

World Watch Research

Chad:

# Background Information

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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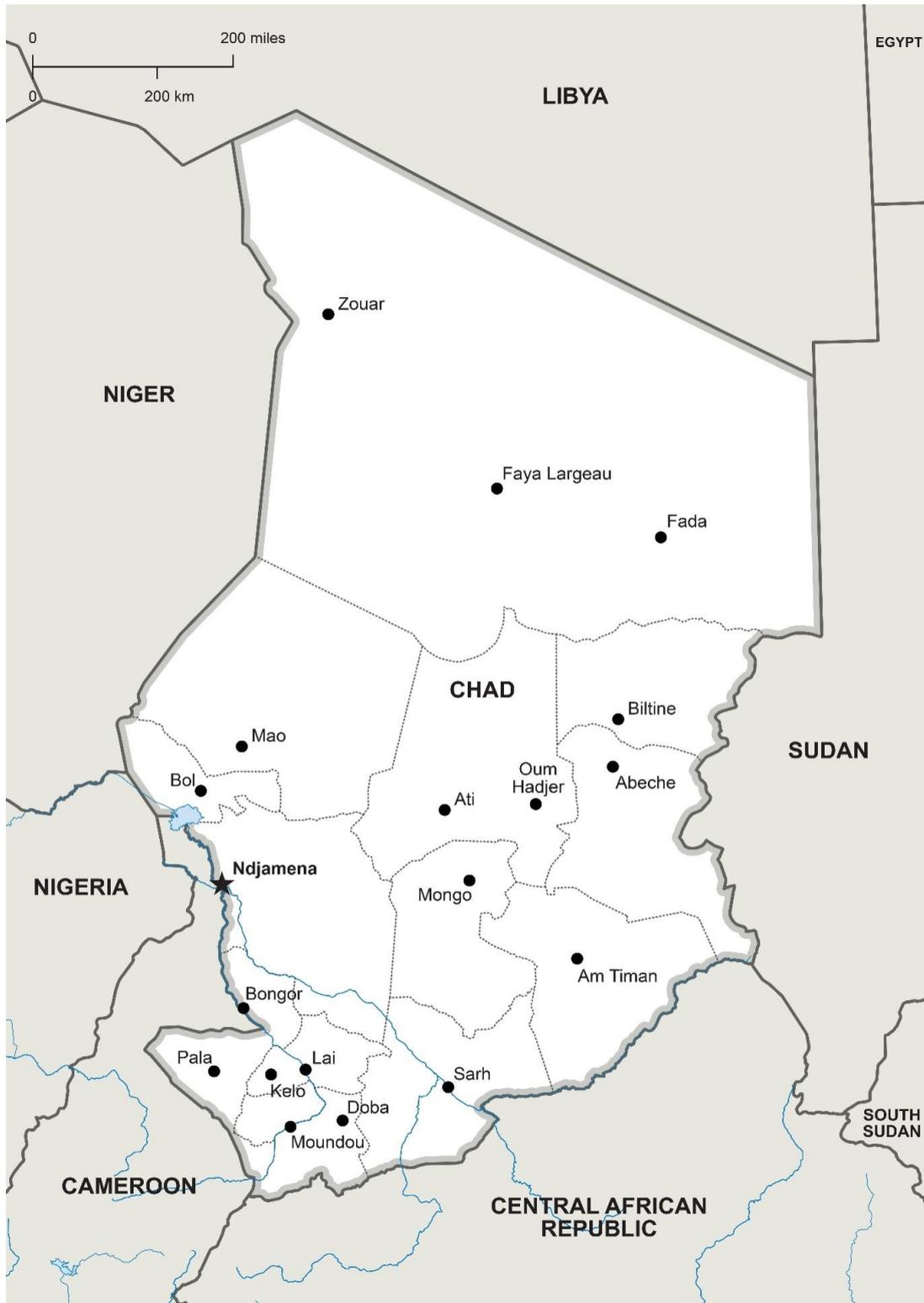
## Copyright and sources

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).

