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Sudan

NOT FREE

6
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	-3 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	9 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

10 /100 **Not Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

After military commanders and a prodemocracy protest movement ousted the repressive regime of longtime president Omar al-Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP) in 2019, Sudan was ruled by a transitional government in which military and civilian leaders agreed to share power until national elections could be held. The process was thrown into turmoil in late 2021 when the military leadership dissolved the transitional government in a coup and cracked down on the ensuing prodemocracy protests. In April 2023, hostilities broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group originally formed by al-Bashir, and the fighting quickly spread across the country. The ongoing conflict has been characterized by extreme levels of violence, including ethnic violence in Darfur, and has led to mass killings and displacement of civilians.

Key Developments in 2023

- In April, disagreements between the leaders of the SAF and the paramilitary RSF brought negotiations over the formation of a new transitional government to a halt. Escalating tensions between the groups sparked armed clashes in Khartoum that month, as their commanders vied for control. Fighting spread across Sudan over the course of the year, and the conflict was ongoing at year's end.
- The conflict led to a grave humanitarian crisis. Reports issued by international human rights organizations indicated that more than 12,000 people were killed and more than six million were internally displaced between the start of the fighting in April and the end of the year.
- In the Darfur region, the RSF and their allies carried out brutal attacks on non-Arab ethnic populations in an attempt to expel them from certain areas and consolidate control. RSF personnel reportedly burned health clinics and humanitarian aid offices, preventing survivors of the attacks from accessing help. Human rights groups documented extremely high rates of conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls in the region.
- Attempts by international and regional partners to secure a cease-fire repeatedly failed. The RSF and the SAF continued to fight over specific territory and control of key facilities such as airports and oil fields.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0 / 4

In October 2021, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, commander of the SAF, staged a coup, declared a state of emergency, and dissolved the Transitional Sovereign Council (TSC) and transitional government that had been in place since the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir's regime in 2019. The SAF detained several civilian government leaders, including Prime Minister Abdulla Hamdok. That November, al-Burhan reconstituted the Sovereign Council with himself as chair; Hamdok was subsequently reinstated as prime minister after signing an agreement with al-Burhan that provided for the release of political detainees, a new technocratic government, and the restructuring of the Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC). However, it also retained the Sovereign Council's "oversight" role and excluded the civilian political coalition Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) from participation in the Sovereign Council. These provisions allowed the military and al-Burhan to maintain significant control over the transitional government.

In January 2022, Prime Minister Hamdok resigned, following weeks of protests by the FFC, the Umma Party, and Sudanese people across the country who rejected the November agreement and demanded a fully civilian government. In December 2022, the military signed a framework agreement to enable cooperation with civilian groups on forming a new transitional government.

In early 2023, however, the signing of a transition deal was postponed twice due to disagreements between the SAF and the RSF over security reforms. In April, disputes between al-Burhan and RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo—better known as Hemedti—over the integration of the RSF into the SAF sparked armed

clashes in Khartoum as the two commanders vied for control. The fighting spread across Sudan over the course of the year and was ongoing at year's end.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

The former parliament was dissolved as part of the 2019 revolution. That year's interim constitution called for a 300-seat Transitional Legislative Council (TLC), which was to hold office until elections could be organized. However, protracted disputes over the formation of a civilian-led government delayed the TLC's creation, as did the outbreak of civil war in April 2023. The legislative council had yet to be established at the end of 2023.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

0/4

In September 2021, the Ministry of Justice presented and held public consultations on a draft electoral commission law. However, the draft law was not enacted, and an electoral commission was not created prior to the October 2021 coup. The civil war that broke out in April 2023 put a halt to legislative processes, and it appeared unlikely that an electoral commission would be created while hostilities continued.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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?

0/4

The 2019 interim constitution guaranteed the right to form political parties, subject to legal regulation. Security forces arrested leaders and members of political parties, civilian resistance committees, and the FFC following the October 2021 coup, including the heads of the Sudanese Congress Party and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, as well as a leader in the Umma Party. The detained politicians were held incommunicado and allegedly tortured before being gradually released, with the last leaving prison in 2022.

