

 AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE  
**FIELD GUIDE**

**Chad**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the decisive cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.



The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces “Culture General,” the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents “Culture Specific” Chad, focusing on unique cultural features of Chadian society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.



For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) or contact AFCLC’s Region Team at [AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil](mailto:AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil).

**Disclaimer:** All text is the property of the AFCLC and may not be modified by a change in title, content, or labeling. It may be reproduced in its current format with the expressed permission of the AFCLC. All photography is provided as a courtesy of the US government, Wikimedia, and other sources as indicated. [Please scroll over images to view captions.](#)

# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.



Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual

symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### **Social Behaviors Across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.



Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for

universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

## Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.



As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume

that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

## 12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

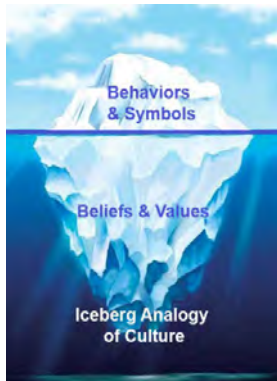
### **Cultural Belief System**

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

### **Core Beliefs**

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as



depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

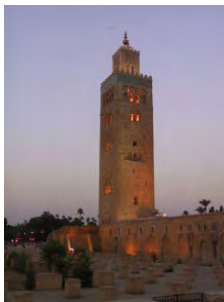
In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.



Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and

wisdom were preserved across generations and ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles.

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of



Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European



presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the

ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue



to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word “tribe” is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of “primitiveness” and oftentimes substituted with the term “ethnic group.” Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai, along with

some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of



these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial

powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective “national” identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as “tribalism.”

This “class versus descent” scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU’s charter is to promote “greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples” by building partnerships in all segments of “civil society.”

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also

create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed



their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of

Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity.

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions.



The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness, death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

#### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.



First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half



the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of single parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is



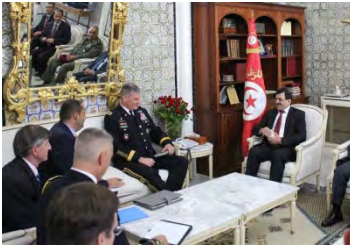
defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt

multilingual practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional “indigenous” languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their “release” from colonial rule and to

preserve a sense of indigenous identity.



While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid

confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also



hamper progress. According to 2023 statistics, about 100 million African children and youth were out of school, of which 35 million were of primary school age.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and



form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a

core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.



Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.



Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world’s dominant male and female distance runners, and

South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 18% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 68% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 95% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.



These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 65% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to basic drinking water, water-borne bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.



Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal

regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of the fastest growing regions in the world.



Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel.

Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.



International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Chadian society.

## PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

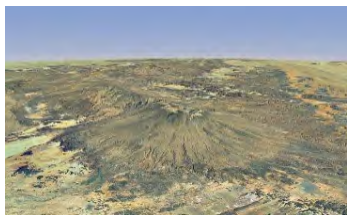
### 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

#### Overview

A vast, land-locked republic in Central Africa, Chad is one of Africa's most diverse countries. Its geographic location along ancient trans-Saharan trade routes served to incorporate it early into the regional economy. Chad's history since its 1960 independence has been characterized by political instability, civil war, and extreme poverty. Nor has democracy taken root: Chad has yet to experience a free and fair transfer of power through elections. It has, however, become an important partner in the fight against terrorism.

#### Early History

While Chad possesses some of Africa's richest archaeological sites, scientists still have an incomplete picture of the country's pre-history. The 2001 discovery of a 7 million-year-old human-like skull in central Chad prompted some scientists to claim the region as a potential cradle for humankind, though other researchers disputed the claim. Nevertheless, scientists agree



that early humans inhabited the region at least 300,000 years ago.

While much of the northern 1/3 of Chad is desert today, the area was lush and fertile when modern humans settled around Chad's northwestern Tibesti Mountains some 12,000 years ago. There, these ancient inhabitants produced rock art depicting the region's wild animals, including elephants, giraffes, ostriches, and panthers. Over the millennia, residents continued to produce rock art around Tibesti and on Chad's northeastern Ennedi Plateau, eventually depicting humans as well as domesticated animals such as cattle, camels, and horses.

The climate of northern Chad began to grow hotter and drier around 4000 BC. As the Sahara Desert expanded, many inhabitants migrated southward into areas that were still fertile and began growing crops. Other people remained in the arid regions and began herding livestock.

