and its relevance to the Tuareg culture.

Revenge is a close translation of the more complicated Tuareg concept of *egha*. *Egha* is closely connected to two other important concepts in Tuareg society: *eshik*, meaning "honor," and *takaraket*, meaning "shame." To the Tuareg, *egha* is considered a debt one indentures against those who have stained one's honor, and who have thus caused one a great deal of shame. The contracted *egha* can be either individual or on the collective level of the entire clan. Only those perceived to be of equal status can stain one's honor: i.e. the free and noble. The contracted debt of *egha* remains unresolved until the attack on one's honor is countered, and can only be repaid and settled through violent revenge. Therefore, *egha* is of critical importance as a motive for resistance and in mobilizing Tuareg communities.

An excellent example of the *egha* concept is the story of Alla ag Albachir, a notorious rebel who led the Kel Adagh Tuareg in their resistance against the French colonial conquest in Mali.

Alla ag Albachir was captured and decapitated by French *goumiers* (soldiers serving in special units) in July 1954. His head was put on public display, and the story surrounding his treatment at the hands of the French was made known to all Tuareg communities.

Alla ag Albachir's son, Elledi, who was only seven years old when his father was killed, later started the first Tuareg rebellion in 1960s, also known as *alfellaga*. Elledi took up arms because he wanted to avenge his father's death. He soon became the rebellion's most prestigious and charismatic leader.

Understanding these cultural concepts reveals how the Tuareg understood these events. Alla was viewed as repaying the Kel Adagh honor debt towards the French because they defeated the clan and colonized their area. The violation of Alla's body damaged his honor. This also violated the honor of his entire clan and all of the Kel Adagh Tuaregs. Kel Adagh's son rose to avenge the honor of his father's clan.[248]

Post-Independence Tuareg Rebellions

French colonial policies in Mali and Niger favored the southern farming regions and disrupted the mutually-beneficial reciprocal trading relations between the different ethnic groups in the northern regions.

When Mali and Niger became independent from France in 1960, national leaders and civil servants were drawn from these southern farming populations. Post-colonial rulers were drawn from the Bambara in Mali and the Zarma-Songhai in Niger, while the northern, predominantly Tuareg regions of Mali and Niger were consequently sidelined and economically marginalized.

Over time, unaddressed and growing grievances held by the Tuareg in Mali eventually precipitated three rebellions: the first in 1962–64, the second in 1990–96, and the most recent 2007.[249] The key actors, and the claims for which they fought, are common to all three rebellions.

There have been two Tuareg rebellions in Niger: 1990-95 and 2007.

The 2007 rebellion by the Tuareg of Niger centered on two grievances: the belief by the Tuareg (who lived in the northern part of the country) that they had received almost no benefits from the central government (whose capital was located in the south); the second grievance of the Niger Tuareg was the belief that much of money earned in the region – largely from uranium exports – went directly to the south.[250].

The Tuareg also sought restrictions on the expansion of the uranium mines; this effort was intended to protect their nomadic way of life. Following these reoccurring conflicts, a peace agreement was signed between the Nigerian government and Tuareg rebels in 2009.

Thousands of Tuareg mercenaries who had served in the Libyan army in support of the Qaddafi regime during the insurgency eventually returned to Mali in the second half of 2011[251] and established the *Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad* (MNLA; the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad). Simultaneously a group of officers in the Malian government led a military *coup d'etat* against the Malian government on March 21, 2012.[252]

MNLA took advantage of the ensuing chaos by seizing control over all of the major northern towns, subsequently declaring the region occupied by MNLA forces as "the independent country of Azawad[253]." No country in the international community recognized Azawad as an independent nation.

In May 2012, MNLA and Ansar al Din agreed to merge forces and transform the territory that they controlled into an Islamic state.[254] Ansar Al Din, is an Islamist militant group believed to have links to Al-Qaida and with AQIM. AQIM was formed at the end of 2011 by Iyad Ag Ghali [255], a former Tuareg rebel leader often described as a "pragmatic opportunist."[256]

The alliance between MNLA and Ansar al Din was short-lived: Ansar al Din and its ally, AQIM, turned against the MNLA. The AQIM-led forces soon captured three major cities that are spiritually significant to Muslims: Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal.