Since the April 2023 breakdown in transition negotiations and the subsequent onset of civil war, civilian political parties have effectively been unable to operate in Sudan. Although some have called for the formation of broad antiwar coalitions, no such coalitions had been able to form as of late 2023, due to military interference as well as significant fragmentation among the parties and an overall lack of coordination that has undermined their influence.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because civilian political parties were effectively unable to operate during the civil war.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 / 4

Sudan has not held elections since the end of al-Bashir's 30-year rule in 2019; changes in leadership have been the result of political negotiations or military intervention. General al-Burhan dissolved the TSC and transitional government as part of the October 2021 coup, and security forces detained more than 100 government ministers and advisers along with the leaders of political parties, civilian resistance committees, and the FFC. He later reconstituted the Sovereign Council with himself as chairman and extended its oversight authority. In April and May 2022, the military government released civilian leaders and ended the state of emergency.

Plans to hold elections have stalled repeatedly in recent years, most recently with the failure of transition negotiations and the outbreak of civil conflict in April 2023. At year's end, it appeared likely that the ongoing war would further delay future elections.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

0/4

The country has a long history of military interventions in political affairs. The October 2021 coup was led by the SAF and supported by the RSF and leaders of armed rebel movements that had signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA). It followed a coup attempt that September, when soldiers loyal to the former regime tried to seize control of the state media building.

Tensions between the SAF and RSF emerged in 2022 and gradually intensified in early 2023 as both sides took part in negotiations over a transition to civilian leadership. Armed clashes broke out in April, and fighting escalated and continued throughout the year as the rival groups fought to assert political and military control across the country. The SAF and RSF have each received support from external actors, including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, respectively.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

0/4

Sudan's political system has traditionally favored the predominantly Arab and Muslim ethnic groups concentrated around Khartoum, and marginalized other groups, particularly those in Darfur and the southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The 2019 interim constitution committed Sudan to a decentralized system in which citizens would be free to exercise their rights without discrimination based on race, religion, gender, regional affiliation, or other such grounds. A new constitution proposed by the Sudan Bar Association in 2022 kept the same provisions.

Women played an influential role in the 2019 protest movement and have since demanded greater representation at all levels of government and in peace

negotiations. Although two women were named to the TSC in 2019, one resigned in 2021 to protest the military's dominance of the council.

LGBT+ people are politically marginalized and face serious deterrents to open participation, including a criminal ban on same-sex sexual relations.

After the fighting between the SAF and RSF began in April 2023, civilians' ability to participate in Sudanese politics was severely curtailed, and the little political power held by women and members of other marginalized groups was effectively eliminated.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the outbreak of civil war further reduced the ability of women and members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups to participate in politics.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

The country lacks any elected executive or legislative body. In October 2021, General al-Burhan staged a coup, dissolved the TSC and transitional government, and detained Prime Minister Hamdok and several government ministers and advisers. Following the coup, local and regional government officials were removed and replaced, and al-Burhan reconstituted the Sovereign Council with himself as chair. Although Prime Minister Hamdok was later reinstated and attempted to replace officials appointed by the coup leaders, he ultimately resigned in January 2022 following widespread protests against his acceptance of the military's de facto dominance. In May of that year, al-Burhan lifted the state of emergency that had been in place since the coup. That December, the military signed a framework agreement to enable cooperation with civilian groups on forming a new transitional government.

The conflict that erupted in April 2023 between the RSF and the SAF effectively terminated the government-formation process, and administrative functions

across the country became fractured as the two sides sought to assert control over the territories they occupied.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	0/4
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There are no effective anticorruption laws or institutions in Sudan, which is a signatory to but has not ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention against Corruption and the African Union (AU) Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.

Following the October 2021 coup, General al-Burhan suspended the ERC, which was created by transitional authorities to investigate financial crimes by former regime officials in 2019. A new anticorruption commission called for under a law approved by the TSC in April 2021 has yet to be established.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	0/4
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The interim constitution required members of the TSC and TLC, the cabinet, and state governors to file disclosures about their personal assets, but there are no clear mechanisms for enforcement, and compliance is reportedly poor in practice.

Important military and government figures, including RSF leader Hemedti, are often accused of amassing wealth through the illicit exploitation of Sudan's natural resources, but state institutions lack the capacity and power to document or punish malfeasance.

