

World Watch Research

Sudan:

Background Information

September 2024



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



Sudan: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
49,358,000	2,028,000	4.1

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

Recent history

Since becoming independent from Great Britain in 1956, Sudan has experienced persistent and recurring violent conflict, primarily driven by struggles between the central government in Khartoum and armed groups from the country’s peripheries. Sudan’s traditional power structures were dominated by an Islamist regime, headed by President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in a coup in 1989. Sudan became infamous in the international community for funding radical Islamic groups, committing atrocities and fundamentally undermining freedom of religion. The popular movement that helped end the era of Omar Bashir in 2019 is now facing a new military dictatorship, since the army staged a coup in October 2021.

2018: The year began with [demonstrations](#) against the imposition of austerity measures that effectively tripled Sudan’s US dollar exchange rate and the increased price of basic commodities

(Human Rights Watch - HRW, 29 January 2020). But the government resorted to excessive force to disperse the peaceful demonstrations; that included the use of beatings and the unlawful detention of hundreds of protesters, activists and opposition party members. In December 2018, the USA categorized Sudan as one of 10 "[Countries of Particular Concern](#)" deemed guilty of severe violations of religious freedom (CNN, 11 December 2018). Meanwhile, Sudan's anti-government protests grew as 2018 drew to an end, with security forces [killing](#) the first 9 student protesters (Amnesty International - AI, 21 December 2018) and then a further [37 protesters](#) in demonstrations that rocked the country (AI, 24 December 2018).

2019: In April 2019, the unthinkable happened - one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, President al-Bashir, was overthrown. He had declared a state of emergency on 22 February 2019 and dissolved government at federal and provincial levels and appointed security chiefs to head all the country's 18 regional states. The ensuing [brutal crackdown](#) intensified the demonstrators' defiance (International Crisis Group - ICG, 26 February 2019). The standoff continued throughout March until finally on 11 April 2019, the army [removed al-Bashir from office](#) (BBC News, 11 April 2019) and assumed provisional power, with Sudan's Prosecutor General later announcing that the former president would be [charged](#) for the killing of protesters (AI, 14 May 2019). However, on 2 June 2019, the security forces [killed scores of protesters](#) who were holding a sit-in in Khartoum to protest against the military council's declaration that it would remain in power for three years (AI, 5 June 2019). Sudan's Transitional Military Council later [admitted](#) to deciding on the action that killed more than 100 protesters (AI, 14 June 2019).

The ex-president and some top members of his cabinet were allegedly moved to a prison and were [charged with corruption](#) (Al-Jazeera, 13 June 2019). However, the protesters demanded civilian rule and the first transitional leader (former defense minister) was [forced to resign](#) after one day (New York Times, 12 April 2019). The protest leaders and the Transitional Council failed to agree on the course the army was taking, particularly after so many protesters had been killed in the process. Finally, in August 2019 the following [agreements](#) were made (BBC News, 16 August 2019):

- Power-sharing would last for 39 months
- A sovereign council, cabinet, and legislative body would be formed
- A general would head the council for the first 21 months, a civilian for the remaining 18 months
- A prime minister, nominated by the pro-democracy movement, would head the cabinet
- The ministers of defense and interior would be chosen by the army.

2020: Sudan's first year of a three-year transition to democratic rule following the dramatic removal of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019, was marked by a failing economy, political tensions and continuing popular protests for justice and reforms. Nevertheless, on 31 August 2020, the government and a coalition of rebel groups made the positive step of signing a [peace deal in Juba](#) that would end the country's internal armed conflicts and provide for cooperation with the ICC in its Darfur investigation (Reuters, 31 August 2020). Meanwhile, the political and economic difficulties were compounded by the crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021: The crisis deepened when the army made the decision to oust the civilian transitional council in a [coup](#) in October 2021 (CBS News, 25 October 2021), with head of the military [General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan](#) emerging as Sudan's strongman (AP News, 27 October 2021). Civilian leaders were arrested

and protesters took to the streets. Pressure from the international community forced the coup leaders to announce the reinstatement of the prime minister; however, there were no meaningful steps taken by the coup leaders to solve the post-coup crisis. Popular protests continued into December 2021. The newly reinstated Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok then ordered a [halt to the firing](#) of civil servants and a review of all appointments made after his detention in the preceding month's military coup (Al-Jazeera, 24 November 2021). A few days later, he [dismissed](#) the country's police chiefs and replaced them after the brutal killing of pro-democracy demonstrators (Al-Jazeera, 27 November 2021).