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## Map of country



### Chad: Population (UN estimate for 2024)

18,847,000

### Christians

6,003,000

### Chr%

31.9

## Recent history

Chad is a landlocked country sharing borders with Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger. In 1960 (often referred to as “the year of Africa”) Chad was one of seventeen African countries to gain independence. However, many different factions soon emerged. The man who was referred to as the father of their independence, François Tombalbaye, became an autocratic president. Tombalbaye's rule was challenged by a guerrilla group operating in the north of the country called FROLINAT (Front for the National Liberation of Chad). Even though French troops helped the president put down the revolt, they were unable to defeat the northern rebels totally. Tombalbaye remained in power until he was [assassinated](#) in 1975 (History of Chad, accessed 16 March 2023).

The 1975 coup saw General Félix Malloum take power. However, he was in constant conflict with rebel forces operating in the northern part of the country. They were financed by Libya (BBC country profile), which claimed possession of the Aouzou Strip (the northern part of Chad) and annexed it in 1977. In 1979, General Malloum was forced to flee the country and Goukouni Oueddei, the leader of FROLINAT, came to power. In 1980, Libya sent in troops to help Oueddei who was willing to acknowledge Libya's claim over the Aouzou Strip. Oueddei had to fight a formidable rebel force led by Hissene Habre. In 1982, Habre seized power but Goukouni Oueddei continued fighting in the northern part of the country. In 1990, Idriss Déby ousted Habre with the support of Sudan and [seized power](#) (The New Humanitarian, 19 April 2006). Habre fled to Senegal and was [put on trial](#) in November 2015 for atrocities committed during his leadership (Human Rights Watch, 23 November 2015).

Violence and rebellions continued under the leadership of President Déby. The country has also been fighting against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area. In 2018, the National Assembly amended the Constitution allowing the president to stay in power for over ten years.

### The April 2021 coup

Presidential elections were held in Chad on 11 April 2021. Incumbent Idriss Déby, who served five consecutive terms since seizing power in the 1990 coup, was running for a sixth term. Provisional results released on 19 April showed that he had won re-election with 79% of the vote. However, on 20 April 2021, it was suddenly announced by the armed forces that Déby had been killed in action while leading his country's troops in a battle against rebels calling themselves the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT). This was the starting-point for a military coup and Déby was swiftly replaced by his son, Mahamat Idris Déby, as the current president of the republic which is now under military control. It was expected that Mahamat Déby would govern for an eighteen month period (starting April 2021) after which free and democratic elections were to be held once the transition period was over ([BBC News, 20 April 2021](#)). On the day initially designated by the military junta for transitioning back to civilian rule (20 October 2022) security forces cracked down harshly on public demonstrations, leading to over 100 fatalities according to certain reports. Following these violent events, a curfew was established in key metropolitan areas and a three-month prohibition on political activities was declared the next day. As 2022 progressed, opposition members continued to face detentions and harassment from security forces.

When ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) issued threats of military intervention in Niger following the July 2023 coup there, Chad's president was among the first to express

opposition. Interestingly, many African leaders who themselves came to power through coups also objected to the proposed action. The presidents of Burkina Faso and Mali went so far as to label ECOWAS's stance as "a declaration of war".

## Elections in 2024

The transition to elections in 2024 was marked by significant events. The election, held in May, saw Mahamat Déby winning the presidency. On one hand, this result has brought a measure of stability to Chad, but on the other hand, it signals a continuation of authoritarianism. The situation was further complicated by the killing of Chad's main opposition leader and potential presidential candidate, Yaya Dillo, by Chadian security forces on 28 February 2024, highlighting the ongoing political tensions and challenges to democratic processes in the country. Combined legislative and local polls are [scheduled for 25 November 2024](#) (Daily Maverick, 9 September 2024).

In the context of violence, coups and other issues that affect the country and the region, Christians have also suffered as they are often seen as being allies to the 'other side' and as 'foreign agents'.

## Political and legal landscape

Chad is a republic and introduced multi-party democracy in 1996. In the same year, a multi-party presidential election was held and Déby won the election. Déby was declared the winner in the following three presidential elections (in 2001, 2006 and 2011). Some of the elections were [boycotted](#) by opposition parties angry over the government's unwillingness to allow opposition parties to campaign freely and fairly (BBC News, 25 April 2011). In 2016 and 2021, Déby won further terms in office as president.

