

World Watch Research

Togo:

Background Information

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OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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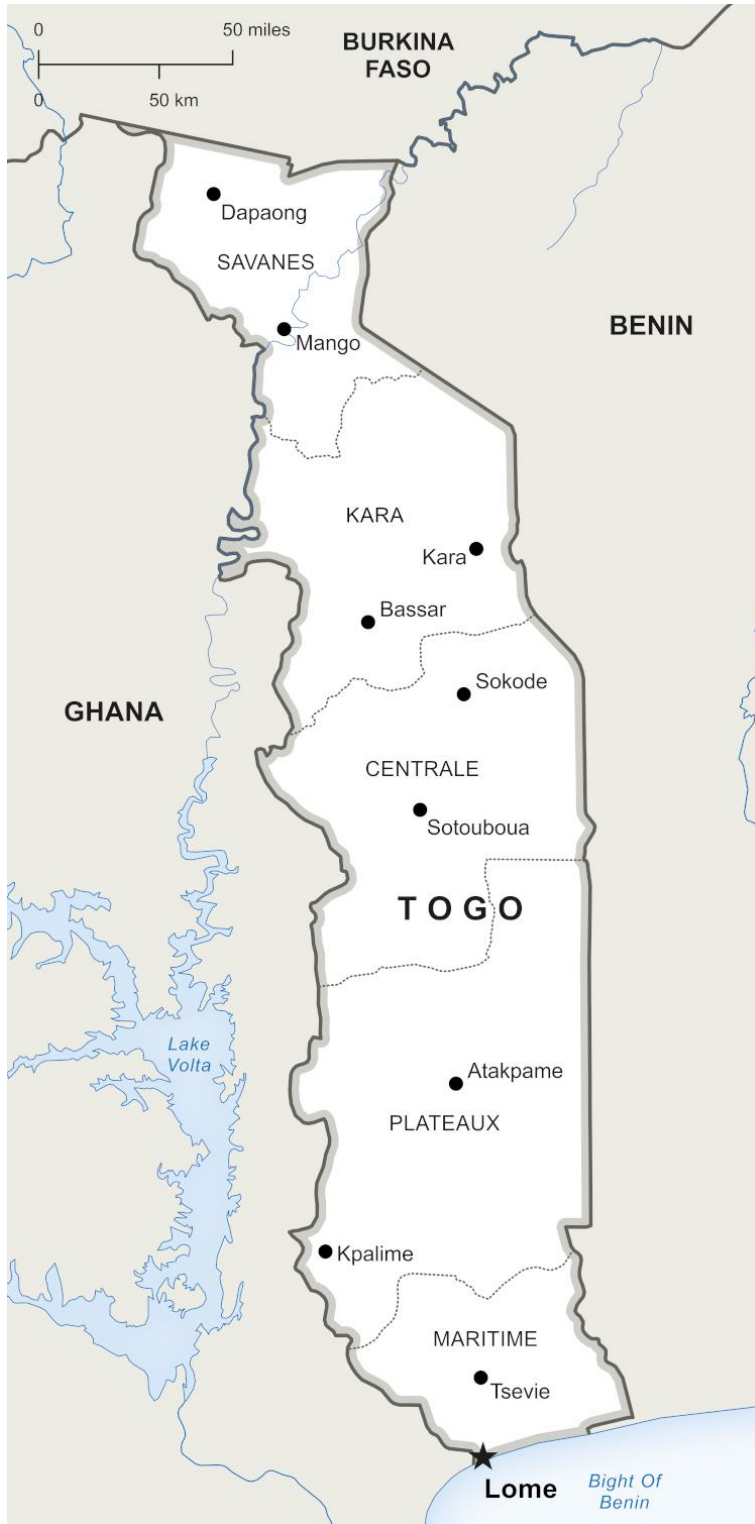
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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

Map of country



Togo: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
9,261,000	4,803,000	51.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Togo's history reflects a complex narrative of colonial legacy, military coups, and prolonged presidential rule, all within the broader context of West African geopolitics.

Togo became a German colony in 1885, marking the beginning of formal European control over the region. The country was then known as Togoland. However, Germany lost control of Togoland to British and French forces during World War I in 1914. Subsequently, the territory was divided between the two Allied powers, with the western part administered by Britain and the eastern part by France under a League of Nations mandate in 1922.

Togo gained independence from France on 27 April 1960, with Sylvanus Olympio becoming the first president. His presidency was short-lived, as he was assassinated in 1963 during a military coup led by Sergeant Étienne Eyadéma Gnassingbé. This coup was notable as it marked the first military takeover in independent Sub-Saharan Africa. After a brief period of political transition, Eyadéma took power in 1967 and established a one-party state under the Rally of the Togolese People, which he controlled for 38 years. Eyadéma's rule was marked by authoritarianism, and he became Africa's longest-serving leader by the time of his death in 2005.