2022: In January 2022, the UN offered to broker an end to the political deadlock and a prominent Sudanese pro-democracy group [conditionally accepted the offer](#) (Al-Jazeera, 16 January 2022). The heavy-handed response by security forces against peaceful protesters led the USA to impose [sanctions](#) on Sudan's Central Reserve Police in March 2022 (Al-Jazeera, 21 March 2022). In April, crowds of Sudanese protesters gathered in Khartoum, and other cities to mark the [third anniversary](#) of former leader Omar al-Bashir's removal from power and to protest against the current military rule (Al-Jazeera, 11 April 2022).

After pressure to free prisoners mounted, high-profile individuals including all 19 members of the "Dismantling Committee" [established in 2019](#) (Al-Jazeera, 29 November 2019) to track corruption and embezzlement by the former regime were [released](#) after a judge refused to sanction their continued detention; nevertheless, many ordinary protesters were still left in prison facing mistreatment (HRW, 28 April 2022). With growing international pressure to commit to dialogue, Sudan's military council [lifted the state of emergency](#) it had imposed in October 2021 when the civilian government was removed (Al-Jazeera, 29 May 2022). In the period January - July 2022, protesters continued to take to the streets, demanding the resignation of the military rulers and the handing-over of power to civilians. On 30 June 2022, more than [seven protesters were shot dead](#) by the security forces (Reuters, 1 July 2022). In July 2022, the military leadership indicated that it would step down, but protesters viewed this as a [ruse](#) (Al-Jazeera, 6 July 2022).

2023: In April, war erupted in the heart of Sudan-Khartoum. De facto ruler, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is in command of the government forces fighting against Burhan's deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as "Hemedti") commanding the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This conflict has led to massive displacement and civilians are caught up in the fighting. The warring parties have their own supporters. It is alleged that Ethiopia, UAE and Khalifa Haftar of Libya support the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It has also been [reported](#) that Wagner mercenaries support RSF (CNN, 21 April 2023). Egypt is allegedly supporting the Sudanese army, helping with tactical advice, intelligence and even logistics.

2024: Sudan continued to face significant challenges due to the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Of particular significance were the following:

The humanitarian crisis: The conflict caused a severe humanitarian crisis, resulting in over 14,000 deaths and more than 8.6 million people displaced, including 1.8 million refugees. Approximately half of Sudan's population, around 25 million people, needed lifesaving assistance ([OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)) ([UN News, 19 April 2024](#)).

Widespread atrocities: Both SAF and RSF committed numerous atrocities, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon, recruitment of child soldiers, and acts of torture. Indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas led to significant civilian casualties, especially in Khartoum, Kordofan, and Darfur ([OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)) ([UN News, 19 April 2024](#)).

Ethnic violence in Darfur: Ethnically motivated violence in Darfur resulted in thousands of deaths, particularly targeting the Masalit ethnic community. Mass graves were discovered, highlighting the extent of the violence perpetrated by RSF and allied militias ([OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)).

In a nutshell, the following are the major events since 2018:

- **December 2018:** Mass protests against al-Bashir
- **April 2019:** Al-Bashir overthrown.
- **June 2019:** Bloody crackdown by the army/security forces
- **August 2019:** Power-sharing between civilian representatives and the army
- **December 2019:** Al-Bashir convicted of corruption and sentenced to two years.
- **March 2020:** Prime Minister Hamdok survived assassination attempt.
- **March-June 2020:** Unrest spreads with protestors demanding justice for people who were killed by the army.
- **October 2020:** Peace-deal with rebel groups.
- **February 2021:** New cabinets that included seven ministers from the former rebel groups were announced.
- **October 2021:** The army conducted what can be characterized as a coup.
- **January 2022:** Prime Minister Hamdok resigned.
- **August 2022:** Introduction of the 'Community Squad'. Many believe this is similar to the Morality police-force which was disbanded in 2019. The Morality police were known for seriously persecuting Christians.
- **April 2023:** Civil war erupted between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).
- **October 2023 and November 2023:** Reports emerged of ethnic cleansing being committed in Darfur. The conflict, primarily driven by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias, targeted specific ethnic communities.
- **April 2024:** Reports indicated growing fears that the conflict in North Darfur could easily spread to other countries due to its proximity to Chad.

Political and legal landscape

As explained above in *Recent History*, in April 2019, one of the longest-serving dictators in Africa, Omar al-Bashir, was overthrown by the pressure of a popular movement demanding more democracy. There had been signs of discontent for some time among the general population due to the rise in prices of oil, bread and other goods. Even though the ousting of the president can be seen as a triumph for the pro-democracy movement, it was also a cause for concern since former ruling Islamists were still very influential in the country and another civil war could easily have been ignited.