The international community played a pivotal role in halting the advance of the Islamist militants. In June 2013, the government of Mali signed a peace agreement with Tuareg nationalist rebels to pave way for the elections that were held a month later.

A ceasefire agreement was signed between the Tuareg and the government of Mali in June 2015, giving partial autonomy to northern Mali -- a territory that includes the two historic cities, Gao and Timbuktu.[257] The agreement is fragile, but brings a semblance of stability to northern Mali.

Libya's Role in the Militarization of the Tuareg

Beginning in the 1960s, many young Tuareg men from the entire sub region had moved to Libya to work as wage laborers in the oil industry or as mercenary soldiers in Muammar Qaddafi's army.[258] While some were incorporated into the regular Libyan military forces, others were inducted into the Libyan-sponsored "Islamic Legion" of militants who were dispatched to Lebanon, Chad and Sudan, where they acquired considerable combat experience.

The dissolution of the Islamic Legion in the late 1980s and the end of multiple conflicts involving Libyan forces saw the return of young male Tuareg to their home areas throughout the West Africa and the Sahel. However, many of the migrants who settled in Libya were issued identity cards, thereby adding a new component to their identity, namely citizenship and political integration into Libya.[259]

More recently, the Libyan civil uprising (sometimes referred to as the "Arab Spring") inspired a revolution in Libya in 2011; young Tuareg men were recruited from Northern Mali and Niger into pro-Qaddafi forces in the first months of the uprising. Libyan rebels fighting against Qaddafi's regime reported that these Tuareg fighters had a vested interest in preserving Qaddafi's power structure because of their heavy reliance on the Libyan economy.[260] This highlights the complicated and intertwined nature of these ethnic-political conflicts in the region and how they can spill over and transform from a national conflict into a regional one.

Tuareg armed militia (Source: Wikimedia)

Belief System

Belief, Behavior and Practices

Tuareg are predominantly Muslim, but are not regarded as strict observers of Islamic custom. Their religious practices display syncretism (fusion of many beliefs)[261] and pluralism. Also, elements of pre-Islamic influences persist in some rituals, such as spirit possession, exorcism, and non-Qur'anic healing (mediumship, divination, and herbalism)[262]. Tuareg hold deep belief in spirits, which they consider mostly evil. These spirits are thought to inhabit isolated, deserted places, and are believed to inflict illnesses.

Qur'anic scholars (*ineslemen* or *marabouts*), play an important role in the Tuareg belief system. They are noble men and considered "people of God," and are believed to possess special powers of benediction (*al baraka).* *Marabouts* also perform important Islamic rituals, such as marrying couples and participating in the "name day" celebration held one week following a child's birth.[263]

A major part of the Tuareg belief system is *Al hima* (meaning "sacred"), which is a Tuareg concept that refers to a protected area or preserved place. This includes tombs as well as other spaces of cultural or religious significance such as shrines.

Chiefs, healing specialists, and Qur'anic scholars protect *al hima* spaces.[264]Tuareg's cultural beliefs and rituals discourage certain persons from entering *al hima* spaces, or restrict their activities inside them. Such persons include youths, persons of ambiguous status (e.g. artisans), and those of low prestige (e.g. former slaves). *Al hima* spaces are threatened with destruction, whether intended or unintended, by local residents, tourists, government officials, and soldiers who break taboos within these spaces. Dangers to *al hima* are not limited to secularists and non-Muslims, but include fellow Muslims, like the Arab invaders of the past, and the AQIM militants of present-day.

Music and Festivals

Ichumar (also called *tichumaren* in some regions), is a type of guitar-based music popular among young Tuareg in Niger and Mali. This music was originally composed and performed by Tuareg rebels, but has since been taken up by bands with a "rock-style." They perform at rites of passage, urban and cultural festivals, holidays, and political rallies.

