

Prayer Profile

THE WOLOF OF WEST AFRICA

A cluster of 5 Wolof groups in 5 countries.

The Wolof of Côte d'Ivoire, France, Gambia, Mali, Senegal.



The Wolof are a large ethnic group with a population of nearly three million. Most of them are located in the West African countries of [Senegal](#) and [Gambia](#). In recent years, however, the expansion of peanut cultivation and an acceleration towards urbanization has motivated many of the Wolof to spread out into [Cote d'Ivoire](#) and [Mali](#). They hope to make use of the land and find better jobs in the cities.

Hundreds of years ago, the Wolof conquered many tribes in the northwestern Senegal area. By the end of the 1300's, the Wolof had grown into a large empire of separate, self-governing states. By the 1500's, the empire had split into four major Wolof kingdoms.

The French expanded into Senegal during the 1800's, making it a colony of French West Africa. At the same time, Gambia was colonized by Great Britain. The Wolof of Senegal were awarded French citizenship; and today, many Wolof have their homes in France.

By 1965, both Senegal and Gambia had gained their independence; however, European influences are still a part of Wolof culture today.

What are their lives like?

The Wolof can be divided into three classes: the freeborn, those born into slavery, and the artisans. The freeborn class ranges from high-ranking noblemen to common peasant farmers. The slave class is made up of the Wolof whose parents were slaves. They were born into slavery and must continue serving their parent's masters. Finally, the artisans are considered a low class in Wolof society. This group includes blacksmiths, leather workers, and musicians. Intermarriage among the three classes is a very rare occurrence.

The Wolof follow a complex code of behavior that is based on their social status. For example, a person belonging to the upper class is obligated to maintain the highest social standards. He is expected to maintain self-control and dignity, always show courage, avoid actions that may dishonor his family, and fulfill all his religious obligations.

When outside the village, the Wolof are expected to wear clothing suitable for the occasion, whether they are attending an important social event or simply shopping in the market. While in the public eye, they must look, move, and talk in the appropriate manner.

The Wolof, particularly the women, are known as being spectacular and beautiful. They dress very fashionably and wear sophisticated hairstyles. In fact, they are often the fashion-setters for others around them.

While many of the Wolof have settled in cities and work as merchants, teachers, or government officials, most of them still live in rural areas and work as peasant farmers.

The main cash crop for the peasants is peanuts. Huge sacks of them are sold to traders, and the earnings are used to provide new clothes, household utensils, blankets, and tobacco. Okra, peppers, beans, and tomatoes are also planted in gardens around the houses; and their basic dietary crops include sorghum and millet. For breakfast, grains are prepared as thick porridge. In the evening, grains are prepared as a steaming dish covered with either peanut and tomato sauce, or meat and bean sauce.

A typical Wolof village consists of several hundred people living in compounds that are grouped around a central village square. The compounds contain houses made of mud or reeds. Fences are built just inside the compound entrances to block the view of strangers. Public events, such as dancing and wrestling, take place in the village square. A platform used for public meetings is usually located in the center of the square, and a mosque is located on the square's east side.

What are their beliefs?

Virtually all of the Wolof claim to be Muslims. The Islamic religion is based on the teachings of Mohammed. The Koran ("holy book" of Islam) was supposedly given to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

Islam is a religion of works that is centered on five basic teachings or "pillars." (1) A Muslim must affirm that "there is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." (2) Five times a day he must pray while facing Mecca. (3) He must give alms generously. (4) He must fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year. (5) He must try to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in his lifetime.

Although the Wolof are almost entirely Muslim, some pre-Islamic beliefs are still held, particularly by the women. They believe that both good and evil spirits, as well as witches exist in each village. The bad spirits are thought to live in the bush or in tall trees in the center of the village. Protective amulets are often worn to ward off the evil forces.

What are their needs?

Today, most of the Wolof groups have a number of Christian resources available to them, and missions agencies have targeted each of the groups. Sadly, however, very few of them have become Christians. There is a great need for laborers who are sensitive to the Muslim culture to work among the Wolof.

Prayer Points

- Ask God to raise up prayer teams to break up the soil through worship and intercession.
- Ask God to grant wisdom and favor to the missions agencies that are targeting the Wolof.
- Pray for effectiveness of the Jesus film and other evangelistic tools among the Wolof.
- Pray that their traditional Muslim culture will soften, creating open doors for the Gospel to be preached among them.
- Ask the Lord to give the Wolof believers opportunities to share the love of Christ with their own people.
- Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Wolofs.

Wolof People Group Information:

Country:	Senegal
Language Spoken:	Wolof
Population of People in this Country:	3,300,000
Population of Language Speakers in the World:	3,400,000
ROPAL Code:	WOL00
% Christians of this People in this Country:	1%
# of Evangelicals of this People in this Country:	40
% Evangelicals of this People in this Country:	0%
Latitude, Longitude:	14.9497, -15.7964
GMI Map Code:	WOL-SEN-EPY
Affinity Block Name:	Sub-Saharan African
People Cluster:	Wolof
Race Code:	NAB56c
1995 Beginning Joshua Project List:	Yes
Active Original Joshua Project List:	Yes

Additional People Group Information:

Complete Bible:	No
New Testament:	1988
Bible Portions:	1873
Jesus Film:	Yes
Christian Radio Broadcast:	HCJB
Audio Recording of Gospel:	Yes