Add Q

Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?	-3
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Former president al-Bashir faces outstanding arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Darfur, where an insurgency by members of local ethnic minority groups began in 2003. The transitional government reached an agreement with Darfuri rebel groups in 2020 to turn over to the ICC five Sudanese suspects accused of war crimes, including al-Bashir, and signed the JPA with the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) alliance and another rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) Minni Minnawi faction. Terms for al-Bashir's extradition to the ICC remained under discussion as of late 2023.

Despite the 2020 agreements, localized ethnic or communal conflicts and accompanying violence surged across Sudan even before the outbreak of civil war between the RSF and SAF in April 2023. Hundreds of people died and hundreds of thousands were displaced in communal clashes between tribes in the Blue Nile, Kordofan, and Darfur areas. The government responded by deploying additional security forces, declaring states of emergency, imposing curfews, and engaging in peacebuilding initiatives. However, government interventions at times worsened the humanitarian situation, as security forces detained and abducted people arbitrarily. The RSF have a long history of committing violence against non-Arab civilians in Darfur.

Since the onset of civil war in April 2023, the RSF and allied militias have carried out brutal attacks on non-Arab populations in Darfur, particularly the Massalit, in an attempt to expel those groups from certain areas, such as the city of El-Geneina. Reports indicated that more than 10,000 people had been killed by late 2023, while hundreds of thousands fled the region. Sexual violence against women and girls in Darfur was pervasive. The RSF also reportedly burned neighborhoods, health clinics, and humanitarian aid offices, preventing survivors of the attacks from accessing help. Violence against civilians based on their ethnic origin intensified in October, when the RSF started gaining more territory in the region, and continued through year's end.

Score Change: The score declined from -2 to -3 due to the RSF's renewed efforts to kill or forcibly expel members of certain ethnic groups in the Darfur region.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

1 / 4

While the interim constitution nominally guarantees freedom of the press, effective legal protections have not been established, and the country remains an extremely restrictive environment for journalists.

After the civil war broke out in April 2023, both the RSF and the SAF were accused of attempting to curtail journalists' work, prompting condemnation from the Sudanese Journalists Network (SJN). Media workers have faced frequent harassment and in some cases arrest since the fighting began. In one instance in September, the RSF detained Mohamed al-Haj, a correspondent for the Egyptian outlet Al-Ghad, in Khartoum. Another journalist, Halima Idris Salim of the independent outlet Sudan Bukra, was killed in October when RSF soldiers struck her with a vehicle in Omdurman.

The 2018 Law on Combating Cybercrimes, which increased prison sentences for crimes such as disseminating false information, remains in effect.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

2 / 4

Sudan's population is mostly Muslim, with a small Christian minority. The 2019 interim constitution guarantees freedom of worship and does not give Islam an official status. The TSC that year pledged to issue clear guidelines for those seeking permission to build new churches, and Christians welcomed the appointment of a Coptic Christian judge to one of the TSC's civilian seats.

In 2020, the transitional government adopted the Miscellaneous Amendments Act, which repealed the criminalization of apostasy, abolished corporal punishment for blasphemy, and permitted non-Muslims to trade and consume alcohol, among other provisions.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

1/4

Prior to 2019, the university system was dominated by NCP-affiliated officials, and these were replaced with more independent figures after al-Bashir's ouster. Following the October 2021 coup, authorities arrested deans and professors at Al-Gezira University who had criticized the military takeover. In addition, security forces attacked student protesters on university campuses. In November of that year, several universities closed their campuses and suspended classes, citing political instability.

Many more of the country's schools and universities closed in April 2023 due to the military conflict and had yet to reopen late in the year.

D4 0-4 pts

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

1/4

The 2019 interim constitution affirmed the right to freedom of expression and privacy, including citizens' right to engage in private correspondence without interference. Restrictive laws remained in place, however, and by 2020 transitional authorities were arresting and harassing individuals for critical speech. After the October 2021 coup, General al-Burhan issued a decree expanding security forces' and intelligence agencies' powers to conduct home raids, surveil citizens, and detain suspects. Neighborhood resistance committees and human rights groups argued that the decree violated citizens' rights to privacy and due process. Widespread violence associated with the civil conflict that erupted in April 2023 further deterred unfettered discussion and criticism of the RSF and SAF among ordinary citizens.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

0 / 4

The TSC reaffirmed the right to assemble in the 2019 interim constitution, and citizens regularly participated in demonstrations in the subsequent years, calling for more rapid democratic reforms and the advancement of women's rights, among other demands. However, security personnel routinely responded to acts of protest with violence and excessive force.

