

Title	Freedom in the World 2011 - Chad
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Chad
Publication Date	16 May 2011
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2011 - Chad</i> , 16 May 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dd21a4bc.html [accessed 30 March 2012]
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Freedom in the World 2011 - Chad

Capital: N'Djamena

Population: 10,329,000

Political Rights Score: 7 *

Civil Liberties Score: 6 *

Status: Not Free

Overview

The Chadian government continued to struggle with rebel groups in 2010, but it significantly improved relations with the Sudanese government as the two sides worked to suppress cross-border rebel activity. Also during the year, long-delayed legislative and municipal elections scheduled for November and December were postponed again until February and March 2011, respectively.

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Chad has been beset by civil conflict and rebellions. Hissène Habré seized control in 1982 and led a one-party dictatorship characterized by widespread atrocities against individuals and ethnic groups that were perceived as threats to the regime. In 1989, Idriss Déby, a military commander, launched a rebellion against Habré from Sudan. With support from Libya and no opposition from French troops stationed in Chad, Déby overthrew Habré in 1990.

Déby won a presidential election held under a new constitution in 1996 despite the ongoing threat of rebel violence. In 1997 legislative elections, his Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party won 65 of the 125 seats. International observers charged that both elections were marred by irregularities.

Déby was reelected in 2001, and the six opposition candidates were briefly detained for alleging that the election results were fraudulent. The MPS secured 110 seats in the recently enlarged, 155-seat National Assembly during the 2002 legislative elections, which were boycotted by several opposition parties. Voters approved the elimination of presidential term limits in a 2005 constitutional referendum, though the balloting featured irregularities and the government cracked down on the media during the campaign.

Security forces, assisted by French intelligence and air support, repelled an April 2006 attack on the capital by the United Front for Change (FUC) rebel group. The May presidential election was then held on schedule despite an opposition boycott, and Déby secured a third term. The military, again with French support, launched a new assault on rebel forces in September, and in November the government declared a six-month state

of emergency for the capital and most of the east, including a ban on media coverage of sensitive issues.

In early February 2008, a formation of some 2,000 rebel fighters attacked the capital. Although the two sides soon agreed on a ceasefire and the rebels withdrew, Déby declared a state of emergency, suspending due process rights and tightening already harsh media restrictions. Human rights groups accused the regime of extrajudicial detention and killing of suspected rebels, their supporters, and members of the Goran ethnic group, some of whom were involved in the rebel assault. The state of emergency was lifted on March 15, but fighting continued in the east during the year.

Déby and Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir traded accusations in 2008 over support for rebels on each other's territory. In May 2009, the Chadian and Sudanese governments signed an accord aimed at normalizing relations. However, shortly thereafter, the Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) – an alliance of eight rebel groups that had formed in January – launched an attack on Chad from its base in Sudan's Darfur region. Violence along the border increased over the subsequent months, and in July Chadian planes bombed targets in Darfur.

In April 2010, the government fought the rebel Popular Front for National Resistance near Tissi, reportedly killing more than 100 fighters. In May, former defense minister Mahamat Nouri announced the formation of a new rebel grouping, the National Alliance for Democratic Change. Members included dissidents from three groups that belonged to the UFR.

Relations between Sudan and Chad improved significantly in 2010, starting with a January agreement that led to a series of presidential visits. In February, the governments established a joint patrol of 3,000 troops along the border. Authorities reopened the border to civilian traffic in April after it had been closed for seven years. In May, Chad prohibited the leader of a leading Darfur rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement, from returning to Sudan. Meanwhile, the Sudanese authorities pressured Chadian rebel groups to leave Sudanese territory. In October, a reported 171 UFR fighters returned to Chad from Darfur.

After years of regular fighting in the region, Chad is now home to some 180,000 internally displaced persons as well as more than 320,000 refugees from Darfur and the Central African Republic. The UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) was formed in 2007 to help care for and protect these civilians. Its original mandate was set to expire in May 2010, but was renewed until December 31. In February 2010, Déby had requested that UN troops leave Chad, while humanitarian groups expressed concern about increased insecurity if the force were to withdraw. By December, MINURCAT had withdrawn all of its troops.