The army's Transitional Council and the leaders of the pro-democracy movement signed an agreement to pave the way for democracy in the following 3-4 years, but the armed forces staged a coup against the civilian leaders in October 2021. This coup did not happen out of nowhere. The October coup took place exactly before the army was supposed to transfer the role of heading the Transitional Council to

civilian partners in November 2021, as agreed in the power-sharing deal. The generals knew that they would face scrutiny for what they had done in the previous decades under al-Bashir's leadership if the transition was to be carried out successfully and elections were to be held on time. Hence, they acted to stop the process which would have placed them under civilian and elected government control. Many of the generals had allegedly participated in atrocities that were committed during the fighting in Darfur and South Kordofan. In early April 2022, the ICC held its [first trial](#) on Darfur crimes. The trial is against Ali Mohammed Ali, former leader of the notorious Janjaweed militia, currently in ICC custody (HRW News Release, 29 March 2022).

According to Freedom House, Sudan's score is just 6 out of 100 in the [Freedom in the World 2024 Index](#), with the country's status categorized as 'Not Free'.

Sudanese politics has always been controversial and the country has never been at ease with the international community nor with its own people. This was particularly the case for the indigenous Africans in the country which led to the independence of South Sudan. The secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (after a referendum in January 2011) was the culmination of a painful and decades-long history of internal conflict between the powerful Muslim Arabs in the north and the Christian and Ethno-religious indigenous African population of the south.

The intended reforms by the civilian Transitional Council could have opened up political and civil space in the country, also leading to more freedom for Christians. But these hopes were dashed by the October 2021 coup. Protests against the coup continued throughout the whole of 2022 and the first months of 2023. But things changed for the worst in April: [On 15 April 2023](#), a disagreement about returning to civilian rule and the integration of RSF forces into the national army triggered a major conflict between RSF and the Sudanese army. The crisis has caused hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee to neighboring countries seeking safety (Toward Freedom, 18 April 2023).

Gender perspective

The legal landscape facing women and girls is additionally restrictive, in particular making marriage a place of enacting violent repression of female converts. Sudan is one of just six UN states not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Sudan recognizes multiple forms of family law, connected to a person's religious community. To provide judgement on family matters, there are three types of religious court in operation: Sharia courts, Christian/civil courts and traditional courts. There is no legislation that prohibits domestic violence, marital rape or child marriage and Article 40 of the 1991 Muslim Personal Law provides that once a child is 10 years old, they may be married with parental or guardian consent. Child marriage is widespread and (according to [Girls Not Brides Sudan](#), accessed 1 August 2024), 34% of girls are married before the age of 18. Whilst a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, a woman must file for divorce through the courts. A 2016 UNHRC report cites a culture of impunity for perpetrators of domestic violence and a silencing of victims ([UNHRC, 18 April 2016](#)). While there are no reliable statistics on the prevalence of rape, it is understood to be widespread. The authorities appear to be unwilling to address it even when government forces were implicated in rape, as underscored in a recent incident where a female social worker who briefed the UN Security Council on allegations of multiple instances of rape committed by government security forces following the coup was threatened with the accusation of [revealing government secrets](#) (Al-Jazeera, 18 April 2022).

Before the October 2021 coup, women had been calling for greater participation in parliament under the Transitional Council, wanting more than just assuming ‘soft’ positions in which they would have nominal power ([CMI Sudan brief 2020](#)).

Military service is compulsory for men between the age of 18 and 33, who must serve 1-2 years ([World Population Review 2021](#)).

Religious landscape

Sudan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	2,028,000	4.1
Muslim	45,501,000	92.2
Hindu	1,000	0.0
Buddhist	1,100	0.0
Ethnic religionist	1,299,000	2.6
Jewish	61	0.0
Bahai	3,100	0.0
Atheist	75,000	0.2
Agnostic	448,000	0.9
Other	2,400	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

The religious composition of Sudan is a controversial issue. World Christian Database (WCD, accessed May 2024) estimates the Christian population at 4.1% and the Muslim majority at 92.2%. According to government statistics, around 97% of the population is Muslim, which would make the Christian presence less than 3%. Various advocacy groups contest these low figures (and those of WCD), claiming that non-Muslims in the country make up 15-20%.

Almost all Muslims are Sunni but significant distinctions exist, particularly among the Sufi orders. In addition, there are small Muslim minorities, including Shia and the Republican Brothers, based predominantly in Khartoum. There is also a growing (yet still small) percentage of Salafists. The main traditional Salafist group, *Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohammediya*, advocates peaceful means for achieving its objectives. However, the newer radical groups tend to be more militant and confrontational and have staged attacks on Sufi, Shia and Christian targets over the years.

