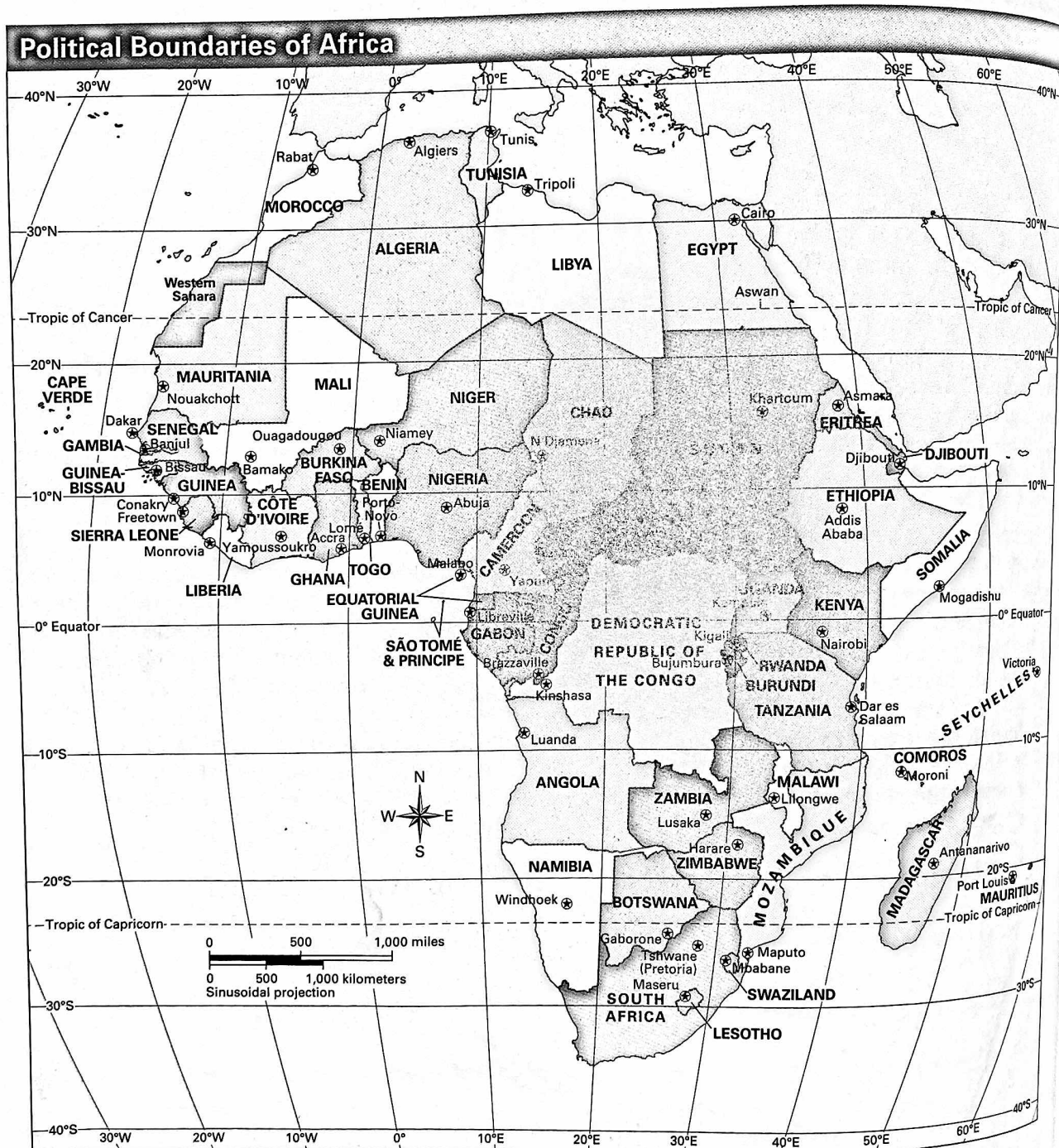


# Introducing the Region: Human Geography

**A**frica is home to 53 countries. The largest one is Sudan. It covers almost 1 million square miles. The smallest African country is Seychelles. This is a group of about 115 small islands scattered over the Indian Ocean, north of Madagascar. Together these islands have a land area of only about 176 square miles.