In 2022, for example, security forces repeatedly used tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to break up demonstrations calling for civilian rule. Over 120 protesters died between the 2021 coup and the end of 2022. Women protesters reported being raped by security officers, who also blocked demonstrators' access to medical care, including by arresting doctors and patients, shooting tear gas into hospitals, and blocking access to ambulances and hospitals. To prevent demonstrations in the wake of the coup, the military shut down the internet, blocked bridges and roads in Khartoum, arrested organizers, and banned trade unions.

Large protests held in early 2023 included prodemocracy demonstrations in February and April, during which participants blocked roads and marched through cities across the country to voice opposition to military rule. However, most demonstrations ceased after the civil conflict began in April, as activists and organizers fled the fighting.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

1 / 4

After the 2019 ouster of al-Bashir, the transitional government loosened the restrictions and impediments that had been placed on civil society organizations. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were able to register, and organizations that operated in exile were able to return to and register in Sudan.

Conditions deteriorated after the outbreak of the civil war in April 2023. In September, the Humanitarian Aid Commission acknowledged that the country's security crisis had created obstacles for NGOs seeking to renew their registrations, and issued a decree that extended the validity of expired registrations of national and international NGOs to March 2024. Meanwhile, aid workers and NGO employees were subjected to violent attacks, including sexual assault; at least three World Food Programme employees were killed in Darfur soon after the fighting began. Many others were forced to flee, and numerous organizations were compelled to relocate or suspend operations in the country due to the ongoing violence.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because NGOs were directly targeted with violence during the civil war, and many were forced to cease operations and leave the country.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

0/4

Independent trade unions were largely absent under al-Bashir; his government banned them after taking power in 1989, and instead co-opted the Sudan Workers' Trade Unions Federation (SWTUF). The independent Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), founded in late 2016, was instrumental in the protest movement that led to al-Bashir's ouster, and it later played a role in the transitional government.

The 2019 interim constitution affirmed workers' right to form and join trade unions. As part of the transitional government's efforts to dismantle the former ruling party and affiliated institutions, it controversially dissolved the SWTUF and the Sudan Journalists Union in late 2019. The Trade Unions Law of 2021 laid the groundwork for union organizing. However, in February 2021, the World

Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) condemned the government's arrest and detention of union leaders and the creation of government-appointed steering committees to oversee union affairs.

Following the October 2021 coup, General al-Burhan dissolved all trade unions and professional associations to limit their organizing capabilities. Multiple union and association leaders were detained and assaulted during the anticoup protests that continued into 2023.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	0 /4
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The interim constitution envisaged the establishment of an independent judiciary to replace the politically influenced judiciary of the al-Bashir era. In May 2021, the TSC removed Chief Justice Nemat Abdullah Khair and accepted the resignation of Attorney General Taj al-Ser Ali al-Hebr, who expressed concern about a lack of independence. That month, the ERC removed more than 20 public prosecutors from office.

Following the October 2021 coup, General al-Burhan replaced the acting public prosecutor and chief justice with former NCP officials. Al-Burhan's replacement head judge, Chief Justice Abdulaziz Fath al-Rahman Abdeen, issued a directive that December ordering the reinstatement of all judges dismissed by the ERC.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	0 /4
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Although the interim constitution enshrined the right to due process, it also contained a provision allowing the government to invoke emergency powers and suspend some due process rights. In practice, security forces have continued to engage in arbitrary arrests and detentions since the October 2021 coup and related protests. Political detainees, activists, and journalists have been held

incommunicado without access to legal representation and have likely been subject to torture and inhumane treatment.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0/4

In 2020, the transitional government formally banned forced confessions and the “infliction of torture” on suspects, and abolished the penalty of public flogging for some criminal offenses. However, demonstrators protesting the October 2021 coup faced lethal violence and mistreatment by security forces. Political detainees who were subsequently released reported experiencing torture or inhumane treatment while in custody.