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

- "Almost all Muslims in the country identify as Sunni, although there are significant distinctions among followers of different Sunni traditions, particularly among Sufi orders. Small Shia Muslim communities are based predominantly in Khartoum."
- "The Jewish community is statistically small in the Khartoum area with most having sought shelter in surrounding communities since the conflict began in April [2022]."
- ""Government statistics indicate less than 1 percent of the population, primarily in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States, adhere to traditional African religious beliefs. Some Christians and Muslims incorporate aspects of these traditional beliefs into their religious practice."
- "The Sudan Council of Churches reports the presence of 36 Christian denominations, of which 24 are registered denominations."
- "Government offices and businesses are closed on Friday for prayers and follow a Sunday to Thursday work week. A 2019 decree mandates that academic institutions shall not give examinations on Sunday and authorizes Christians to leave work at 10 a.m. on Sunday for religious activities. Individuals may also leave work to celebrate Orthodox Christmas, an official state holiday, along with several key Islamic holidays."

From 1999 to 2018, Sudan had been designated by the US Secretary of State as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its serious and systematic violations of religious freedom. Religious freedom, although guaranteed by the 2005 Interim Constitution, was not upheld in practice. Moreover, Sudan's criminal law based on Islamic law (allowing punishments such as amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of 'indecent' and 'immorality') had been applied indiscriminately especially against indigenous African Christians.

In 2020, the Transitional Council vowed to abolish all laws that violated fundamental human rights - including the [apostasy law](#), which prohibited anyone converting from Islam to a different religion; also, it declared that women would no longer require a permit from a male relative to travel (HRW, 16 July 2020).

In September 2020, it was [announced](#) that Sudan's Transitional Council had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule in the nation (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020). However, things fundamentally changed following the army's decision to conduct a coup in October 2021, effectively ending all hope of change. To summarize, most of the positive steps taken following the removal of President al-Bashir were undone by this coup. As if that was not enough, the fighting between powerful paramilitary group RSF and the Sudanese army since April 2023 has brought the country to a stand-still, creating much anxiety for the Christian community and others.

Economic landscape

According to the Heritage Foundation's [2024 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Sudan's economic freedom score is 33.9, making its economy the 173rd freest in the 2024 Index of Economic Freedom. Its rating has increased by 2.4 points from last year, and Sudan is ranked 47th out of 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. The country's economic freedom score is lower than the world and regional averages. Sudan's economy is considered "repressed" according to the 2024 Index.

- The large informal economy has been an important source of employment. Outside of the hydrocarbon sector, economic development is limited by the region's ongoing political instability. Attempts to develop and diversify the economy are constrained by a lack of institutional capacity. Rampant corruption and insufficient respect for private property rights are serious impediments to long-term private-sector development. Oil has driven much of Sudan's GDP growth. Approximately half of the population is at or below the poverty line and dependent on subsistence agriculture.

Some of the challenges affecting the Sudan economy are (according to [Coface](#), accessed 1 August 2024):

- Political instability since the overthrow of al-Bashir in 2019, the military coup in 2021 and the internal armed conflict since April 2023.
- Inter-community violence in the southern regions, marked by the presence of militias, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile.
- Poverty (35.7%), high unemployment (33% in early 2023), insecurity, dependence on food aid, risk of famine (40% of the population are predicted to suffer acute food insecurity in 2024)
- Unsustainable external debt exacerbated by the suspension of international financial aid and extremely low foreign exchange reserves.
- Currency depreciation and hyperinflation.
- The country is heading for partition.

According to 2024 [Africa Development Bank's Sudan Economic Outlook](#) (accessed 1 August 2024):

- **GDP:** The ongoing armed conflict in Sudan has significantly impacted its economic performance, with real GDP contracting by 37.5% in 2023. This drastic decline is attributed to the destruction of production capacity and the disruption of economic activities, notably in the services sector. On the demand side, the loss of income and mass displacements have led to reduced consumption. Projections for 2024 indicate a further contraction of 5.9%, assuming the conflict persists. However, a potential recovery is expected in 2025, with GDP growth projected at 0.5%, contingent upon the restoration of peace and increased reconstruction spending.
- **Inflation:** Sudan experienced hyperinflation in 2023, with the rate soaring to 245.3%. This inflationary pressure was driven by a combination of reduced government revenues, increased expenditures leading to deficit monetization, a shortage of consumer goods, and currency depreciation. Projections suggest a decrease in inflation to 157.9% in 2024 and further to 85.6% in 2025, assuming an improvement in the political situation and an increase in government revenues.
- **Fiscal deficit:** The fiscal deficit widened significantly to 9.1% of GDP in 2023, primarily due to a steep decline in tax revenue and increased expenditures. Tax revenue fell from 5.6% of GDP in 2021 to just 2.0% in 2023. The projected fiscal deficit is expected to narrow to 6.3% in 2024 and further to 2.8% in 2025, driven by anticipated improvements in government revenues and spending efficiency, provided peace is restored.