By the 5th-century BC, trade caravans dealing in beads, ivory, metals, salt, and slaves began passing through what is now Chad. Over the next centuries, small kingdoms rose and fell, though few details are known about these events. Around the 9th-century AD, Arab travelers and traders began recording the region's history.

### The Age of Empires

From the end of the first millennium AD until the end of the 19th century, the region was home to a succession of empires that overlapped in both time and space. Although none of those empires ever controlled the entirety of present-day Chad, they all contributed to the culture, customs, and ethnic composition of the modern state. Most of these empires were founded by indigenous Africans but were also heavily influenced by Arabic-speaking, predominately Muslim immigrants (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).

None of these states was ever able to expand far into southern Chad, where forests and disease effectively halted their cavalries. Instead, these empires regularly raided the southern regions, capturing slaves for the North African slave trade. Eventually, an ethnic, linguistic, and religious division arose that aligned with Chad's geographic divisions.

**The Kanem-Bornu Empire:** One of the earliest states was the Kanem Empire, founded on the northeast shore of Lake Chad in the 9th century. Ruled for most of its history by the Sefuwa dynasty, Kanem became an Islamic state at the end of the 11th century. Kanem reached its height in the 13th century, when it extended into the present-day states of Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Libya.



Kanem fell in the late 14th century due to economic difficulties, internal political divisions, and an invasion from the East. The Sefuwa dynasty then regrouped at Bornu (in present-day northeastern Nigeria) and gave birth to the Kanem-Bornu Empire, which extended its rule across much of the former Kanem Empire during the 16th century.

The Kanem-Bornu Empire drew its strength from its control of the southern end of the trans-Saharan trade route to Tripoli, modern-day Libya's capital on the Mediterranean coast. The Empire traded slaves, ivory, animal hides, cotton, kola nuts, and ostrich feathers for salt, horses, silk, glass, muskets, and other manufactured goods from North Africa. The Empire reached its height at the beginning of the 17th century under **mai** (king) Idris Alawna, whose successful military tactics included armored horses and riders along with iron-helmeted musketeers trained by Turkish military advisors. An observant Muslim, Alawna built numerous mosques and introduced significant legal and administrative reforms based on **sharia**



(Islamic law). In the ensuing decades, Kanem-Bornu entered a long, slow decline before dissolving completely in 1893 after Rabih Fadlallah, a Sudanese warlord, invaded the territory.

**The Bagirmi Empire:** The kingdom of Bagirmi emerged to the southeast of Kanem-Bornu in the 16th century. Following its adoption of Islam, it became a sultanate. Over its 300 year history, it experienced periods of strength and weakness. When

strong, it expanded, taking over smaller regional kingdoms and allying with several nomadic groups as a significant rival to Kanem-Bornu. During periods of weakness and instability, neighboring states, including the Kanem-Bornu, subjugated or absorbed it. By the 19th century, internal dissent and external threats had significantly weakened the Bagirmi. Faced with Rabih Fadlallah's 1893 invasion, Bagirmi leaders turned to the French for help.



**The Wadai Empire:** The non-Muslim Wadai Empire first emerged in the 16th century as an offshoot of the state of Darfur, a region bordering Chad in present-day Sudan. Early in the 17th century, Islamic leader Abd al Karim united several local Muslim groups and overthrew the non-Muslim Wadai leaders. Abd al Karim subsequently established a dynasty that ruled the sultanate until the late 19th-century arrival of the French.

Besides successfully resisting reincorporation into Darfur, Wadai's leaders conquered substantial new territory. Wadai's most famous ruler, Muhammad Sharif, subjugated Bagirmi and brought the Sanusiyya Islamic brotherhood to Chad in the mid-19th century (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). This movement became an important source of resistance to French colonization well into the 20th century.

### The Arrival of Europeans

Heinrich Barth, a German explorer who worked for the British government, became one of the first Europeans to enter the territory of modern-day Chad when he explored the Sahara Desert in the early 1850s. In 1870, German explorer Gustav Nachtigal led an expedition from Libya to Lake Chad, visiting the Kanem-Bornu, Wadai, and Bagirmi empires.

The writings of these early explorers prompted French interest in the region. From their settlements on Africa's west coast, the French moved



Übersetzung des Goethe'schen König Wilhelm's an Scheich 'Omar von Bornu. (S. 594.)

inland, first claiming the territory of Ubangi-Chari (present-day Central African Republic – CAR) then occupying what is now southern Chad in 1889.

Meanwhile, Sudanese warlord Rabih Fadlallah conducted slave raids throughout the region in the 1890s, sacking Bornu-Kanem, Bagirmi, and Wadai settlements. French military expeditions engaged Rabih's troops numerous times before defeating them in 1900.