Over the years, the government of Chad has been [accused](#) of carrying out torture, extra-judicial killings, unlawful detention and more (Amnesty International, 7 February 2008). Freedom of the press, freedom of expression and assembly have been restricted. In a significant development that is believed to have set a precedent in Africa, the former president of Chad, Issene Habre, was [convicted](#) in May 2016 (by an African Union-backed court) of crimes against humanity for atrocities committed during his rule and sentenced to life imprisonment in Senegal (BBC News, 30 May 2016), where he died in August 2021.

According to the [Freedom House](#) 2024 report, Chad is rated as "Not Free" with a low score of 15 out of 100. Here are five major developments from the report:

- **Political instability and authoritarianism:** The death of longtime President Idriss Déby Itno in 2021 led to a military coup, with his son, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, taking control. The transition period, initially set for 18 months, was extended by two years in 2022, prolonging the authoritarian rule.
- **Civil liberties suppression:** In 2023, the transitional government continued to suppress civil liberties, including freedom of the press and assembly. Journalists faced arrests, and peaceful protests were met with lethal force, highlighting the ongoing repression under the Déby regime.
- **Electoral process and constitutional changes:** A new constitution was reportedly approved in a December 2023 referendum, allowing junta members and transitional government officials to compete in the 2024 elections: May 2024 for the presidential election and November 2024 for the combined legislative and local elections. The referendum was boycotted by the opposition,

and main opposition leader Yaya Dillo was assassinated in February 2024, further questioning the fairness of the electoral process.

- **Refugee crisis:** Chad is experiencing instability due to ongoing rebel activities in the north and south, as well as a dire humanitarian crisis exacerbated by the influx of Sudanese refugees fleeing the civil war in neighboring Sudan. By the end of 2023, nearly 500,000 Sudanese refugees had crossed into eastern Chad, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region.
- **Corruption and governance:** Corruption remains rampant, with the government operating with minimal transparency. The transitional government, led by Mahamat Idriss Déby, continues to rule by decree, with little opportunity for civil society to engage or access government information. As [Human Rights Watch 2024](#) reported, human rights abuses continue.

In summary, Chad's legal and political environment is characterized by hostility towards dissent, limited freedom of expression and assembly, lack of free and fair elections, and rampant nepotism. Compounding these issues is the fact that the current president assumed power through a coup, following the unexpected death of his predecessor, who was also his father.

### Gender perspective

In August 2022, the Higher Islamic Council ruled that women are now liable for a [fine](#) of up to \$30 known as *amchilini* for rejecting a marriage proposal (The Telegraph, 11 August 2022).

### Religious landscape

Chad: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	6,003,000	31.9
Muslim	11,339,000	60.2
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	3,000	0.0
Ethnic religionist	1,258,000	6.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	213,000	1.1
Atheist	2,700	0.0
Agnostic	22,600	0.1
Other	6,400	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

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

Islam first came to the country in the 11th century but did not become a national religion until the 16th and 17th centuries when the country had become established as a route for the Muslim slave trade. Chad is now a Muslim majority country.

Although Chad is a secular republic, Islam is the majority religion and pervades the whole of society causing some Chadians to show hostility and intolerance towards Christians whom they regard as 'infidels'. The Arab, Kanembu, Bornu and Buduma ethnic groups are mostly Muslim and have an antagonistic relationship with the Wadai Bulala, Kobe, Tama, Barma and the Mesmedje ethnic groups, who are mostly Christian.

According to the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Chad](#)):

- "Most Muslims adhere to the Sufi Tijaniyah tradition. A small minority hold beliefs associated with Wahhabism, Salafism, or follow the political-religious doctrine espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood. Most Protestants are evangelical Christians. There are small numbers of Baha'is and Jehovah's Witnesses."
- "There is a significant Muslim presence in the south, but minimal Christian presence in the north. Religious distribution is mixed in urban areas, and indigenous religions are often practiced to some degree along with Islam and Christianity."