South Sudan's secession in 2011 caused a watershed in Sudan's economic history. Sudan lost about 80% of its agricultural and water resources, in addition to the loss of about 75% of oil reserves and about 90% of total exports and about 50% of government revenues. Following the loss of oil and

population, economic growth contracted by 4.4% in 2012. Even as it concluded an agreement with South Sudan to cover the export of oil from South Sudan, as well as US\$3.03bn of “transitional assistance” to be paid by South Sudan, Omar al-Bashir announced a series of deep budget cuts in June 2012 to control a ballooning fiscal deficit. Moreover, the World Bank projected that Sudan would fall back into the low-income country category, with 47% of Sudan’s population living below the poverty line. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also pushed for austerity measures. As described above, in 2018 the country saw a series of demonstrations protesting about the poor [economic situation](#) (Sudan Tribune, 5 January 2018), which finally led to the overthrow of the president in 2019. According to a country observer writing in the Mail & Guardian on 11 May 2018, the collapse started with “a [major devaluation](#) of the Sudanese pound in an effort to make the official rate for the pound drop to that of the black market. With the International Monetary Fund pushing for austerity and the rate of inflation hovering around 70%, the camel’s back was finally broken.”

Before the October 2021 coup, the Transitional Council had shown willing to negotiate with South Sudan to ease the economic crisis and obtain payment for letting South Sudanese petroleum use its pipelines. The comprehensive US sanctions which were lifted in October 2017 had a tremendous impact on the economy. The country is also attempting to develop non-oil revenues, such as gold mining and agriculture while carrying out austerity measures to reduce expenditure. (Source: [CIA World Factbook Sudan/Economy](#), accessed 1 August 2024).

In early March 2022, Sudan announced it would [float the country’s currency](#) as economic conditions deteriorated further (AP News, 7 March 2022). When war broke out between the army and the powerful paramilitary group in April 2023, this created another layer of crisis in the country.

Gender perspective

Women are economically vulnerable within Sudan. This is in part due to low education rates for girls as UNICEF reports ([UNICEF Sudan Education](#), accessed 2 January 2024):

- “[F]ollowing the pandemic, prolonged school closures and unequal mitigation strategies have negatively impacted 8.1 million children (aged 5 – 18) enrolled in school, as well as worsening the situation for 6.9 million children out of school, especially those living through conflicts and crises. The girl child is especially vulnerable – evidence suggests that COVID-19’s associated economic crises exacerbated gender inequalities in Sudan, and even more so among adolescent girls. The primary driver of dropout for girls has been economic—compounded by pregnancy, early marriage and FGM.”

According to Islamic law, sons and daughters do not have equal inheritance rights in Sudan. Under the 1991 Muslim Personal Law Act (Articles 356, 357, 359, and 373), a woman inherits half of the property of her brother(s). Under customary law, widows are commonly expected to marry a male relative within her deceased husband’s family.

Social and cultural landscape

According to [UNDP Human Development Report Sudan](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024) and [CIA World Factbook Sudan/Economy](#) (accessed 1 August 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Unspecified Sudanese Arab (approximately 70%), Fur, Beja, Nuba, Fallata, Masalit, Dajo, Gimir, Tunjur, Berti (over 500 ethnic groups)
- **Main languages:** Arabic (official), English (official), Nubian, Ta Bedawie, Fur
- **Median age:** 19.7 years
- **Urban population:** 36.% (2022 est.)
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 65.3 years (2022 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.9 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 and older):** 60.7%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 and older):** 40.4%
- **Unemployment, total of labor force:** 16.5%
- **Unemployment, youth (age 15-24):** 31.4%
- **Human Development Index:** Sudan ranks 172 out of 191 countries, with a human development value of 0.508.
- **Gender development index (GDI):** "The 2021 female HDI value for Sudan is 0.466 in contrast with 0.535 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.870.
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** "Sudan has a GII value of 0.553, ranking it 141 out of 170 countries in 2021."