Africa is a region of many cultural and language groups. By some estimates, Africans speak at least 2,000 languages. Some of these, such as Arabic and Swahili, are widely used. Others are spoken only by small groups. Despite their differences, all Africans share a long history.



## History

Scientists have found the bones of a human-like species that lived in eastern Africa millions of years ago. For this reason, people call Africa the birthplace of the human race.

### Early Times

Early African people were hunters and gatherers. Learning to farm changed the way people lived. By 5000 B.C.E., Africans were raising animals and growing crops.

The Nile River valley was home to one of the world's earliest civilizations. The Egyptian civilization lasted for more than 3,000 years. The ancient Egyptians invented a kind of paper and a form of picture writing. They learned how to preserve the bodies of the dead as mummies. They also built the Egyptian pyramids, which still stand today.

### Kingdoms and Colonies

Beginning around 300 C.E., three great kingdoms arose in West Africa. The first one, Ghana, ruled until the 11th century. After the fall of Ghana, the kingdom of Mali rose to power. The last of the three, the Songhai empire, rose and fell between 1400 and 1600.

The wealth of these kingdoms came from their control of trade across the Sahara. Arab traders from North Africa brought salt and copper from mines in the Sahara to West African markets. They traded these goods for gold, ivory, and slaves. The traders carried their faith with them. They spread the religion of Islam across much of Africa.

Europeans began to explore Africa in the 1400s. The Portuguese set up trading posts along the west coast of Africa. At first they were interested in gold. But they soon began to ship Africans to Europe as slaves.

The slave trade expanded after Europeans set up colonies in the Americas. The European colonists needed workers to help them raise crops like sugar and tobacco. To meet that need, millions of Africans were captured and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean as slaves. The Atlantic slave trade did not end until around 1850.

In the 1700s and 1800s, Europeans began setting up colonies in Africa. The Belgians took control of the Congo basin. France gained control of Algeria and Tunisia. Great Britain took over Egypt. By 1914, European countries had divided up most of Africa.

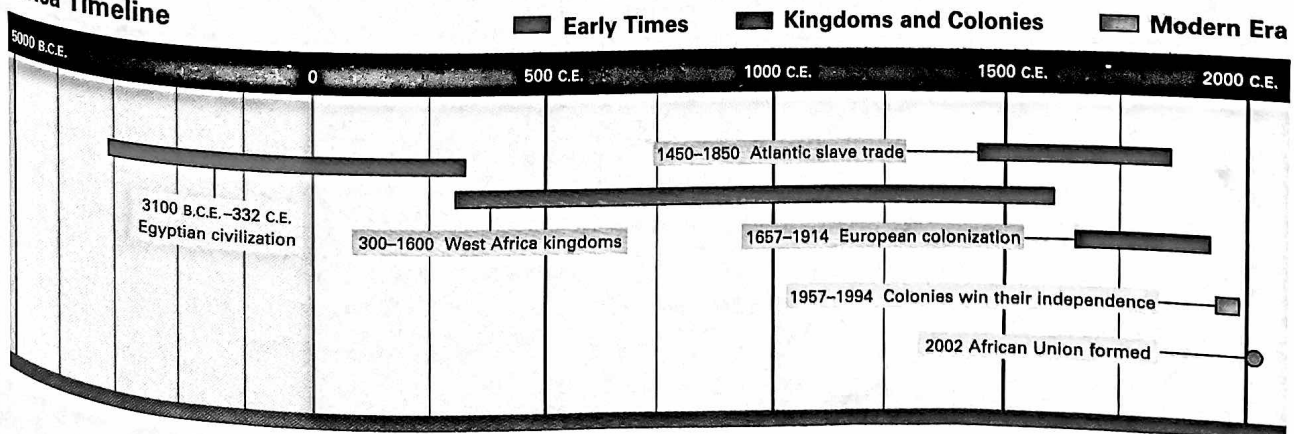
### The Modern Era

In 1957, Ghana became the first black African colony to gain its independence. Over the next 10 years, most of Africa threw off colonial rule.