## Economic landscape

According to the [World Bank Working Group](#) (last updated 21 March 2024), Chad continues to face a range of complex challenges:

- **Economic outlook:** Chad's economy, heavily reliant on oil production, is expected to see its strongest performance since 2014, with GDP growth projected at 4.1% in 2023. However, growth is expected to slow in 2024 due to a decline in oil prices and reduced public investment. Despite some improvements in agricultural production, food insecurity remains a pressing issue, and inflation is anticipated to decrease slightly over the next few years.
- **Security and humanitarian crisis:** Chad grapples with significant security challenges due to conflicts in neighboring countries and the impacts of desertification and the drying up of Lake Chad. The crisis in Sudan has resulted in a substantial influx of refugees - see below: *Social and cultural landscape*.
- **Poverty and social vulnerability:** Poverty remains pervasive, with 42.3% of the population living below the national poverty line. The extreme poverty rate has also risen, reaching 35.4% in 2023, up from 31.2% in 2018. Chad's Human Capital Index is alarmingly low at 0.30, indicating that children born today will be 70% less productive as adults compared to those who receive quality education and health services.
- **Risks and challenges:** Chad's future is marked by significant risks, including potential declines in oil prices, political instability, rising insecurity, and climate-related challenges. The ongoing conflict in Sudan could further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, strain public finances, and heighten inflationary pressures.

Updated in October 2023, the [Heritage Foundation's](#) Index of Economic Freedom ranks Chad 136th out of 184 countries, with an economic freedom score of 51.4, classifying its economy as "mostly unfree." Chad's score has decreased by 0.6 points from the previous year and is below both the world

and regional averages. The country faces significant challenges in various pillars of economic freedom, particularly in the rule of law, where property rights, judicial effectiveness, and government integrity are all weak.

Key points include:

- **Rule of law:** Chad scores poorly, with weak protection of property rights, low judicial effectiveness, and significant corruption.
- **Government taxes:** The country scores relatively well in fiscal health, government spending, and tax burden, with a top individual income tax rate of 30% and a corporate tax rate of 35%.
- **Regulatory efficiency:** Chad's regulatory environment is inefficient, with low scores in business freedom and labor freedom. However, the monetary freedom score is above the world average.
- **Open markets:** Trade freedom is hindered by high tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and the investment environment is constrained by institutional weaknesses. Access to financing remains limited, further restricting private-sector growth.

Overall, Chad's economic freedom is significantly limited by its fragile institutional framework, which hampers meaningful economic progress.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [World Factbook Chad](#) (accessed 30 September 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Sara (Ngambaye/Sara/Madjingaye/Mbaye) 30.5%, Kanembu/Bornu/Buduma 9.8%, Arab 9.7%, Wadai/Maba/Masalit/Mimi 7%, Gorane 5.8%, Masa/Musseye/Musgum 4.9%, many others (2014-15 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Arabic (official), Sara (in the south), more than 120 different languages and dialects
- **Urban population:** 23.8% of the total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.1% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Median age:** 16.1 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.3 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years of age and above):** 22.3%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years of age and older):** 69.4%
- **Unemployment, total:** 1.9% of labor force
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** is 3.1%

According to the [UNHCR Operational data portal](#) (accessed 19 March 2024):

- **Refugees:** As of 16 March 2024, the number of all refugees in Chad was estimated to be 1,155,421. The main countries of origin were: Sudan (977,983), CAR (134,015), Nigeria (21,381) and Cameroon (20,080).
- **IDPs:** As of 29 February 2024, the number of registered IDPs in Chad was 215,928.

According to the [UNDP Human Development Report Chad](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Human Development Index:** 0.394 with a ranking of 189 out of 193 countries (2022). Chad is one of the poorest countries in the world.

- **Life expectancy at birth:** 53.0 years (2022)
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.766 (2022)
- **Poverty:** 38.4% of the population are living below the income poverty line, PPP \$1.90 a day.