The United Nations reported heightened food shortages due to flooding and droughts in 2010; acute malnutrition rates for children under age two are as high as 26 percent in some regions. Lake Chad continues to shrink, posing a grave risk to the millions people that rely on its water. An estimated 2.8 million people in Chad were receiving humanitarian aid in mid-2010.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Chad is not an electoral democracy. The country has never experienced a free and fair transfer of power through elections. The president is elected for five-year terms, and a 2005 constitutional amendment abolished term limits. The 2006 presidential election was held shortly after a rebel assault on the capital despite calls for a postponement. Many opposition members boycotted the balloting, which was reportedly marred by irregularities, and voter turnout may have been as low as 10 percent in some areas. The executive branch dominates the judicial and legislative branches, and the president appoints the prime minister. The unicameral National Assembly consists of 155 members elected for four-year terms. The last legislative elections, in 2002, also featured widespread irregularities.

The legislative elections due in 2006 have been repeatedly postponed; in September 2010 they were pushed back from November of that year to February 2011. Election officials

cited insufficient equipment and staffing, and delays in voter registration. Municipal elections were similarly rescheduled from December 2010 to March 2011. A presidential election is now slated for April 2011. Also in 2010, the main opposition coalition, Coordination for the Defense of the Constitution, threatened to boycott the upcoming votes due to the government's media dominance and the use of state resources to benefit the ruling party.

There are over 70 political parties, although a number were created by the government to divide the opposition. Only the ruling MPS has significant influence. Despite rivalries within President Idriss Déby's northeastern Zaghawa ethnic group, members of that and other northern ethnic groups continue to control Chad's political and economic systems, causing resentment among the country's more than 200 other ethnic groups.

Corruption is rampant within Déby's inner circle. Weaknesses in revenue management and oversight facilitate the diversion of oil revenues from national development projects to private interests and growing military expenditures. Chad was ranked 171 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is severely restricted, and self-censorship is common. Broadcast media are controlled by the state. The High Council of Communication (HCC) exerts control over most radio content, and while there are roughly a dozen private stations, they face high licensing fees and the threat of closure for critical coverage. A 2008 press law increased the maximum penalty for false news and defamation to three years in prison, and the maximum penalty for insulting the president to five years. Also in 2008, the HCC banned reporting on the activities of rebels or any other information that could harm national unity. A small number of private newspapers have circulated in the capital, and internet access is not restricted, but the reach of both print and online media is limited by poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate infrastructure. A court cleared the newspaper *La Voix* of alleged licensing violations in January 2010; the authorities had seized its press runs and abducted staff members in December 2009. In August 2010, the National Assembly passed a media bill that eliminated imprisonment as a punishment for libel, slander, or insulting the president, but created new imprisonment penalties for "inciting racial and ethnic hatred and condoning violence."

Although Chad is a secular state, religion is a divisive force. Muslims, who make up slightly more than half of the population, hold a disproportionately large number of senior government posts, and some policies favor Islam in practice, such as government sponsorship of the pilgrimage to Mecca. At the same time, the authorities have banned Muslim groups that are seen as promoting violence, and security forces clashed with supporters of a radical Islamist preacher in 2008. The government does not restrict academic freedom, but funds meant for the education system have reportedly been lost to corruption.

Despite the constitutional guarantee of free assembly, the authorities ban demonstrations by groups thought to be critical of the government. Insecurity in the east and south has severely hindered the activities of humanitarian organizations in recent years. The constitution guarantees the rights to strike and unionize, but a 2007 law imposed new limits on public-sector workers' right to strike.

The rule of law and the judicial system remain weak, with courts heavily influenced by the political leadership. Civilian leaders do not maintain effective control of the security forces, which routinely ignore constitutional protections regarding search, seizure, and detention. Human rights groups credibly accuse the security forces and rebel groups of killing and torturing with impunity. Overcrowding, disease, and malnutrition make prison conditions harsh, and many inmates are held for years without charge.

Clashes are common between Christian farmers of the various southern ethnic groups and Muslim Arab groups living largely in the north. Turmoil linked to ethnic and religious differences is exacerbated by clan rivalries and external interference along the insecure borders. Communal tensions in eastern Chad have worsened due to the proliferation of small arms and ongoing disputes over the use of land and water resources.

The government restricts the movement of citizens within the country, a practice that has increased in tandem with the civil conflicts.

Chadian women face widespread discrimination and violence. Female genital mutilation is illegal but routinely practiced by several ethnic groups. Chad is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking, and the government has not made significant efforts to eliminate the problem. The U.S. State Department placed Chad on the Tier 2 Watch List in its 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

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