Few of the new countries were prepared for self-rule. Since gaining their independence, they have struggled to create stable governments. Tensions between **ethnic groups** have led to unrest in many countries.

In 2002, most African countries came together to form the African Union. The African Union helps its members work together for the benefit of all Africans. It promotes peace and human rights. It also works to improve public health.

### Africa Timeline



## Population

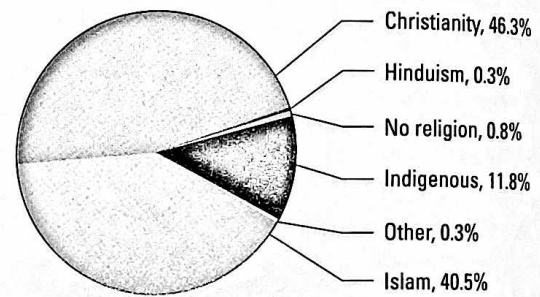
As of 2008, about 967 million people lived in Africa. This is one seventh of the world's people. Only Asia has more people. Africa has the fastest growing population in the world.

About three fifths of Africans live in **rural** areas. Most of them live in small villages, much as their ancestors did. In recent years, however, a growing number of Africans have been moving to cities.

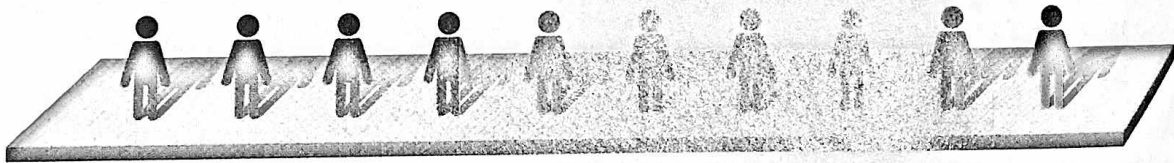
People in Africa follow many different religions. About 4 out of 10 Africans are Muslims. Most Muslims live in North and West Africa. Christians just slightly outnumber Muslims. The majority of Christians live in West, East, and Central and Southern Africa.

More than 100 million people practice indigenous religions. There are hundreds of these local faiths. But they have many features in common. Like most other religions, they explain how the universe was created. They also teach what is right and wrong.

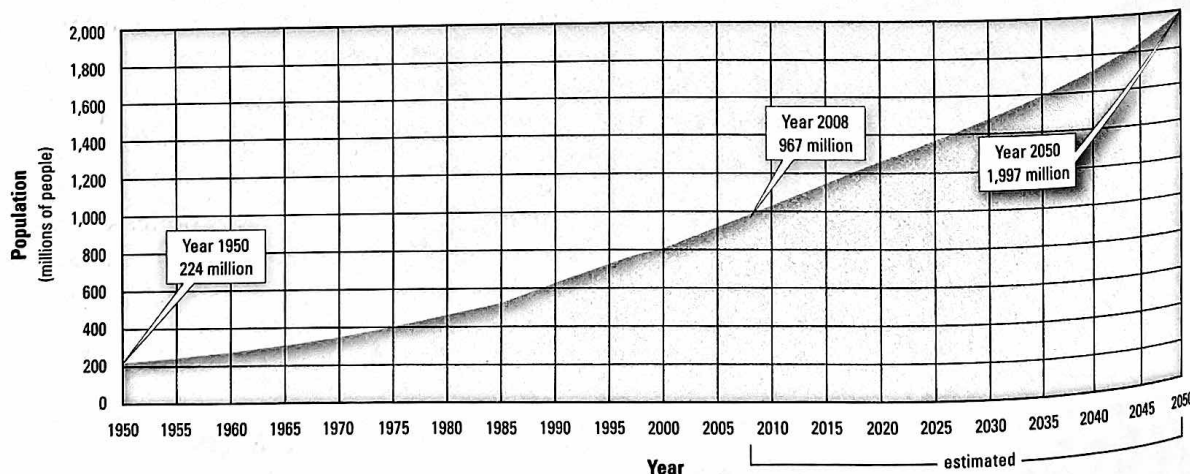
**Africa: Major Religions**



**Africa: Urban and Rural Population, 2007**



**Africa: Population Growth, 1950–2050**



Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.  
Encyclopaedia Britannica.