According to [World Bank Chad overview](#) (21 March 2024):

- "Poverty and vulnerability are pervasive in Chad, with 42.3% of the population living below the national poverty line. Extreme poverty (\$2.15/day per capita [PPP 2017]) also remains high in the country and has risen significantly, from 31.2% in 2018 to 34.9% in 2021 and 35.4% in 2023."
- "The extreme poverty rate (measured at the 2017 \$2.15 purchasing power parity threshold) fell by 1.1 percentage points between 2022 and 2023, but given the high population growth, the number of people (5.4 million) living in extreme poverty remains high. In addition, security restrictions, the low geographical coverage of social protection programs and the current crisis in Sudan limit the possibilities of reducing extreme poverty. As a result, an additional 237,479 people will fall into extreme poverty in 2024, representing an increase of 0.4 percentage points in the extreme poverty rate."
- "The World Bank's Human Capital Index for Chad is 0.30. This means that a child born today will be 70% less productive as an adult than a child who has received a quality education and appropriate health services. Furthermore, one in five Chadian children will not reach the age of five, and 40% of them suffer from stunted growth, with the risk of lasting consequences for their cognitive development. Between the ages of 4 and 18, Chadian children spend an average of just 5 years in school."
- "With 856 deaths per 100,000 live births, Chad has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality, a phenomenon exacerbated by the high number of early pregnancies (164.5 births per 1,000 teenagers aged 15 to 19)."

## Technological landscape

Chad is among the poorest countries in Africa. Coups and civil wars have made progress in the country very difficult. One of the areas affected is technology. The country still depends on non-electronic methods for doing business.

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

- **Internet usage:** Chad had 4.18 million internet users at the start of 2024. Internet penetration stands at 22.5% of the total population, indicating limited access to the internet for the majority of Chadians.
- **Social media usage:** There were 973.0 thousand social media users in Chad in January 2024. This figure represents just 5.2% of the total population, reflecting a relatively low adoption of social media platforms compared to global averages. 25.9% of Chad's social media users were female, while 74.1% were male.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** Chad had 13.06 million active cellular mobile connections in early 2024. The number of mobile connections is equivalent to 70.4% of the population, suggesting widespread access to mobile technology, although not necessarily internet-enabled devices.

As reported by [Reuters](#) on 4 September 2024: "China has signed multiple agreements with Chad and Senegal involving projects ranging from electricity and infrastructure to drinking water and communications technology at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing ... . The world's biggest bilateral lender, which is hosting 50 African nations, wants to re-align its relations with developing economies around President Xi Jinping's new mantra of 'small and beautiful projects', instead of big-ticket infrastructure."

## Security situation

Chad's security situation is characterized by several key issues:

- **Political instability:** Following the death of long-time leader Idriss Déby, his son General Mahamat Déby assumed power with promises of a transition to democratic governance. However, this transition was postponed until elections in 2024 and included a harsh crackdown on dissent. The brutal suppression of protests, particularly those opposing the extension of the transitional government's term, further eroded public trust in the government's commitment to a civilian-led democracy. Reports from various human rights organizations have documented the severe state-led violence against protestors, resulting in numerous casualties and mass arrests. The heavy-handed response, including curtailing Internet access in opposition areas, has only deepened the population's distrust in the transitional process.
- **Role of social media:** While social media in Chad has the potential to increase civic engagement and political participation, it has also been exploited to spread disinformation, incite violence and exacerbate ethnic tensions. The government's response to this dual-edged tool has been inconsistent, at times leveraging it to bolster its narrative while simultaneously restricting access to prevent organized dissent. This dynamic has complicated the political landscape, as social media becomes both a platform for citizen voice and a tool for deepening societal divides.
- **Violent Islamic militants:** The threat from Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) remains a significant challenge for Chad's security forces, particularly in the Lake Chad region. A notable escalation occurred in March 2023, when a Boko Haram attack on Chadian troops in Bohoma resulted in the deaths of 98 soldiers, underlining the group's significant capabilities. This incident is part of a broader pattern of increasing violence by Boko Haram and ISWAP, which has had devastating effects on the local population, especially in Chad's Lake Province. These jihadist groups are increasingly targeting religious minorities, including Christian communities, in their campaign to establish an Islamic State, leading to heightened insecurity and fear among these populations.
- **Regional and domestic violence:** In addition to threats from jihadist groups, Chad is also contending with violence in its southwestern regions, where armed groups have specifically targeted Christian communities. In May 2023, these groups intensified their attacks, resulting in the deaths of many Christians, the burning down of numerous homes, and the displacement of thousands who have been forced into IDP camps. This violence has created a humanitarian crisis and further destabilized an already fragile region. The spread of Wahhabism, despite being banned by the government, continues to radicalize young Imams, contributing to an environment of fear and division, particularly in the rural southern parts of the country.
- **Government response and regional cooperation:** Chad's government has played a pivotal role in regional security efforts, including military interventions in neighboring countries like the Central