Refugees/IDPs

As of July 2024, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sudan has reached approximately 7.72 million. This figure reflects the massive displacement caused by ongoing conflict since April 2023, which has severely affected regions such as Khartoum, Kordofan, and Darfur. The humanitarian situation remains critical, with widespread violence, rights violations, and limited access to essential services exacerbating the plight of the displaced populations ([UNHCR Data, accessed 1 August 2024](#)).

Gender perspective

Sudan has a patriarchal society in which men and women are expected to assume traditional gender roles. The pervading societal belief that women belong in the home and should undertake domestic responsibilities has prevented many girls from accessing school. A lack of education serves to fuel the widespread practice of early or forced marriage, as girls feel ill-equipped to search for an alternative route. Women play a leading role in raising children, representing the family at societal events and helping with agricultural duties. The persecution of Christian women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on her wider family and community.

Technological landscape

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

- **Internet usage:** 28.7% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 6.0% of the total population
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 59.8% of the total population. 68.1% of women use a mobile phone, according to Georgetown ([GIWPS Sudan](#), accessed 1 August 2024).

The fairly high number of mobile connections highlights the importance of mobile technology in Sudan, providing a critical means for communication and access to digital services. Mobile phones play a key role in bridging the digital divide, especially in areas with limited fixed-line infrastructure.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net 2023 report](#), Sudan is regarded as “not free” when it comes to internet freedom. Among other concerns, the report notes that:

- Internet services were regularly intermittently disrupted after conflict began between the RSF and SAF in April 2023. Some restrictions were due to government orders, while others were the result of the RSF occupying the Sudan Telecom Company (Sudatel) Khartoum data center and attacks on or near communications infrastructure in conflict-affected areas .
- Authorities enacted nationwide internet restrictions multiple times throughout the coverage period in response to planned protests against military rule.
- In November 2022, the cabinet passed an amendment to the LCC, under which offenders will receive a mandatory prison term and a fine in cases where they defame a public figure or agency/
- Violence, online harassment, and arrests targeted at journalists in retaliation for their reporting increased after clashes between the RSF and SAF began, with both sides seeking to control the narrative and conceal human rights abuses.
- In July 2022, after tribal conflict erupted in Blue Nile State, telecommunications service providers were ordered to suspend all SIM cards not registered with a national ID number.

Internet and digital usage in Sudan should also be understood in the context of the current political climate in the country. Since the 2019 coup and the ongoing civil war, there have been serious restrictions to media and Internet usage by the warring parties. Digital infrastructure has also been destroyed and investment in the sector or the country at large halted due to the insecurity. For example, according to a [March 2024 report](#) published by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation:

- "In Sudan, the Transitional Military Council killed over 100 pro-democracy protesters, leading to a near-total internet blackout for over a month in June 2019. The military also shut down phone and SMS services for two days before a nationwide pro-democracy march on 30 October 2021. Shutdowns were deployed again in December 2021, January 2022, and around anniversary marches in June and October 2022 to quell protests”.

Furthermore, Sudan is one of the lowest performing countries in Africa when it comes to media freedoms with the majority perception being that media is not free, according to the [Afro Barometer 2024 Media Freedoms Report](#) (Dispatch No. 800, 30 April 2024).

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (publication date: July 2024):

- "The difficult economic conditions have meant that for several years telcos have reported revenue under hyperinflationary reporting standards. Pressure on revenue has made it difficult for operators to invest in infrastructure upgrades, and so provide improved services to customers. Despite this, the number of mobile subscribers increased 7.% in 20201, year-on-year. This level of growth is expected to have been maintained in 2022, though could slow from 2023 as the acute influences resulting the pandemic begin to wane."
- "The country's poor fixed-line infrastructure has helped the development of mobile broadband services. Sudatel, Cameroon's Camtel, and Chad-based SudaChad Telecom's planned investment, the WE-Africa-NA terrestrial fibre link, will connect from Port-Sudan then on to Kribi in Cameroon, passing through Chad. The new build aims to respond to rising data demand in all three countries, particularly as usage has been accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic with digital and data services gaining traction."

According to [World Factbook Sudan](#), accessed 1 August 2024):

- Compared to other countries in the region, Sudan has a well-equipped cellular communications system which covers most of the major cities with ongoing upgrades (2020). "Following the establishment of Sudan's civilian-led transitional government in August 2019, government-owned broadcasters became increasingly independent from government and military control. Following the October 2021 military takeover, additional restrictions were imposed on these government-owned broadcasters, which now practice a heightened degree of self-censorship but still operate more independently than in the pre-2019 environment".

According to [Space Watch](#) reporting in November 2019, Sudan's Chinese built-satellite was launched (from China) on 3 November 2019. In common with countries such as Ethiopia and Egypt, Sudan has been developing space technologies in a bid to support economic growth and improve the capabilities of its military and agricultural sectors.