## French Equatorial Africa

In the first years of the 20th century, the French implemented colonial rule, outlawing slave raiding by the northern groups and establishing a rudimentary administrative structure. In 1905, France's Chadian territories joined with other French colonial possessions to form French Equatorial Africa (FEA), a colonial federation consisting of Chad, Gabon, Middle Congo (present-day Republic of the Congo), and Ubangi-Chari.

Administration of FEA took place from Brazzaville (in present-day Republic of the Congo). In Chad, French colonial presence was largely confined to the South, where the French opened some schools (see p. 1-2 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and started a few development projects. By contrast, French presence in Chad's central and northern areas was minimal.



Indeed, resistance against the French continued in some of these regions for decades.

Eventually, the French came to rely on indirect rule through individual Islamic sultanates in Chad's central and northern

areas. In the South, where the French did have direct control, the colonial administration introduced large-scale cotton farming. The small advancements brought by the colonial system in the South, such as improved roads, some income, and new schools, did not outweigh its burdens. These included the dislocation of villages, significant hardship for farmers facing mandatory cotton production quotas, and forced labor (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

In contrast to their other African possessions, the French never tried to unify Chad or prepare its residents for service in the colonial administration. Instead, the French viewed Chad primarily as a source of raw cotton and untrained labor for use in other FEA regions. In fact, many areas of Chad remained ungoverned for much of the colonial period.

During World War II, FEA's governor-general advocated support of the Free French instead of the Vichy French government because of the latter's collaboration with Nazi Germany. In 1946, the postwar French government – which was controlled by the Free French – rewarded FEA's loyalty by granting its residents French citizenship and giving them the right to elect representatives to France's National Assembly. A decade later, France's **loi-cadre** (Reform Act) of 1956 transferred new powers of self-government to the FEA states.

### Independence

These changes inspired local political activity. Generally, political groupings followed Chad's historic geographic, ethnic, and religious lines: Non-Muslim southerners tended to oppose politically the Muslim residents of the old Islamic sultanates of the northern and central regions. In 1958, voters approved a referendum making Chad an autonomous republic within the French community. Although portions of the North remained under French military administration until 1963, Chad achieved independence in 1960 with François Tombalbaye, a teacher and trade union leader from the South, as its first President.

### The Tombalbaye Era

Although Tombalbaye initially made some effort at integrating Chad's political factions, Chad's central and northern groups resented the southerners' political dominance. To neutralize his opponents and ensure his hold on power, Tombalbaye allowed only government-approved candidates in the 1963 elections, ushering in a one-party state.

Within a few years, Tombalbaye's authoritarianism had alienated large segments of the population. Further, economic conditions worsened, corruption increased, and government services and programs declined in quality and quantity.



In 1966, several rebel groups in the northern regions joined together to form an anti-government coalition, the National Liberation Front of Chad (*Front de Libération Nationale du Chad*—FROLINAT). Meanwhile, a smaller rebel group formed in the east-central region. Both groups aimed to overthrow Tombalbaye's government, reduce French influence in Chad, and forge a stronger relationship with North Africa's Arab states. In the late 1960s, home-grown anti-government violence occurred across central and northern Chad as groups in Sudan and Libya provided vocal support to the rebels.

When governmental forces were unable to crush the rebellions, Tombalbaye turned to the French to contain most rebellious activities in 1970-71. A subsequent reduction in violence,



combined with the government's release of political prisoners plus Tombalbaye's promise to work toward national reconciliation, compelled the French to withdraw.

Tombalbaye abruptly ended his reform efforts in 1971 when he claimed to have uncovered a coup attempt supported by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. In retaliation, Tombalbaye invited anti-

Gaddafi Libyan rebel forces to establish bases in Chad. Gaddafi responded by offering FROLINAT an operational base in Tripoli.

In 1971-72, the Tombalbaye regime faced student demonstrations, a serious financial crisis, a drought, and civil unrest. When authorities captured Libyan-trained rebels attempting to smuggle guns and explosives into the capital, Tombalbaye abandoned all attempts at national reconciliation, jailing thousands, including former southern political allies.

Over the next 3 years, Tombalbaye gradually lost the support of his southern base and the loyalty of the military. He tried to deflect mounting criticism in various ways, such as requiring

new African names for French place names (for example, the capital Fort Lamy was renamed N'Djamena). After Tombalbaye ordered the arrest of senior military officers suspected of plotting against him in 1975, several military units mutinied, killing him during a coup d'état.