The 1990s brought about significant change across Africa, including in Togo, where there was a surge of democratic reforms and protests fueled by both internal discontent and international pressure. While Togo officially transitioned to a multi-party system, Eyadéma managed to maintain his grip on power through elections that were widely regarded as flawed and manipulated.

Upon Eyadéma's sudden death in 2005, his son Faure Gnassingbé was quickly installed as president by the armed forces, an act that sparked international condemnation and widespread unrest within Togo. Despite this, Faure has remained in power, securing re-election multiple times despite allegations of electoral fraud and political repression.

The years 2017 and 2018 saw large-scale protests in Togo, with demonstrators demanding the resignation of Faure Gnassingbé and the reinstatement of the 1992 Constitution, which had been amended to allow his father to remain in power indefinitely. These protests were met with resistance from the government, and the demands for democratic reforms went largely unheeded.

In the most recent elections in 2020, Faure Gnassingbé was re-elected, further extending his family's rule over Togo, which now spans more than five decades. In April 2024, the president's ruling party won a landslide victory.

Current security concerns in Togo include the growing threat of Islamic militancy along its northern border with Burkina Faso, where jihadist groups have been increasingly active. Additionally, internal challenges persist, particularly in areas where traditional Voodoo practices are prevalent, as well as ongoing government repression, which continues to stifle political dissent and undermine civil liberties.

Political and legal landscape

Togo's political landscape revolves around the founders of the country. Two men, Gnassingbe Eyadema and his son Faure have dominated Togolese politics for most of Togo's existence as an independent state. Gnassingbe Eyadema became the President of Togo through a coup in 1963 and remained at the

helm till he died in 2005. After seizing power, he turned Togo into a one-party state and continued without even a pretense of democracy until 1992. In 1991, he was forced to reintroduce multi-party elections, bowing to the prevailing international and regional trend of democratization. However, the democratic transition in Togo has proved to be very shallow and Gnassingbe Eyadema stayed in power by manipulating elections and severely restricting civil and political rights.

When Eyadema died after ruling Togo for almost four decades, his son Faure became president with the army's backing, in violation of the constitutional rules concerning succession to the presidency. Although Faure briefly stepped down from the presidency to placate the ire of the international community about his unconstitutional assumption of power, he was returned to the presidency in short order by holding presidential elections almost three years ahead of schedule. Faure has relaxed the iron grip of his father to some extent, but Togo still remains an autocracy. Thanks to constitutional amendments passed during his father's rule, Faure ran and won his third election in 2015. President Faure tried to soften the autocratic image of the system by forming a national unity government in 2010. However, the repressive and autocratic nature of the regime has continued, backed by the army which is dominated by Gnassingbe's Kabyé ethnic group.

Starting in August 2017, thousands of people took to the streets [demanding](#) that the president step aside in the biggest challenge to his family's power since the death of his father in 2005 (Al-Jazeera, 9 September 2017). Parliamentary elections on 20 December 2018 were [boycotted](#) by 14 opposition parties (The Economist, 5 January 2019). In February 2020, incumbent President Gnassingbe was declared victor in the country's presidential elections. The opposition candidate (Kodjo) and supporters claimed the election was rigged and a planned [protest march](#) was suppressed by security forces, with Kodjo and retired Archbishop Fanoko Kpodzro placed under house arrest (Crux, 4 March 2020).

Under the country's current law, Gnassingbe could remain in office until 2030. The Constitution of the country is not being respected as pointed out in Freedom House's [Freedom in the World 2023 Togo](#) report (A2): "The constitution calls for a bicameral legislature, but the Senate has never been established. Members of the current 91-seat National Assembly, which exercises all legislative powers, were elected for five-year terms through proportional representation in multimember districts."

For many years, there were no local elections. These were eventually held in June 2019 (for the first time in 32 years), and the ruling Union pour la République (UNIR) won the majority of seats, securing 878 of the 1,490 seats. The Alliance Nationale pour le Changement won the second-highest number of seats (132), followed by the opposition coalition C14 (131 seats).

As reported in the Freedom in the World 2023 Togo report, the political landscape in Togo is deeply entrenched in a history of autocracy, characterized by the Gnassingbé family's rule since a 1963 coup. Despite multi-party elections being a feature since 1992, the ruling party has continually manipulated the system through means like gerrymandering and a biased security apparatus, mostly favoring their ethnic group. The opposition's calls for reform are regularly met with repression, and although there are constitutional protections for press freedom and civil liberties, they are inconsistently upheld with numerous instances of surveillance, arrests, and violence against dissenters.