The majority of Christians in the country reside in cities, which generally have better infrastructure and technology than rural areas.

Security situation

Despite South Sudan's independence, armed conflict over dwindling resources and political power (typical aspects of Sudan's post-independence situation) has persisted. While the root causes of the conflict remain constant (e.g., political marginalization, land dispossession and unimplemented promises), ethnic dynamics in the various regions of Sudan and South Sudan have kept changing. For example, in Abyei, a province that is being claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, the Misserya Arabs (the government of Sudan's main local supporters) have grown increasingly frustrated with Khartoum, while the Ngok Dinka tribe (which enjoys support from the government of South Sudan) has become vocal and strong. Although Sudan's political system is based on a decentralized system of governance and multi-party politics, real power had always been wielded by ex-President al-Bashir and his ruling Islamist National Congress Party (NCP). The independence of South Sudan, which signaled the end of the Government of National Unity and the withdrawal of the South's representatives from parliament,

further reinforced the dominance of al-Bashir’s political party. It also signaled the start of another civil war: SPLA-North versus the government of Sudan.

This war resulted from the fact that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA - signed in January 2005) failed to solve the problem of the marginalization of Sudan’s peripheral regions, in particular, the so-called ‘three areas’, consisting of Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Located strategically along Sudan’s volatile North-South border and possessing considerable natural resources (including oil), finding solutions to the contested issues in these three areas has long been deemed critical for the stability of the two countries. Dominated by two main tribes, Abyei in particular was influential in the domestic politics of both Sudan and South Sudan. The Ngok Dinka tribe, a subset of South Sudan’s largest ethnic group, have traditionally lived in Abyei, and have strong representation in the leadership of both the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). During the civil war years, the Dinka - which has a largely African Christian population - was heavily displaced. At the same time, the Misserya, a largely Arab Muslim nomadic tribe which migrates through the region to graze their cattle, form an important constituency of the NCP and fought against the Ngok Dinka during the civil war. This problem is expected to continue in the foreseeable future.

Under ex-President al-Bashir, there had been a coordinated effort by the government to mobilize and militarize tribal militias (including but not limited to Arab militias) known as *Janjaweed*. The aim was to use these groups to work towards creating an Islamic state at the expense of other religious groups in the country. Several reports by different human right groups have accused these militias of committing gross violations of human rights against non-Arab citizens of Sudan.

In late January 2018, the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission to Darfur agreed with the Sudanese government to open a temporary base in [Darfur’s Jebel Marra](#), as mandated by the June 2017 UN Security Council resolution, in the wake of sectarian violence and a suspected chemical attack that caused horrific suffering to civilians (AI, 1 February 2018). Reports of abuse by government forces and affiliated militias continued to surface, including attacks that damaged or destroyed at least 45 villages in Jebel Marra between July 2018 and February 2019. Meanwhile, possible plans to [close the joint mission](#) unnerved civilians who relied on the base for protection (AI, 11 June 2019). Rebel groups signed a peace agreement with the government in October 2020, but in 2021, it was reported that the [war was far from over](#) (The New Humanitarian, 21 April 2021).

The United Nations African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which operated in the war-torn Darfur region between 2007 and the end of its mandate in July 2021, [withdrew the last of its personnel](#) in December 2021 (CIA World Factbook Sudan). Predictably, just days after the last international peacekeepers left, a [deadly attack](#) was launched against civilians in west Darfur by ethnic Arab militia (Al-Jazeera, 22 January 2022). In April 2022, at least [168 people](#) were killed in fighting between Arabs and non-Arabs in the Darfur region, with the notorious *Janjaweed* blamed for the latest attacks (Al-Jazeera, 24 April 2022).

In late 2020 and 2021, thousands of refugees from Ethiopia crossed the border to escape the conflict between Ethiopian government and Tigray forces. What exacerbated the matter was Sudan’s border dispute with Ethiopia concerning Fashaga which it decided to [retake by force](#), disregarding the land-use agreement the two countries had signed in 2007 (ICG, 24 June 2021). It is likely that the issue could flare up in the near future putting the countries at risk of engaging in military confrontation.

As of 15 April 2023, many things have changed in Sudan. The conflict between the Sudan army (reportedly backed by Egypt) and the RSF (allegedly backed by Ethiopia, UAE and Libyan warlord Field-Marshal Haftar), is putting the entire region at risk. Some [analysts](#) consider it possible that Egypt might decide to send troops to Sudan to reinforce the Sudanese army because of the close relationship between RSF and Ethiopia (Atlantic Council, 1 June 2023). The conflict has displaced millions from their homes. Refugees who were in Sudan from neighboring countries have faced tremendous challenges, too. Some [Sudanese](#) have fled to Chad, Egypt, Central African Republic and South Sudan (CNN, 25 May 2023).