### The Malloum Era

Southern military officer Félix Malloum then assumed power as head of a Supreme Military Council. Malloum's military

government overturned some of Tombalbaye's most hated policies but was largely ineffective. While Malloum managed to stay in office, surviving a violent coup attempt in 1977, the balance of power gradually shifted to the rebels when Libya began to provide them more weaponry and logistical support.

This increase in Libyan support helped the rebels but also intensified tensions and rivalries within the rebel groups. A few years earlier, the northern rebels had split into several factions, including one led by Hissène Habré, an ex-member of Tombalbaye's government, and another by Goukouni Oueddei (known as Goukouni). In 1977, Malloum met with Habré to negotiate a ceasefire. With international support, the parties reached a peace agreement and formed a government in 1978 with Malloum as President and Habré as Prime Minister.

### The Hissène Habré Era

Despite the integration of rebel leader Habré into the Chadian government, the rebel groups continued their violent activities. By 1979, FROLINAT controlled about 1/2 of Chad's territory. Meanwhile, Goukouni announced he had united 3 other rebel groups and continued to seek the government's overthrow. As rebels advanced on the capital, much of its population fled, including President Malloum. With new factions forming and reforming, the civil war became predominantly a struggle among northern rebel groups.

As the violence across the country intensified, Chad's neighbors organized 4 conferences to devise a power-sharing agreement acceptable to all parties. Negotiations were severely hampered by neighboring Nigeria's and Libya's efforts to influence the results. Nevertheless, 11 Chadian factions agreed in 1979 to a new government, the Transitional Government of National Unity (*Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition* – GUNT), with Goukouni as President and Habré as a cabinet minister. While the other cabinet positions were assigned to representatives from Chad's different regions, the factions remained distrustful of each other. The rivalry between Goukouni and Habré grew.

**Habré is Forced Out:** In mid-1980, President Goukouni signed a military cooperation treaty with Libya then requested direct military assistance from Libyan leader Gaddafi. By December, Libyan forces allied with Goukouni occupied the capital. Habré fled to Sudan, vowing to continue his fight for supremacy.



The international community strongly condemned Libya's presence in Chad, calling for Libya to withdraw and sending in a peacekeeping unit, the Inter-African Force (IAF). Eventually, President Goukouni's relations with Libya deteriorated, likely due to Gaddafi's support to a rivalrous rebel group having ethnic and cultural ties to Libya. Because of this rift,

Goukouni asked the Libyan troops to withdraw, which they did by the end of 1981. Taking advantage of their departure, Habré's rebel troops invaded, winning key territories in eastern Chad. IAF troops eventually stopped their advance.

**Habré Returns:** When peace negotiations with President Goukouni collapsed in 1982, Habré resumed his march. This time, the IAF did not engage his troops, allowing Habré to take the capital. As Habré seized power as head of state, Goukouni fled, establishing an opposition government supported by Libya in Chad's North.

With massive Libyan military aid, Goukouni's troops attacked Habré's in mid-1983. Concerned about Libyan leader Gaddafi's intentions, the French soon intervened on President Habré's behalf, dispatching troops and advisers while airlifting supplies to his troops. After heavy fighting in 1983-84, Habré's troops prevailed. Although subsequent peace negotiations required the withdrawal of both French and Libyan troops, Libya refused to do so. Instead, it reinforced its presence in Chad, especially in the northern Aouzou Strip, a territory it historically claimed.

In response to Goukouni's and the Libyans' continuing incursions, the French re-deployed to Chad in 1986. With French on-the-ground support enabled by US weaponry, President Habré launched successful offensives against the Libyans. Chad and Libya honored a ceasefire in 1987-88, then entered into peace negotiations. In 1994, the International Court of Justice returned the Aouzou Strip to Chad, effectively ending the Libyan occupation.

**Habré Flees:** Despite success against Libya, President Habré continued to face internal challenges. In 1989, 3 former Habré advisors were accused of planning a coup against him. One plotter was former commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Idriss Déby. Evading capture, Déby escaped to neighboring Sudan's Darfur region. From there, his forces attacked Habré's troops. In late 1990, Habré fled to Senegal as Déby's forces seized the capital and Déby assumed power.



### The Déby Era

Déby's government enjoyed support from both Sudan and Libya but soon faced significant internal opposition, including several attacks and coup attempts in 1991-92. Nevertheless, Déby implemented a series of reforms that opened the system to multiple political parties. Officially designated interim President in 1993, Déby was elected President in 1996 in Chad's first multiparty presidential elections.

Periodic skirmishes with rebels continued to occur in the late 1990s. Despite accusations of corruption and mismanagement, Déby was re-elected in 2001 amidst a re-escalating northern insurgency. Following protests against the jailing of opposition leaders, the government announced a ceasefire with rebel leaders in 2002.