The National Assembly passed a bill in 2022 for subnational elections, but legal milestones like these are marred by frequent infringements on freedom of assembly and arbitrary regulations on NGOs.

Academic freedom is similarly stifled, and the judiciary, though formally independent, is compromised by executive influence and corruption. Elections for the president and National Assembly are fraught with irregularities, lack of independent oversight, and voter suppression. Existing anti-corruption and transparency laws are not effectively implemented. These systemic flaws are exacerbated by an increasing threat of violent Islamic militancy, particularly near the Burkina Faso border.

The April 2024 elections and May 2024 Constitution

On [29 April 2024](#), Togo held its postponed parliamentary and regional elections. President Faure Gnassingbé's party, Union for the Republic (UNIR), secured a landslide victory, winning 108 out of 113 seats in the National Assembly (IPU Parline, accessed 8 October 2024). The remaining five seats were distributed among four other parties. These elections were held alongside regional elections, where regional deputies and municipal councilors will eventually elect members of a Senate—a body that has been anticipated since constitutional amendments in 2002.

The 2024 elections followed significant constitutional amendments aimed at transforming Togo from a presidential system to a parliamentary one with a ceremonial president. Opposition parties criticized these changes, expressing concerns that they might allow President Faure Gnassingbé, who has been in power since 2005, to maintain control. The elections, initially scheduled for 20 April were postponed to 29 April 29 to allow for broader consultations on the amendments. The outgoing National Assembly adopted the amendments on 19 April 2024, with some modifications. Despite opposition protests against the changes, President Gnassingbé promulgated the [new constitution](#) on 6 May 2024 (Idea International, accessed 8 October 2024).

Religious landscape

Togo: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,803,000	51.9
Muslim	1,502,000	16.2
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	2,867,000	31.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	58,300	0.6
Atheist	2,600	0.0
Agnostic	21,500	0.2
Other (includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian)	5,900	0.1

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Togo is one of the few African countries where traditional religious groups are still dominant in most parts of the country. However, the number of ethnic religionists has greatly decreased in the last years and many people combine traditional rites and customs with Christianity or Islam.

Christians live mainly in the south, while Muslims are predominately in the central and northern regions.

The law does not officially recognize any specific religions, but in practice the government recognizes Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam with their religious holidays observed as national holidays and with religious leaders of these groups invited to government events. The law requires all other religious groups, including indigenous groups, to register as religious associations. Official recognition as a religious association provides these groups with the same rights as those afforded to the three religions recognized by the government, including import duty exemptions for humanitarian and development projects. Registration is not obligatory, but unregistered groups do not receive import duty exemptions or additional government benefits such as government-provided teachers for private schools.

Economic landscape

According to the [World Bank Overview for Togo](#) (updated 3 April 2024):

- **Economic growth and stability:** Togo has experienced stable economic growth, with a GDP growth rate of 5.4% in 2023, although it is expected to slow slightly to 5.1% in 2024 due to fiscal consolidation efforts, weak external demand, and regional uncertainties. The country's economic resilience has been supported by increased public spending to counter the impacts of global shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic fallout from the conflict in Ukraine.
- **Poverty and inequality:** Poverty remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas where the poverty rate is nearly double that of urban areas. The World Bank report highlights that poverty is more pronounced in female-headed households, underscoring the gender disparities in economic opportunities and access to services like education and healthcare. Although poverty is projected to gradually decline in the coming years, it remains a critical issue that requires targeted interventions.
- **Political reforms and governance:** Togo's political landscape is undergoing significant changes with the adoption of a new constitution in March 2024. The new constitution transitions the country from a semi-presidential system to a parliamentary system, where the President of the Republic will hold ceremonial powers, and governance will be led by the President of the Council, who is appointed by the National Assembly. This reform marks Togo's entry into its Fifth Republic and represents a shift in the political structure, aimed at improving governance and democratic processes.
- **Regional security and fragility:** The security situation in Togo, particularly in the northern Savanes region, remains a concern due to the increasing threat from violent Islamic militants operating along the border with Burkina Faso. The government has responded with increased military presence and an emergency program to address the growing risks of regional instability. These security challenges, combined with financial turbulence and climate-related shocks, pose significant risks to Togo's economic and social stability.

