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## The Worst of the Worst 2009 - Eritrea

### Country Scores

**Political Rights:** 7  
**Civil Liberties:** 6  
**Status:** Not Free  
**Population:** 5,000,000  
**Capital:** Asmara

**2008 Key Developments:** The government of Eritrea continued its long-standing suppression of democratic and human rights in 2008, and a group of independent journalists imprisoned in 2001 remained behind bars. The country also maintained its aggressive foreign policy in the region, initiating border-related clashes with Djiboutian forces in June.

**Political Rights:** Eritrea is not an electoral democracy. The Popular Front for Democracy and Justice maintains complete dominance over the country's political life and has taken significant steps backward since the end of the war with Ethiopia. The 2001 crackdown on those calling for greater political pluralism and subsequent repressive steps clearly demonstrate the Eritrean government's authoritarian stance. The constitution calls for the legislature to elect the president from among its members by a majority vote. However, national elections have been postponed indefinitely. Regulations governing political parties have never been enacted, and independent political parties do not exist. In recent years, corruption appears to have increased somewhat.

**Civil Liberties:** Government control over all broadcasting outlets and the repression of independent print publications have eliminated the vehicles for dissemination of opposing or alternative views. In its September 2001 crackdown, the government banned all privately owned newspapers, and journalists arrested in 2001 remain imprisoned. The government places significant limitations on the exercise of religion. It officially recognizes only four faiths: Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Persecution of minority Christian sects has escalated in recent years. Freedom of assembly does not exist. Independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are not allowed, and the legitimate role of human rights defenders is not recognized. International human rights organizations are barred from the country, and the government expelled three remaining development NGOs in 2006. The judiciary has never issued rulings significantly at variance with government positions, and constitutional guarantees are often ignored in cases related to state security. Torture, arbitrary detentions, and political arrests are common. The Kunama people, one of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups, reportedly face severe discrimination. The government has worked to improve the status of women,

codifying equal educational opportunity, equal pay for equal work, and penalties for domestic violence. However, traditional societal discrimination against women persists in the largely rural and agricultural country.

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