For the next few years, it appeared that Chad was finally on a progressive course to stability. There was little fighting, and with Chad's new status as an oil-producing country, citizens hoped revenues would transform the country's economy (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). This optimism quickly waned as the Déby regime remained corrupt and repressive, with Chad's security forces regularly committing serious human rights abuses. Following a 2005 referendum and constitutional



amendment abolishing presidential term limits, Déby was re-elected for a 3rd term in 2006.

Rebel offensives soon resumed. Although Déby (with the help of French troops) successfully defused 2 coup attempts, rebels

reached the capital in 2006 and 2008 before they were forced to retreat. Instead of using oil revenues to develop the country, the Déby government bought weaponry to combat the rebels.

**Spillover from Sudan:** Besides these internal challenges, regional conflicts impacted Chad significantly. Beginning in 2003, fighting in Sudan's Darfur region resulted in hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees fleeing to Chad. Soon, the Chadian and Sudanese governments were accusing each other of supporting rebels. While the presence of international peacekeeping forces in Chad beginning in 2008 somewhat calmed the conflict, it was 2010 before the 2 countries signed a peace agreement. Despite normalized relations, most Sudanese refugees remain in Chad (see p. 9 and 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).



Chad's 2011 presidential elections were initially postponed so that the government could respond to complaints regarding the voter registration process. When the issues remained unresolved, the opposition parties boycotted the election. Déby won his 4th presidential term with almost 89% of the vote.

**The Fight against Terrorism:** Meanwhile, increased militant violence in neighboring lands prompted Chad's substantial support to counterterrorism efforts in the region (see p. 8-10 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2013, Chadian soldiers fought alongside the French to halt the advance of al-Qa'ida-linked extremists in northern Mali, then participated in efforts against the Nigeria-based terrorist organization Boko Haram. While these and other efforts earned Chad praise in the international arena, they were not without controversy. Following accusations of human rights abuses by Chadian soldiers in the CAR, Déby ordered a full withdrawal of his peacekeepers there.

### Contemporary Chad

During his 3rd decade in power, Déby had been largely successful in controlling dissent within his own



faction. By allowing his own Zaghawa ethnic group to dominate politically and economically, Déby had engendered some resentment among members of Chad's other 200 ethnic and linguistic groups (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*). The fact that Christians continued to be largely excluded from political power also occasionally causes tensions (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Chad's precarious economic situation continued to cause significant hardship. In late 2014, crowds demonstrated in 3 cities, protesting commodity shortages, increased fuel prices, and nonpayment of public workers' salaries.

Throughout 2015, Boko Haram continued to attack Chadian territory from its bases in Nigeria, killing and abducting civilians, looting and destroying property, and displacing some 70,000 Chadians. In response, Chad's National Assembly adopted stringent new anti-terrorism measures that increased the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions. They further banned veils fully covering the face, legalized the use of excessive force to disperse demonstrations, and allowed the execution of suspected Boko Haram members.

In addition to societal tensions, economic hardship, and the continual threat of violence, Chadians continue to suffer under the Déby regime's poor governance and corruption. Chad remains one of the world's poorest countries where 87% of



rural residents live below the poverty line and suffer persistent food insecurity (see p. 3 of *Sustenance and Health*). Further, Chad houses some 450,000 refugees and internally displaced persons further stressing its already inadequate infrastructure and education, health, and social services.

Collectively, these sources of instability make Chad very fragile. Protests are increasingly common: a 2015 law requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets sparked demonstrations that closed schools and universities, while the gang-rape of a young woman in 2016 generated significant public outrage at the government. Further, protests in advance of the 2016 presidential election included demonstrations and a general strike. Meanwhile, some rebel groups continue their violent anti-government activities.

Through political opposition, civil society organizations tried to deny Déby another term in the 2016 election but were unsuccessful. During the voting, the government shut down the Internet and text messaging services, acts widely condemned by international observers as attempts to influence the election. Amid accusations of voting fraud, the government announced that Déby had won a 5th term with almost 62% of the vote.

**Habré Tried and Sentenced:** In a May 2016 landmark ruling, former President Habré was convicted of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life in prison. Accused of ordering the killing up to 40,000 people and the torturing of hundreds of thousands, Habré had lived for years in Senegal until victims successfully pressed its government to establish a special court under the authority of the African Union for his trial.

### **Su, the Trickster Spider**

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. A common character in folktales across Africa is the animal trickster who behaves in unexpected and amusing ways. Through his quick wits or unique skills, the trickster often fools a more important or powerful being. Many societies use such trickster tales to reaffirm social norms and proper behaviors.