In April 2023, rising tensions between al-Burhan and Hemedti over security reforms—namely, plans to integrate Hemedti’s RSF into al-Burhan’s SAF—triggered military clashes between the two groups. Fighting quickly escalated and spread across the country as al-Burhan and Hemedti battled for control over Sudanese territory and resources. Attempts by international and regional partners to secure a cease-fire repeatedly failed.

The conflict had a significant impact on civilians’ physical security: local and international NGOs recorded thousands of cases of violence against civilians, and the UN reported that approximately 12,000 civilians were killed between the start of the conflict in April and the end of the year. In Darfur, civilians experienced extreme violence at the hands of the RSF as the paramilitary group sought to push non-Arab ethnic populations out of certain areas. NGOs also reported high incidences of sexual assaults against women and girls across the country, and especially in Darfur.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

0/4

The 2019 interim constitution commits the transitional government to upholding the human rights of all citizens without discrimination and ensuring their equal

treatment under the law. The charter also calls for accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of human rights. However, extreme violence based on racial or ethnic identity remained common in 2023, particularly in Darfur after the outbreak of the new civil conflict.

Despite the guarantees of equal treatment in the interim constitution and some legal improvements adopted in 2020, women continue to face disadvantages in many areas of the law, and perpetrators of widespread crimes against women—including during armed conflicts—have generally enjoyed impunity.

Same-sex relations are illegal in Sudan, though 2020 reforms eliminated flogging and execution as potential punishments under an antisodomy law that is used to target LGBT+ people. Discrimination and violence against LGBT+ people remain common.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

1/4

The 2019 interim constitution affirms freedom of movement and the right to travel—including overseas—for all citizens. These rights are still impeded in practice by state security forces and other armed groups across the country.

In 2022, the government began to limit the movement of people in some of the states affected by intercommunal conflicts. Several reports indicated that the decision mostly affected already vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that over six million people were displaced within Sudan between April and December 2023, in the context of the war between the SAF and the RSF. Over a million others sought refuge outside of the country during the same period.

G2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

Weak land rights have been a chronic driver of conflict in Sudan. In a succession of opaque deals, al-Bashir's regime leased large parcels of arable land to foreign countries for export crop production. In some cases, local populations were forced from their land or had their water supplies depleted.

The 2019 interim constitution guarantees the right to own property and protects citizens from expropriation by the state without compensation. The government has stated its intention to address land-related grievances, but property seizures by security forces and communal conflicts over land rights continue to be reported. Many civilians who fled Khartoum after fighting broke out there in April 2023 said that the RSF and SAF had occupied or taken over their properties. Soldiers from both sides have been accused of looting civilian properties.

Women are denied equal rights to property and inheritance under laws based on Sharia (Islamic law) and through discriminatory customary practices.

G3 0-4 pts

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

1/4

Although the transitional government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in April 2021, it failed to endorse provisions recognizing equality in marriage, divorce, and parenting, which would conflict with the country's Sharia-based laws. Among other restrictions, a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man. In 2022, a court sentenced a woman to death by stoning for committing adultery, though the sentence was overturned on procedural grounds, and she was then retried and sentenced to prison.

Sexual violence against women remains a major problem. Although female genital mutilation (FGM) was criminalized in 2020, the practice is still widespread. A UN report released in August 2021 claimed that there were high numbers of incidents

of domestic and sexual violence in households, as well as sexual violence against women in informal jobs, displaced and refugee women outside of camps, children in Quranic schools, and people with disabilities. The report also noted high rates of forced, arranged, and child marriages.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

0 / 4

Economic mismanagement and corruption under al-Bashir's regime led to mass unemployment and high prices for basic goods, which left residents more vulnerable to exploitation. Such bleak economic conditions were among the root causes of the 2019 revolution. Prime Minister Hamdok's government voiced a commitment to reversing these trends. Though the country officially met the requirements to receive debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) in June 2021, international financial institutions paused assistance to the Sudanese government after the October 2021 coup, including \$500 million from the World Bank and \$150 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain especially vulnerable to sexual and labor exploitation, including by criminal networks engaged in human trafficking. Some armed groups in the country have allegedly recruited children as fighters.



On Sudan

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

6/100 Not Free

Internet Freedom Score

30/100 Not Free

Other Years

2023

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