As per the [African Development Bank's Togo Economic Outlook](#) (accessed 8 October 2024):

- **Economic performance:** Togo's economic growth remained relatively sluggish in 2023, with real GDP growth slowing slightly to 5.6% from 5.8% in 2022. The economy's growth was primarily driven by the agriculture, industry, and services sectors, contributing 1%, 2%, and 2.6% to GDP growth, respectively. Inflation decreased significantly from 7.6% in 2022 to 5.3% in 2023, largely due to lower food prices and subsidies on fuel and electricity.
- **Fiscal and financial management:** Togo made strides in fiscal consolidation, reducing its budget deficit from 8.3% of GDP in 2022 to 6.9% in 2023. However, the current account balance worsened slightly, reflecting increased import prices. The banking sector showed improvement, with a decline in the gross deterioration rate of loan portfolios and an increase in credit to the economy. Public debt remained stable at 67.2% of GDP, slightly below the West African Economic and Monetary Union's threshold.
- **Poverty and inequality:** Despite some progress, poverty and inequality remain significant challenges in Togo. The poverty rate, according to the latest survey, stood at 45.5% in 2019, a reduction from 53.5% in 2017. However, inequality has worsened, as indicated by the Gini coefficient's increase from 0.393 in 2011 to 0.427 in 2017.
- **Economic outlook and risks:** The economic outlook for Togo appears favorable, with GDP growth projected at 5.3% in 2024 and 6.0% in 2025, driven by agricultural dynamism and private investment. Inflation is expected to continue its downward trend. However, the budget deficit is likely to persist due to ongoing energy subsidies. Key risks include potential terrorist violence, agricultural underperformance, and volatile global phosphate prices. The implementation of the new constitution could also pose challenges to economic activities.
- **Structural transformation and global financial reform:** Togo's economy is undergoing structural transformation, with a shift in GDP contributions from agriculture to services and industry. The "Togo 2025 Roadmap" aims to accelerate this transformation through agricultural modernization, industrial development, and improved energy access. The reform of the global financial architecture is essential for optimizing international capital flows, securing concessional resources, and exploring non-concessional options like public-private partnerships to meet Togo's development needs.

According to the Heritage Foundation's 2024 [Index of Economic Freedom](#), Togo's economic freedom score stands at 50.9, ranking the country 139th out of 184 nations worldwide. This score marks a decline of 4.4 points from the previous year, placing Togo in the "mostly unfree" category. In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Togo ranks 32nd out of 47 countries, with its score falling below both the global average of 58.6 and the regional average of 52.4.

Togo's economic environment is characterized by significant challenges, particularly in the areas of rule of law, regulatory efficiency, and government influence over the financial sector. The country scores poorly in property rights, judicial effectiveness, and government integrity due to ongoing political interference in the judiciary and pervasive corruption, which weaken the legal and regulatory framework. While the government has made some strides in fiscal management, reflected in a high score for government spending, the overall fiscal health remains fragile. The country's public debt stands at 66.3% of GDP, with ongoing budget deficits and a high individual income tax rate of 45%, which poses challenges for economic growth.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Togo](#) (accessed 8 October 2024) and [UNDP Human Development Report Togo](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Adja-Ewe/Mina 42.4%, Kabye/Tem 25.9%, Para-Gourma/Akan 17.1%, Akposso/Akebu 4.1%, Ana-lfe 3.2%, other Togolese 1.7%, foreigners 5.2%, no response 4% (2013-14 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official language of commerce), Dagomba, Ewe, Kabye, Mina
- **Urban population:** 43.4% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.6% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 2.51% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 20 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 12.7 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older):** 63.7%
- **Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):** 76.0%
- **Unemployment, total:** 2.0% of labor force
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 3.5%
- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and rank:** Togo is ranked 167th with a score of 0.515 points
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 61.0 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.822
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.573

Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Togo](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date - January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** Togo had 3.44 million internet users, representing 37.6% of the total population. This indicates a growing reliance on digital connectivity, although a large portion of the population remains offline.
- **Social media usage:** Social media adoption also increased, with 913.5 thousand users, making up 10.0% of the population. This suggests that social media is becoming an important channel for communication and information sharing in Togo. In January 2024, 30.0% of Togo's social media users were female, and 70.0% were male.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** There were 6.91 million active cellular mobile connections in Togo, which is equivalent to 75.5% of the population. This high rate of mobile connectivity underscores the importance of mobile devices in Togo's digital landscape, providing a critical platform for internet access and digital services.

According to [NapoleonCat](#), social media usage in Togo during July 2024 revealed distinct patterns across various platforms:

- **Facebook:** Togo had approximately 1,173,300 Facebook users, accounting for 12.5% of the country's population. The user base was predominantly male, with 68.8% men compared to 31.2% women. The largest demographic was people aged 18 to 24, who made up 34.9% of the total Facebook users.