## Economic Activity

Mining is an important **economic activity** in Africa. Mining is the process of digging minerals and coal out of the ground. Mining most likely began in Africa thousands of years ago. Today half of the value of Africa's exports is from mining.

There are many methods of mining. Each method depends on where a mineral deposit is located. When the deposit is near the surface, mining can be done in large, open pits. When the deposit is deep underground, miners must dig tunnels to reach it. Both open pit and underground mines are used in Africa to get at its mineral wealth.

### Resources

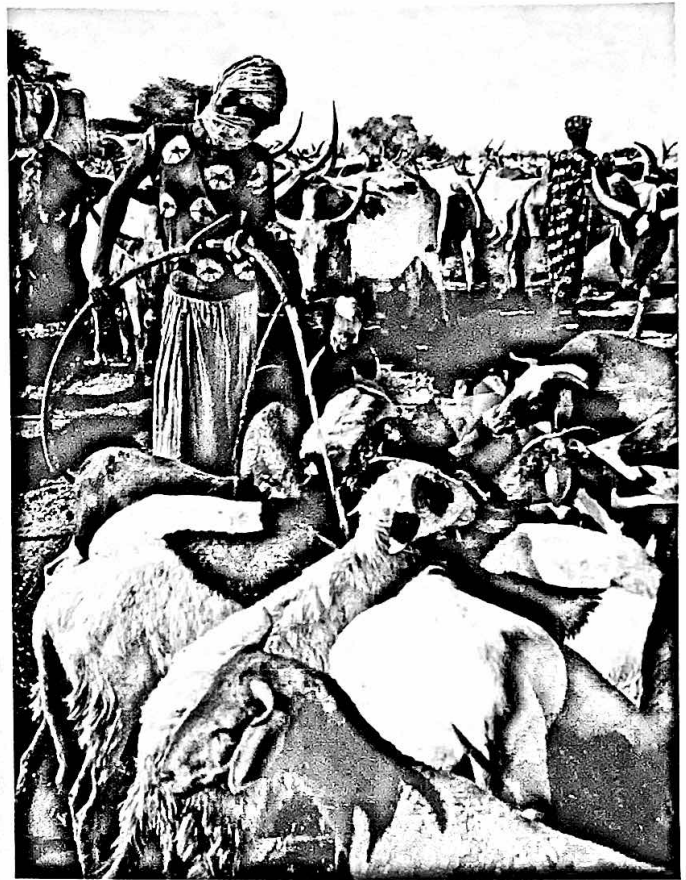
Oil is a key resource in parts of North and West Africa. Most of the oil imported into Europe comes from this region.

Central and Southern Africa are centers for diamond mines. In fact, Africa produces almost three fourths of the world's diamonds.

Gold is another important resource. More gold is mined in Central and Southern Africa than in any other region of the world.

### Land Use

The grasslands of North and East Africa are used for **nomadic herding**. Herders move from place to place to find food and water for their animals.



A herder in Senegal gives his goats water from a well. Senegal lies in the arid western Sahel.

More than half of Africa's farmland is used for **subsistence farming**. This means that the farmers are raising just enough food to feed their families.

In recent years, many Africans have turned to **commercial farming**. Egyptian farmers raise cotton along the Nile River and in the Nile Delta. Large groves of date palms grow around **oases** in the Sahara. The rainforests of West Africa produce cocoa beans. These are used to make chocolate.

Most trade and manufacturing takes place in South Africa. This country produces about two fifths of Africa's manufactured goods, including cars, clothing, steel, and electronics. Many other nations across Africa are working to promote the growth of industry.

As African countries continue to develop, the importance of trade and manufacturing will increase. There will be more jobs for highly skilled workers like this lab scientist in Nairobi, Kenya.