Ichumar music was originally highly political (and somewhat forbidden) because it criticized colonial and postcolonial domination, and warned of threats to the Tuareg's cultural survival. Currently, these songs address broader themes, but some lyrics continue to commemorate ideals and heroes from the Tuareg rebellion.[265] Additionally, Tuareg host parties called *Zahutten* (from the Arabic word *Zahu*, meaning "pride"). These are regular events staged at the houses of young women. While women are singing at these events, the men are expected to serve food, tea, sugar, and tobacco.[266]


Tuareg band at a music festival (Source: Wikimedia)

Another significant Tuareg event is the *Cure Salee* festival ("Festival of the Nomads"), which is an annual gathering of Tuareg and Wodaabe people in the northern Niger town of Ingall. It occurs in the last two weeks of September and marks the end of the rainy season. Thousands of people from Niger and neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Benin, Algeria, and Libya congregate for this three-day festival. This event has been taking place for hundreds of years, but civil unrest and AQIM activity in the region has hampered these festivities.[267]

Traditional Dress as an Expression of Cultural Values

Tuareg are often referred to as the "People of the Veil" or the "Blue people of the Sahara."[268] This name is derived from the deep blue indigo-dyed garments that they wear. The name also stems from the fact that perspiration will sometimes transfer dye from these garments to a wearer's skin.

Tuareg men wearing their traditional indigo head turbans (Source: Wikimedia)

The cultural values of modesty and reserve are expressed in dress and bodily conduct: men almost always wear a face-veil, and women always wear a head scarf.[269] The Tuareg use of head dress is unique; men wear veils instead of the women, and many men will not remove the veil in front of strangers.[270]

Tuareg men start wearing the famous blue head cover and veil when they enter the realm of manhood, roughly around the age of 18. Wearing a veil indicates a man's readiness to marry and establish a family. A formal veiling process is performed by the religious noble men in a special ritual.

The fabric that veils the mouth is called *eghewid*; it can indicate the wealth and prestige of the owner. *Eghewid* is considered the main symbol of expressing male honor, pride, and dignity.[271] It is believed that the veil covering of the mouth and nose is to demonstrate respect to chiefs, elderlies and in-laws.[272] Moreover, the mouth of a Tuareg man is considered a private part, and a man preserves his honor by reducing the visibility of his face. This is why they veil the mouth, especially in the presence of a female.

Most women who migrated to the Maghreb maintain their customary dress: a *pagne* and a *tasirnest* (*melhafa* in Arabic), a long veil wrapped around the body, knotted on the shoulders, with the end forming a loosely draped headscarf while their face remained unveiled. Women who had migrated to coastal West Africa adopted the local dress fashion of *boubous* and headscarves.[273]

Conclusion

In identifying several dimensions of the Tuareg culture, this case study highlights the concepts of **identity**, **holism**, **change**, **variation**, **mobilization**, and **reciprocity** in this particular West African community.

This case study has shown that the marginalization of Tuareg in the countries they inhabit have led to their mobilization and rebellion against the governments.

The Tuareg, who refer to themselves as Kel Tamasheq, **identify** themselves as one big group that extends across several national borders. Most of these people do not consider themselves citizens of any specific nation.

The Tuareg consider the region that they occupy, Azawad, to be the equivalent of an independent country. Over the years, the Tuareg have **mobilized** and attempted secession; they will very likely continue to aspire for independence of their self-defined homeland.

Holism is demonstrated through the effect of environmental and political changes on the economic activities of the Tuareg. The arid environment where they live caused most of the Tuareg to become pastoralist.

Changes in the environment, such as desertification, droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, and political unrest, killed a majority of Tuareg livestock. However, the Tuareg demonstrated **variation** in their response to these changes; some maintained their pastoralist lifestyle; others opted to become sedentary.

Harsh changes in the environment also restructured their social relations after large numbers of Tuareg migrated to other countries to find work. The occasional migration of Tuareg eventually ceased to be tied to economic necessity: it became a lifestyle that had a culture unto itself.

Finally, **reciprocity** is evident in the Tuareg community because pastoralists Tuareg have always bartered animal products with food crops from their neighbors, the sedentary farmers.

You might have noticed that the case study does not include all, or even many, of the concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document. This is only natural: a comprehensive body of literature devoted to the study of a single culture is rare. In fact, Marines are frequently called upon to operate in areas where current information on local culture is scarce.

What the OCG and the chapters in this document were designed to help you learn more about your assigned region. We are offering you the skills and concepts that will help you operate more effectively in complex cross-cultural situations in any part of the globe, particularly when information is scarce or rapidly changing.

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