The Sara people of Chad's southern regions relate the adventures of Su, a large, red, hairy spider. In one story, the beautiful daughter of a powerful chief chose not to speak, although she was physically able to do so. By refusing to speak, the daughter avoided a planned marriage to a political ally. Devastated, her father promised his daughter's hand to anyone who could compel her to speak.

Although everyone doubted his abilities, Su announced he would try. He entered the daughter's house carrying a bundle of straw and proceeded to repair her thatched roof. The daughter was so amused by the comical site that she burst out laughing and called Su a fool. Su and the young woman were subsequently married.

## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Name

Republic of Chad

*Jumhūriyat Tshād* (Arabic)

*République du Tchad* (French)

### Political Borders

Libya: 652 mi

Sudan: 872 mi

Central African Republic: 967 mi

Cameroon: 693 mi

Nigeria: 53 mi

Niger: 743 mi

### Capital

N'Djamena

### Demographics

Chad's population of about 18.5 million is growing at a rate of 3.05% per year. Significantly, Chad has one the Sahara region's highest population growth rates, ranking it 10<sup>th</sup> in the world. Like many African states, Chad is a young nation – about 67% of the population is under age 25. Chad is primarily rural: only 24% of the population lives in metropolitan areas, predominantly in N'Djamena. Approximately 1/2 of Chadians live in the South and 1/3rd in the center. Chad's North remains sparsely populated.



red, the Chadian flag's 3 equal vertical color bands have several different meanings. The blue band symbolizes hope, the sky, and Chad's fertile South; yellow represents the sun and the desert in the North; red denotes unity, progress, and sacrifice.

### Flag

Combining colonial French blue and red with the Pan-African colors of yellow and

## Geography

Situated in Central Africa, Chad is a landlocked country sharing borders with Libya to the north, Sudan to the east, the Central African Republic to the south, Cameroon and Nigeria to the southwest, and Niger to the west. Chad's total land area is about 495,755 sq mi, making it slightly larger than 3 times the size of California.

The hot and dry Saharan Desert extends along Chad's northern 1/3. A large basin comprises the majority of the remaining territory, bounded by mountains to the north, east, and



south. The towering and volcanic Tibesti Mountains lie in the Northwest, where Chad's highest peak, Emi Koussi, rises to 11,204 ft. Broad, semiarid plains characterize Chad's center. Known as the Sahel, this zone extends across Central Africa and divides the Sahara Desert from the southern savannas. The Sahelian plains eventually transform into fertile, flat lowlands in the South. The Chari and Logone are Chad's longest rivers, flowing from Chad's Southeast into Lake Chad, which borders Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger in Chad's West. Of note, Lake Chad has shrunk substantially since the mid-20th century. Today, its exact size varies depending on annual rainfall and evaporation caused by high temperatures during the dry season. Consequently, the lake's size ranges from about 3,800 sq mi to 11,000 sq mi from year-to-year.

## Climate

Chad's climate and temperatures vary across its 3 zones: desert in the North, Sahelian in the center, and subtropical in the South. Accordingly, the northern and central regions are hot and dry, while the South experiences a more humid and rainy climate. December-February constitute the cool and dry season, with temperatures averaging 80°F, but dropping as low as 55°F at night. Chad's hot season runs March-May, bringing **harmattan** trade winds off the desert, with daytime temperatures averaging 100°F. In the South, rainfall is heaviest June-October. The North receives little to no rain each year.

## Natural Hazards

Chad is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including *harmattan* winds, locust plagues, and periodic droughts. Most prevalent November-March, *harmattan* winds intermittently blanket portions of Chad with a thick haze of dust, disrupting air and road traffic and causing various health complications, including asthma and bronchial illnesses. In addition, swarms of locusts periodically sweep across Chad, destroying crops.



Finally, a lack of significant rainfall occasionally leads to drought, which in turn results in food shortages and contributes to desertification. In 2012, a severe drought prompted a national food and humanitarian crisis, eventually alleviated with the help of international disaster relief organizations.

## Environmental Issues

Desertification caused by recurrent drought, rampant deforestation, and harmful farming techniques affects over 60% of Chad's territory and leads to shortages in potable water. Notably, only about 44% of rural residents have access to basic drinking water. In addition, Chad's primary source of water, Lake Chad, is only 5% of its original size and continues to shrink each year.

Further, just 5% of rural Chadians have access to basic sanitation. As a result, improper waste disposal in rural regions creates pervasive water and soil pollution. Finally, because only about 11% of Chadians have access to electricity, the burning of wood and charcoal results in household air pollution. In N'Djamena, air pollution caused by automobile and industrial emissions is an additional concern.