African Republic and Mali, and joint operations with Nigeria, Benin, Niger, and Cameroon against Boko Haram. However, despite these efforts, the security situation within Chad remains precarious. The continued insurgencies in the north, the emergence of new rebel groups in the south, and the government's reliance on a swift and often brutal judicial process, as seen with the 2015 executions of Boko Haram members, highlight the ongoing challenges in stabilizing the country.

The compounded effects of these security issues—ranging from political instability and social media exploitation to violent extremism and targeted attacks on religious communities—paint a picture of a country struggling to maintain control amidst rising internal and external threats. The situation remains fluid, with potential for further deterioration if these challenges are not addressed comprehensively.

## Christian origins

Even though Roman Catholic priests attempted to establish a Christian mission-station as early as the 1660s, this was only possible after the French fully controlled the country - i.e. after the First World War. A fully institutionalized presence was established in 1946. Baptist missionaries first entered Chad in 1925 and the Sudan United Mission in 1927. Seventh-day Adventists have been active in the country since 1967.

## Church spectrum today

Chad: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	3,036,000	50.6
Protestant	1,412,000	23.5
Independent	754,000	12.6
Unaffiliated	800,000	13.3
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,002,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,722,000	28.7
Pentecostal-Charismatic	505,000	8.4

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".

Most Christian communities and churches are to be found in the south.

## 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=Chad>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

## External Links

- Recent history: assassinated - <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad40#ixzz410R0Gran>
- Recent history: seized power - <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2006/04/19/idriss-deby-president-under-siege>
- Recent history: put on trial - <https://www.hrw.org/blog-feed/trial-hissene-habre>
- Recent history: BBC News, 20 April 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-56815708>
- Recent history: scheduled for 25 November 2024 - <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-09-09-chads-can-november-elections-improve-on-past-disputed-polls/>
- Political and legal landscape: boycotted - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13187097>
- Political and legal landscape: accused - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2008/02/chad-authorities-must-act-prevent-extrajudicial-executions-20080207/>
- Political and legal landscape: convicted - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36411466>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom House - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chad/freedom-world/2024>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch 2024 - [https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/chad?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwIIG2BhC4ARIsADBgpVToCp7zLKq40anwpiwxWeOec0liPWPAXCHaTYXos0xKY7tYHM8N90QaAu96EALw\\_wcB](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/chad?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwIIG2BhC4ARIsADBgpVToCp7zLKq40anwpiwxWeOec0liPWPAXCHaTYXos0xKY7tYHM8N90QaAu96EALw_wcB)
- Political and legal landscape: fine - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/08/11/people-who-refuse-marriage-proposals-chad-fined/>
- Religious landscape description: IRFR 2023 Chad - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/chad/>
- Economic landscape: World Bank Working Group - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/chad/overview>
- Economic landscape: Heritage Foundation' - <https://www.heritage.org/index/pages/country-pages/chad>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook Chad - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/chad/>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/tcd>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Chad - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/TCD>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Bank Chad overview - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/chad/overview>
- Technological landscape: DataReportal Digital Chad: 2024 - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-chad>
- Technological landscape: Reuters - <https://www.reuters.com/world/china-signs-electricity-infrastructure-deals-with-chad-senegal-2024-09-04/>