In 2024, Sudan has faced numerous, severe, security-related issues. The conflict between the SAF and RSF has led to widespread atrocities and significant humanitarian crises. Here are some of the major security-related events:

- **Widespread atrocities and Human Rights violations:** The ongoing conflict has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, millions displaced, and widespread property looting. Both the SAF and RSF have been reported to use sexual violence as a weapon of war, recruit child soldiers, and engage in torture and prolonged arbitrary detention. This has significantly worsened the humanitarian situation, with more than 8.6 million people displaced and 18 million facing acute hunger ([UN News, 19 April 2024](#); [OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)).
- **Indiscriminate attacks:** The SAF and RSF have used explosive weapons in densely populated areas, causing numerous civilian casualties. For instance, in April 2024, SAF missiles killed at least 45 civilians in Khartoum. Similar attacks by the RSF in Omdurman and other areas have resulted in multiple civilian deaths and injuries ([OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)).
- **Ethnic violence in Darfur:** Ethnic cleansing and mass killings have been reported in Darfur, particularly targeting the Masalit ethnic community. RSF and allied militias have carried out numerous attacks in West Darfur, leading to thousands of deaths and the discovery of mass graves ([OHCHR Press Release, 23 February 2024](#)).
- **Humanitarian crisis:** The conflict has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, with over 25 million people needing lifesaving assistance. The violence has disrupted food supplies, leading to record levels of food insecurity and malnutrition across the country ([UN News, 19 April 2024](#)).
- **External Interference:** The conflict has been prolonged by external actors supplying weapons and other support to the warring parties. This external involvement has been a major obstacle to achieving a ceasefire and peaceful resolution of the conflict ([UN News, 19 April 2024](#)).

Christian origins

Christianity has a long history in Sudan. The [discovery](#) of one of the oldest cathedrals in the world is a testament to this (Ancient History Encyclopedia, last accessed 1 August 2024): "The Cathedral of Faras, a city in ancient Nubia and once the capital of the Kingdom of Faras (aka Nobatia), was built and rebuilt from the 8th to 11th century CE. Its interior was decorated with hundreds of frescoes which are amongst the finest examples of early Christian art seen anywhere."

Christianity had been very influential in Sudan from the 4th century onwards and for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Christians suffered when invading Arabs brought Islam - especially in the northern part of the country - and gradually Islamized the region by

the 15th century. However, the Greek Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox churches survived. Following the defeat of the self-proclaimed Islamic Mahdi and his supporters by the British in 1898, many Christian groups entered the country. Roman Catholics, Anglicans (via the Church Missionary Society) and American Presbyterians also came from their base in Egypt. The Anglican Sudan United Mission, the Africa Inland Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission all followed. Several African-initiated churches have also become established. Many missionaries went to South Sudan from Khartoum.

As indicated above, the role of Christianity started diminishing with the arrival of Islam, especially after the rise of the Mahdist movement of the 19th century. The situation worsened after the independence of Sudan in the second half of the 20th century, as powerful Islamists took over political power. When al-Bashir assumed office by coup in the 1980s, he proclaimed that Sharia law would be the source of all laws in the country. As a result, the Christian influence further decreased.

Church spectrum today

Sudan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	102,000	5.0
Catholic	1,106,000	54.5
Protestant	832,000	41.0
Independent	21,800	1.1
Unaffiliated	36,200	1.8
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-68,800	-3.4
Total	2,029,200	100.1
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	426,000	21.0
Pentecostal-Charismatic	147,000	7.2

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".

Generally speaking, Christians are found throughout the country. However, they live primarily in major cities, such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid, and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile state.

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

- "Christians are resident throughout the country, primarily in major cities such as Khartoum, Port Sudan, Kassala, Gedaref, El Obeid and El Fasher. Christians also are concentrated in some parts of the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan State, and in parts of Blue Nile State."

"Relatively small but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians are in Khartoum, El Obeid in North Kordofan, River Nile State, Gezira State, and eastern parts of the country. Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities, largely made up of refugees and migrants, are in Khartoum and the eastern part of the country. Other larger Christian groups include the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Anglican Church, SCOC, Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC), and the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. Smaller Christian groups include the Africa Inland Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Sudan Interior Church, Sudan Pentecostal Church [and] Seventh-day Adventist Church".

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

External Links

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