## Government

Chad is a presidential republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 23 administrative regions, each presided by a presidentially-appointed governor. Regions subdivide into 61 departments. Within each department,

villages are grouped into counties led by local traditional chiefs. Since gaining independence from France in 1960 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), Chad has had several constitutions, the latest of which was adopted in 2018. Chad's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

### Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is elected by popular vote and serves as chief-of-state and head of government. The President appoints the 29-member Council of Ministers, which supports the President. The President also



has considerable influence over the appointments of judges, military leaders, and provincial officials and over both the legislative and judicial branches.

Idriss Déby first came to power in 1990 and began his 6th continuous Presidential term in April 2021 but was killed shortly thereafter (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). A 2005 Constitutional amendment allows the President to serve unlimited 5-year terms. His son,

General Mahamat Kaka Deby Itno, will serve as president of the transitional military council for 18 months leading to a new election.

### Legislative Branch

Prior to the installation of the National Transitional Council (NTC), Chad's legislature was a 1-chamber National Assembly (NA) composed of 188 members serving 4-year terms. While 163 members were elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation, the remaining 25 were directly elected in single-seat constituencies by popular vote. The NA controlled all legislative powers, including amending the constitution, appointing positions in government, and approving declarations of war. The NTC is comprised of 93 members and will act as the NA until the country's next election takes place.

## Judicial Branch

Chad's legal system is a mix of formal law and informal, customary law, which is based on traditional, unwritten practices of the indigenous population. The civil judiciary includes a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, a High Court of Justice, and Courts of Appeal. As the highest court, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases. For the Supreme Court, the President appoints the Chief Justice and 8 judges, while the speaker of the NA appoints the remaining 7, all of whom serve life-long terms. Historically, judicial power has been weak and justices are often criticized for being corrupt and vulnerable to political influence.

Local, customary courts adjudicate disputes pertaining to family, inheritance, and property. In some cases, village chiefs consult diviners (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) to assess guilt and may assign public shaming or beatings as punishment.

## Political Climate

Chad has had numerous active political parties since Déby's introduction of a multi-party system in the 1990s (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Most parties are fractionalized, underfunded, and politically weak. Prior to the the dissolution of the NA, Déby's Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) had been Chad's ruling party since 1990 and recently held the majority (62%) of NA seats.

The NA's remaining 71 seats were distributed among 11 other parties, including the National Union for Democracy and Renewal (UNDR), Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), Union for Renewal and Democracy (URD), National Rally for Development and Progress (Viva-RNDP), and Front of Action Forces for the Republic (FAR), among others. Of note, political parties sometimes form along ethnic and rarely along religious lines (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).





The government faced several challenges in maintaining the democratic process. Although the former Constitution guaranteed freedom of assembly, expression, and press, Déby's regime regularly jailed, harassed, and intimidated political opponents, journalists, and activists. In addition, opposition groups repeatedly reported voting irregularities (see p. 11-13 of *History and Myth*) despite international observers deeming elections generally free and fair. Discouraged by the election fraud, voters turned out in low numbers. Finally, corruption permeates all levels of government and significantly hinders the political process.

## Defense

The Chadian Armed Forces (CAF) are a unified military force consisting of ground, air, and paramilitary branches, with a joint strength of 33,250 active duty troops. It is charged with defending against foreign and domestic threats and supporting disaster relief efforts. Due to Chad's history of internal instability (see p. 6-14 *History and Myth*) and emerging threats



from radical Islamist groups, domestic counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts dominate operations.

**Army:** The Chadian Army is a well-equipped, well-trained force of approximately 27,500 active-duty troops, consisting of 8 maneuver battalions (including armored and light), 3 combat support battalions, and 1 combat service support unit.

**Air Force:** The smallest of the 3 military branches, the Chadian Air Force consists of 350 active-duty personnel and has 1 each ground attack unit, transport squadron, Presidential transport unit, and attack helicopter squadron, with 12 combat capable aircraft, 5 of which are used for training.

**Paramilitary:** The Chadian Paramilitary divides into 7,400 active-duty State Security Service General Direction members and 4,500 active-duty Gendarmerie personnel. The National and Nomadic guard consists of 7,400 personnel.

# Chadian Air Force Rank Insignia



Division  
General



Brigadier  
General



Colonel



Lieutenant  
Colonel



Major



Captain



First  
Lieutenant



Second  
Lieutenant



Master  
Sergeant



Staff  
Sergeant



Sergeant



Corporal



Private  
First  
Class

## Security Issues

Chad's security environment is dominated by a variety of both internal and external threats.

