

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World 2022 - Eritrea

Not Free

3

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 1 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 2 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

2 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

Eritrea is a militarized authoritarian state that has not held a national election since independence from Ethiopia in 1993. The People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), headed by President Isaias Afwerki, is the sole political party. Arbitrary detention is commonplace, and citizens are required to perform national service, often for their entire working lives. The government shut down all independent media in 2001.

Key Developments in 2021

- Eritrean forces continued to support the Ethiopian government's military campaign against the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), though they reportedly left three towns in the Tigray region in June. Eritrean forces were accused of committing human rights abuses during their deployment in Ethiopia, including the forcible repatriation of Eritrean refugees, killings, and rape.
- In January and February, 70 Evangelical and Orthodox Christians and 4 Jehovah's Witnesses were released from custody.
- Asmara otherwise maintained its limits on religious activity during the year. In March, 35 people were arrested while attending two prayer meetings. In May, the government interfered in the recognized Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC) by installing a new patriarch.

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 0 /

elections?

4

Following Eritrea's formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993, an unelected Transitional National Assembly chose Isaias Afwerki to serve as president until elections could be held under a new constitution. He has remained in office since then, without ever obtaining a mandate from voters.

A2 0-4 pts

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

A constitution ratified in 1997 but never instituted calls for an elected 150-seat National Assembly, which would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote. National elections have been postponed indefinitely, and the transitional assembly has not met since 2002. National elections have never been conducted. Periodic local and regional assembly elections are carefully orchestrated by the PFDJ and offer no meaningful choice to voters.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 0 / 4

The 1997 constitution calls for an electoral commission whose head is appointed by the president and confirmed by the National Assembly, but it has never been established. Electoral laws have not been finalized.

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 PFDJ is the only legally recognized political party in Eritrea. Alternative groups must operate from abroad among the diaspora. Groups were hosted in Ethiopia in the past, but its government ordered many of them to cease operations after the two countries sought rapprochement in 2018.

The Eritrean government holds prominent dissidents and family members in detention; a group of 11 has reportedly been held incommunicado since 2001. In September 2021, Amnesty International noted that nine may have died in detention. In addition, Ciham Ali Abdu, the daughter of former information minister Ali Abdu Ahmed, was detained in 2012 when she tried to flee to Sudan. Former finance minister Berhane Abrehe, meanwhile, was detained in 2018. Ciham and Berhane remain in custody.

B2 0-4 pts

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

President Isaias and the PFDJ have been in power without interruption since independence. Since multiparty elections have never been allowed, opposition groups have had no opportunity to compete or enter government.

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

Eritrean society is dominated by the military, with most citizens required to perform open-ended military or other national service. The authorities' intolerance of dissent and the absence of elections or opposition parties leaves individuals with no political options other than loyalty to the PFDJ, imprisonment, or illegal emigration.

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

Women and various ethnic groups are nominally represented within the PFDJ but have no practical ability to organize independently or advocate for their interests through the political system.

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

Power is concentrated in the hands of the unelected president, who reportedly determines policy with the help of an informal circle of advisers, leaving the cabinet and security officials to merely carry out his decisions. In 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) noted that military personnel were overrepresented among the president's closest associates.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

Petty bribery and influence peddling are thought to be endemic, and larger-scale corruption is a problem among some party officials and military leaders. The government's control over foreign exchange effectively gives it sole authority over imports. Those in the regime's favor profit from the smuggling and sale of scarce goods such as food, building materials, and alcohol. Senior military officials have allegedly profited from smuggling Eritreans out of the country. There are no independent agencies or mechanisms in place to prevent or punish corruption. Special anticorruption courts overseen by the military nominally exist but are mostly inactive.

C3 0-4 pts

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

The government operates without public scrutiny. Basic data about the state budget and its appropriations are not publicly disclosed, and officials are not required to disclose their assets.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 0 / 4

The government shut down all independent media outlets in 2001. Several outlets provide coverage to Eritreans from outside the country, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Paris-based Radio Erena, and satellite station Asena TV. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 16 journalists remain imprisoned for their work in Eritrea.

D2 0-4 pts

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

The government places strict limits on the exercise of religion. Eritrea officially recognizes only four faiths: Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Evangelical Lutheranism. Religious practice is prohibited among members of the military.

Asmara interferes in the practice of recognized faiths. The EOC's patriarch, Abune Antonios, was deposed in 2006 and expelled from the EOC for "heresy" in 2019. Abune has remained under house arrest. In May 2021, Asmara announced the election of Abune Qerlos as patriarch.

Followers of other denominations are subject to arrest, imprisonment, and the loss of property. Jehovah's Witnesses face severe persecution, including detention and denial of citizenship.

The government released several groups of religious prisoners in 2020 and continued to do so in 2021. Authorities released 70 Evangelical and Orthodox Christians and 4 Jehovah's Witnesses in the first two months of the year according to the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Eritrea. However, authorities arrested 35 religious followers at two prayer meetings in March.

Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because the government continued to release religious prisoners of conscience, including Evangelical and Orthodox Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 0 / 4

Academic freedom is greatly constrained. Students in their last year of secondary school must perform military service at the Sawa military training center. In 2019, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that widespread physical and sexual abuse took place at Sawa. Former students say they were given insufficient food and were forced to perform manual labor.

From 2017 to 2019, the government took steps to nationalize an Islamic school in Asmara along with seven other schools operated by religious organizations, though no subsequent actions have been reported.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 0 / 4

Freedoms of expression and private discussion are severely inhibited by fear of government informants and the likelihood of arrest and arbitrary detention for any airing of dissent. The authorities regularly block access to social media platforms and shutter internet cafés.

Members of the Eritrean diaspora are, by comparison, better able to express dissent online. Activists have used internet platforms and protests to oppose the government and raise awareness of government abuses. However, members of the diaspora are also subject to government surveillance and harassment.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

Freedom of assembly is not recognized by the authorities. Public gatherings of more than seven people require a permit. Those who protest face the threat of deadly force at the hands of state security officers or arbitrary detention.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? 0 / 4

The law requires all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to undergo an onerous and arbitrary annual registration process and limits their activities to providing humanitarian relief. In reality, there are no independent NGOs based in Eritrea. The government continues to deny permission for external human rights organizations to enter the country.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 0 / 4

While the Eritrean government has ratified the International Labour Organization's eight fundamental conventions, no independent trade unions function in Eritrea. The only union umbrella group, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers, is affiliated with the PFDJ. According to reports to the UNHRC, the government has prevented new unions from being formed.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The judiciary has no independence from the executive branch. The Supreme Court called for in the constitution has never been established, nor has a Judicial Commission tasked with appointing judges. The president controls the appointment and dismissal of all judges; even nominally elected judges in local community courts are controlled by the Justice Ministry, according to UN investigators. Many judges are military officers.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

Basic principles of due process are systematically violated. Arbitrary arrests and detentions are common; targets include those who evade military service, try to flee the country, or are suspected of practicing an unauthorized religion. Eritreans who offend high-ranking government or party officials are also reportedly subject to arbitrary arrest.

Prisoners, including children, former members of the government, and their family members, are routinely held incommunicado for indefinite periods without charge or trial, with the authorities refusing even to inform family members whether they are still alive. There is no operational system of public defense lawyers. Thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience remain imprisoned.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and 0 /

insurgencies?

4

UN investigators have described the routine and systematic use of physical and psychological torture in both civilian and military detention centers. Deaths in custody or in military service due to torture and other harsh conditions have been reported, though authorities do not investigate such incidents. Security forces employ lethal violence arbitrarily and with impunity. Individuals attempting to escape military service or flee the country have been fired on by soldiers.

Eritrean forces continued to operate in Ethiopia in support of Addis Ababa's military campaign against the TPLF during the year. In March 2021, Human Rights Concern–Eritrea reported that boys were being pressed into military service and sent to the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Asmara reportedly committed to withdrawing from Tigray in March, with Eritrean forces leaving three Tigrayan towns in June.

Eritrean forces engaged in violence against civilians during their deployment. In August 2021, Amnesty International reported that Eritrean forces and an Eritrean militia group engaged in rape in Tigray. In September, HRW reported that Eritrean forces killed and forcibly repatriated Eritrean refugees while deployed in Tigray.

F4 0-4 pts

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

There are allegations that two of Eritrea's nine recognized ethnic groups, the Kunama and Afar, face severe discrimination, including exclusion from the government's poverty alleviation programs.

Laws mandate equal educational opportunity for women and equal pay for equal work. However, traditional societal discrimination against women persists in the countryside, and the deeply flawed legal system does not effectively uphold their formal rights.

Same-sex relations are criminalized, and LGBT+ people enjoy no legal protections from societal discrimination.

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? 0 / 4

Freedom of movement is heavily restricted. Eritreans young enough for national service are rarely given permission to go abroad, and those who try to travel outside the country without obtaining an exit visa face imprisonment. Individuals also require permits to travel within the country. Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers who are repatriated from other countries are subject to detention under harsh conditions.

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? 0 / 4

The national conscription system denies much of the working-age population the opportunity to establish and run their own businesses. Both the authorities and private actors with the regime's support can confiscate property and evict occupants without due process.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of 1 /

family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

4

Men and women have equal rights under laws governing marriage, nationality, and other personal status matters. However, girls in rural areas remain vulnerable to early or forced marriage. Rape of women and sexualized forms of violence against men are common in detention and in military service. Sexual assault of female conscripts is endemic and has not been thoroughly investigated by the authorities.

The government has banned the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). In 2020, the government formed a steering committee and adopted a national action plan to halt FGM and other forms of gender-based violence. FGM remains widespread in rural areas, though awareness campaigns have contributed to a decline in the practice.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 0 / 4

Eritrea's conscription system ties most able-bodied men and women—including those under 18 who are completing secondary school—to obligatory military service, which can also entail compulsory, unpaid labor for enterprises controlled by the political elite. National service is supposed to last 18 months but is open-ended in practice. UN human rights experts have described this system as enslavement.