- **Instagram:** There were 178,900 Instagram users in Togo, making up 1.9% of the population. Similar to Facebook, Instagram's user base was also male-dominated, with men constituting 69.5% of the users. The majority of users were aged 18 to 24, representing 47.7% of the total.
- **Messenger:** The Messenger app had 956,000 users in Togo, which was 10.1% of the population. Men accounted for 69.4% of the user base, with the most significant group being individuals aged 25 to 34, comprising 35.8% of the total users.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn had 339,900 users in Togo, representing 3.6% of the population. The platform's largest demographic was individuals aged 25 to 34, making up 53% of the total user base.

Further details concerning access, censorship, digital economy and governance are available at [USAID Information and Communications Technology - Togo](#) (accessed 2 April 2024).

Security situation

The security situation in Togo has become increasingly precarious, particularly in the northern regions near the border with Burkina Faso. This area, known as the Savanes region, has been a focal point for the Togolese government's heightened security measures due to the growing threat posed by violent Islamic militants. The proximity to Burkina Faso, a country grappling with severe extremist violence, has made northern Togo vulnerable to the spillover of jihadist activities. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the Togolese government has imposed stringent travel restrictions in the region, requiring non-Togolese citizens to obtain written authorization from the Ministry of Defense before entering the area. This move underscores the government's efforts to prevent further destabilization and to control the movement of people in and out of the volatile region.

The increased security measures, while necessary to some extent, also highlight the broader issues of human security within the context of Togo's authoritarian regime. The imposition of such restrictions reflects the government's approach to managing threats through control and limitation of freedoms, rather than addressing the root causes of insecurity. The government's focus on militarized responses rather than community engagement and development has left the region in a state of fear and repression, with the local population caught between the threat of jihadist violence and the heavy-handed tactics of the state.

The lack of political freedoms and the government's control over every aspect of life in Togo, from movement to expression, has created a climate where the basic rights of individuals are subordinated to the state's desire for control. This approach not only fails to address the underlying causes of insecurity but also exacerbates the very conditions that allow extremism to thrive. The focus on militarization and the curtailment of civil liberties in response to security threats reflect a broader pattern of authoritarian governance that prioritizes regime stability over the well-being of its citizens.

Christian origins

The Portuguese were present in the coastal area of Togo from the 16th century onwards, but there was no real attempt at introducing Christianity until German mission work began around 1847. In 1871, the Roman Catholic Church established its first mission station in the country. In 1886, the Society of African Missions was established. From 1884/5 until 1918, German Catholic priests were particularly active. Following the defeat of Germany in the First World War, the German presence was expelled. Churches from the USA first entered the country with the arrival of the Assemblies of God in 1937.

Church spectrum today

Togo: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	2,565,000	53.4
Protestant	1,212,000	25.2
Independent	288,000	6.0
Unaffiliated	807,000	16.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-67,900	-1.4
Total	4,804,100	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	645,000	13.4
Pentecostal-Charismatic	1,081,000	22.5

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest church denomination. Protestant groups include Methodists, Lutherans, Assemblies of God and Seventh-day Adventist. In terms of geography, Christians are mainly to be found in the southern part of the country, while Muslims dominate the central and the northern parts of the country.

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Togo>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.
- [Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023](#)

External Links

- Political and legal landscape: demanding - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/urges-togo-respond-protesters-expectations-170909053453123.html?xif=>
- Political and legal landscape: boycotted - <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/01/05/togos-president-suffers-an-electoral-setback>
- Political and legal landscape: protest march - <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2020/03/togos-president-re-elected-according-to-official-final-results/>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom in the World 2023 Togo - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/togo/freedom-world/2023>
- Political and legal landscape: 29 April 2024, - <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/TG/TG-LC01/election/TG-LC01-E20240429/>
- Political and legal landscape: new constitution - <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/togo>
- Economic landscape: World Bank Overview for Togo - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/togo/overview>
- Economic landscape: African Development Bank's Togo Economic Outlook - <https://www.afdb.org/en/countries-west-africa-togolese-republic/togo-economic-outlook>
- Economic landscape: Index of Economic Freedom - <https://www.heritage.org/index/pages/country-pages/togo>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook Togo - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/togo/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Togo - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/TGO>
- Technological landscape: DataReportal Digital 2024: Togo - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-togo?rq=Togo>
- Technological landscape: NapoleonCat - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-togo/2024/>
- Technological landscape: USAID Information and Communications Technology - Togo - <https://idea.usaid.gov/cd/togo/information-and-communications-technology-ict>
- Further useful reports: Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023 - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups>