

Chad | Freedom House

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 3 / 40 (-1)

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 1 / 12 (-1)

A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 1 / 4

The president is directly elected to a five-year term. President Idriss Déby Itno took power in 1990 during a rebellion, and then overwhelmingly won elections in 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011. In the 2016 poll, he received just under 60 percent of the vote, defeating opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo, who took 13 percent. The opposition rejected the result, citing a variety of electoral irregularities.

A new constitution promulgated in May 2018 eliminated the office of prime minister and gave the president exclusive and sweeping powers to appoint state officials. It also reinstated term limits: under its provisions, the president serves a six-year term that is renewable once. However, the term limit mandate is not retroactive and does not take effect until after the 2021 presidential election, thus permitting Déby the opportunity to run for sixth and seventh terms that could keep him in power until 2033.

A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

The unicameral National Assembly consists of 188 members elected to four-year terms. However, elections have not been organized since 2011, with the 2015 parliamentary elections having been repeatedly postponed. The ruling political party, Déby's Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS), and allied parties control 117 seats, more than a two-thirds majority.

A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 0 / 4 (-1)

An Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) is established prior to elections. However, its leadership is appointed by the country's entrenched political class through the National Framework for Political Dialogue (CNDP), and civil society is excluded from the process.

In April 2018, the MPS-controlled National Assembly—whose mandate had long since expired—adopted a new constitution that significantly increased the powers of the president and redrew legislative districts, among other changes, and Déby promulgated it in May. The government rejected calls from the opposition, civil society groups, and the Catholic Church in Chad to put the new charter to a referendum. Authorities organized a national forum to debate constitutional reforms, but opposition parties and civil society organizations boycotted it, calling for a more

inclusive dialog that addressed a broader range of issues.

The CNDP in 2018 failed to fulfill its mandates. Despite the promulgation of the new constitution and Déby's calls to hold legislative elections, it has not established a new electoral code, nor has it appointed a CENI.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the electoral commission has failed to organize legislative elections originally scheduled for 2015, and because a new constitution was approved by lawmakers with expired mandates and in the absence of consultations with the opposition and civil society.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 1 / 16

B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 1 / 4

There are more than 130 registered political parties in Chad, though most of them are aligned with the ruling party. The MPS enjoys significant influence, and has held a majority in the National Assembly since legislative elections in 1997.

B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 0 / 4

The mandate of the current legislature expired in 2015 and new elections have been repeatedly postponed, leaving the opposition no avenue to increase support or gain power through elections. The political opposition is given legal recognition, but opposition leaders who publicly criticize the government risk severe harassment and arrest. Opposition leaders have disappeared after entering state custody. In 2018, the state continued to forbid the organization of opposition activities including rallies, marches, and other public demonstrations, as well as meetings between opposition officials.

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 0 / 4

The extensive and complicated kinship networks tied to the president and his family have resulted in a concentration of political and economic power. The government is not accountable to voters in practice, and voters have few effective means of influencing or participating in political affairs.

B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 0 / 4

Members of the Zaghawa ethnic group, and other northern ethnic groups, control Chad's political and economic systems, causing resentment among the country's 200 other ethnic groups. Although they comprise roughly 44 percent of the population, Christians in the south have largely been excluded from political power for roughly 40

years. While some Christians hold positions in the current government, their representation and voice are limited to a few token ministerial positions. The new constitution requires cabinet members and some other officials to be sworn in on either a Bible or a Quran, and to invoke Allah, the Arabic-language name of God. Following cabinet shuffles, some officials were fired after they refused to take the oath on grounds that it violated secularism or provisions of their Christian faith. One official was reportedly permitted by Déby to invoke the name of God in French, rather than Arabic.

Despite some government efforts to encourage their political participation, women hold few senior positions in government and political parties. Women living in rural areas are largely excluded from local governance bodies. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community is severely marginalized, and this impacts the ability of LGBT people to engage in political processes and advocate for their interests.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 1 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 1 / 4

Déby enjoys unlimited discretionary power over the composition of the government and routinely reshuffles the cabinet, including in 2018. The elimination of the prime minister's office further concentrated the executive powers of government in the presidency. The significant influence of the presidential office impedes the National Assembly from steering national policies.

C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 0 / 4

Corruption, bribery, and nepotism are endemic and pervasive in Chad. High-profile journalists, labor leaders, and religious figures have faced harsh reprisals for speaking out about corruption, including arrest, prosecution, and expulsion from the country. Corruption charges against high-level officials that do go forward are widely viewed as selective prosecutions meant to discredit those who pose a threat to Déby or his allies.

C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4

Chad has no law establishing the right to access official information. Déby, his family, and his associates dominate government and have little incentive to share even basic information about government operations with journalists, transparency advocates, or ordinary citizens.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 6 / 12

D1. Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

The constitution formally provides for freedom of the press, but press freedom is restricted in practice. Although criticism of the government is generally permitted within certain boundaries, reporters and editors practice self-censorship to avoid reprisals, including arbitrary detention and other harassment and abuse. Many of Chad's most prominent news outlets are either state-owned or controlled by those with close ties to the government, and have limited editorial independence.

The internet and social media are heavily regulated and restricted. Beginning in March 2018, shortly after protests against proposed constitutional changes took place, state authorities pressured internet providers in Chad to block access to social media platforms and messaging apps, and they remained inaccessible at the end of the year. The courts in October upheld the state's authority to regulate internet access.

D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 1 / 4

The state imposes a number of religious restrictions, primarily against certain Muslim sects. Several sects deemed to promote violence are banned, despite limited evidence of such activity. Imams are subject to governance by the semi-state run High Council for Islamic Affairs (HCIA), which is led by a group of imams belonging to the Tijanyya Sufi order. Terrorist attacks are considered an acute threat against Muslim and Christian places of worship, and the state has provided security to some houses of worship in response to such concerns. The government has engaged in a highly visible campaign to ban burqas, and has detained women who choose to wear them in public.

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 2 / 4

The government does not restrict academic freedom, but funds meant for the education system, as well as government-funded stipends, are regularly in arrears. In May 2018, university lecturers, students, and staff at the University of N'Djamena and its satellite campuses went on strike, citing months of unpaid salary and other benefits. The primary and secondary education systems also experienced strikes, disrupting their academic calendars.

D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 2 / 4

Space for open and free private discussion exists, but tends to be heavily self-censored due to fears of reprisal from the state's repressive apparatus.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 4 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

Constitutional guarantees of free assembly are not upheld by authorities, who routinely ban gatherings and persecute organizers. A number of demonstrations were banned in 2018, and in January, security forces dispersed crowds with tear gas and arrested around sixty student protesters who organized to support the strike of civil

servants in the education sector. Several other demonstrations of protest were met with police repression throughout the year.

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? 1 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must receive government approval to operate legally, and few such applications are approved. Most legal NGOs operate in the humanitarian and development sectors. Intelligence agents target and intimidate local activists who attempt to address issues related to governance or human rights.

E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 2 / 4

The constitution guarantees the rights to strike and unionize, but a 2007 law imposed limits on public sector workers' right to strike. In 2017, trade unions and the government reached an agreement to form a new tripartite arbitration committee composed of state officials, employers, and union representatives. However, the committee failed to reach a consensus in 2018. Several strikes took place during the year in response to reductions to or unpaid salaries and benefits, particularly in the public sector.

F. RULE OF LAW: 1 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The rule of law and judicial system remain weak because the political leadership, especially the executive, heavily influences the courts.

F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

Security forces routinely ignore constitutional protections regarding search, seizure, and detention. Detained persons may be denied access to lawyers, notably those detained in connection with their involvement in antigovernment protests or activities. Many people suspected of committing crimes are held for lengthy periods without charge.

F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

Civilian leaders do not maintain control of the security forces, who stand accused of killing and torturing with impunity. The militant group Boko Haram operates near Lake Chad, and in 2018 it continued to carry out abductions and killings of civilians, and burned dozens of homes, leading to increased internal displacement. Rebel groups formed an alliance in southern Libya and led attacks on security forces in northern Chad in August. This represents a new front and insurgency facing the Chadian state in 2018. Increased insecurity from insurgent activities in Libya led Chad to move the command center of the G5 Sahel, a regional military partnership comprised primarily of Chadian forces, from N'Djamena to northern Chad.

Cleavages between different ethno-regional groups have at times sparked violent conflict between communities.

Conditions in prisons are dangerous.

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 0 / 4

Due to cultural stigmatization, LGBT citizens are forced to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity. The current penal code criminalizes same-sex sexual activity. Women face pervasive discrimination. Girls have limited access to education.

The government struggles to provide services to internationally displaced persons (IDPs) and the more than 450,000 refugees in Chad at the end of 2018 who fled conflicts in neighboring Central African Republic, Sudan, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 3 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 1 / 4

Although constitutional guarantees for the freedom of movement exist, in practice militant activity and consequent security responses limit movement, particularly in the Lake Chad region.

Significant structural constraints on the resources available to everyday citizens restrict the ability of individuals to pursue employment or educational opportunities outside of their local areas.

A report by the Centre for Studies and Training for Development (CEFOD) released in 2017 cited early marriage as a key cause of girls dropping out of school.

G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 1 / 4

Laws establishing land and property rights are nominally in force, but they are functionally irrelevant to the majority of the country's population owing to the state's minimal presence in rural areas; customary law governs land ownership and use rights in practice. Laws protecting the right of women to inherit land are not enforced.

Due to high levels of corruption, establishing and operating a business in Chad is extremely difficult.

G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 0 / 4

Violence against women is common. Female genital mutilation is illegal but widely

practiced.

The penal code bans child marriage, setting the legal age of marriage at 18, but the courts rarely hold those who practice it accountable. This issue received some attention in a recent case in which a girl accused a man of rape; she had married him when she was 13 and said he had kidnapped her. The courts acquitted the accused in 2017 but the verdict was appealed, and he was retried in October 2018. He was found guilty in November and sentenced to a year in prison, but had not been taken into custody at year's end.

G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Chad has adopted minimum wage and occupational health and safety laws, but authorities do not enforce them well, and many workers are unaware of or lack access to formal channels through which they may seek redress for mistreatment by employers; corruption also impedes workers from obtaining redress. Unpaid wages are a serious problem in many sectors.

Chad is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking, and the government has made minimal efforts to eliminate the problem. Children can be found engaged in forced begging and forced labor. Young girls who travel to look for work often end up either forced into prostitution or abusive domestic servitude.