**Internal Violence:** Violence stemming from rebel groups seeking to overthrow the government has plagued Chad for several decades, leaving more than 215,918 Chadians displaced (see p. 7-10 and 13 of *History and Myth*). Despite intermittent periods of stability, rebel groups remain active along Chad's border regions. Of note, the ongoing violence has hampered international efforts to deliver aid to Chad's displaced and vulnerable populations.

**Boko Haram:** Boko Haram is a Nigeria-based violent Islamist insurgent movement that first emerged in the 1990s. Today, it also operates from parts of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon while seeking to purge the region of Western influence. Notorious for its brutality, Boko Haram has conducted several terrorist attacks in Chad, primarily in the Lake Chad region and in the capital city of N'Djamena. These attacks have destroyed entire villages and killed scores of Chadians. Since 2009, Boko Haram has destroyed entire villages, killed over 40,000 people, and displaced over 3.01 million others across the Lake Chad region. An additional 3.3 million require emergency food aid and 10.6 million require humanitarian assistance.



villages and killed scores of Chadians. Since 2009, Boko Haram has destroyed entire villages, killed over 40,000 people, and displaced over 3.01 million others across the Lake Chad region. An additional 3.3 million require emergency food aid and 10.6 million require humanitarian assistance.

In 2015, Boko Haram publicly pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State Organization (IS, also known as Daesh, ISIS, and ISIL), a militant Islamist group currently controlling large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria. Although Chad and its regional allies successfully reversed Boko Haram's recent territorial advances, the new alliance with IS fuels the concern that Boko Haram may gain more regional influence.

**Regional Insecurity:** Porous borders and ongoing internal conflicts in neighboring Libya, Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria result in regional tensions. The continuing movement of weapons, drugs, and rebel forces across the borders results in intermittently heightened tensions. Regional tensions escalated most recently in 2014, when Chad temporarily closed its border with CAR following intensified violence, later reopening a corridor to allow refugees to pass.

As of 2024, roughly 599,754 refugees have entered Chad, primarily from Sudan, Cameroon, the CAR, and Nigeria. Although Chad cooperates with international organizations to administer aid to these displaced populations, the efforts are severely underfunded. Refugee camps stress Chad's already limited public resources and are fraught with violence and criminal activity. Consequently, the majority of residents live in dire conditions.

### Foreign Relations

Chad's desire to secure its borders and counter regional Islamist militant groups significantly influences its foreign relations. Thus, Chad generally seeks friendly relations with



neighboring countries, participates in multiple regional counter-terrorism operations, and actively encourages other African nations to take ownership of regional security. In addition, Chad is a member of global

institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the World Trade Organization.

**Regional Security Cooperation:** Chad participated in the French-led Operation Barkhane, an anti-insurgent operation formed in 2014 together with Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Collectively known as the "G5 du Sahel," the group addressed common security concerns and seeks to promote economic development of the Sahel region, including

investment in local infrastructure, agriculture, and pastoralism. Chad and Mauritania are the only two original G5 du Sahel members remaining. Chad is also a founding member of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a 5-country security force (with Benin, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria) established in 2015 to fight Boko Haram and other Islamist militant groups. The MNJTF's headquarters are in N'Djamena.

**Relations with the US:** The US and Chad have strong political and military ties, first established in 1960 following Chad's independence from France. Most notably, the US partners with Chad in numerous counter-terrorism and internal security operations, such as the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), first established in 2005. Under the TSCTP, the US provides training to counterparts in 12 countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia) on regional security and stability practices.

The main objectives of the TSCTP are to deny terrorists the ability to move freely in the sparsely populated Sahara, promote knowledge-sharing among member nations, and develop regional interoperability. The TSCTP also seeks to protect vulnerable groups living in isolated areas that are most susceptible to extremist ideologies by supporting social services, youth employment, and improving health and education infrastructure. Chad hosted the annual TSCTP counterterrorism exercises known as Exercise Flintlock in 2015.

In addition to military support, the US provides Chad with bilateral assistance to develop Chadian civil society, human rights institutions, and other socio-economic stabilizing



agencies. The US also provides Chad with financial aid to support various humanitarian efforts, including food security and medical assistance programs for displaced Chadian and international refugee populations.

## Ethnic Groups

While the government neither officially recognizes ethnic groups nor collects census information regarding their membership, scholars estimate Chad is home to over 200 separate ethnic groups.



Historically, Chadian ethnic groups divided into 3 groups: nomadic pastoralists, semi-nomadic pastoralists, and sedentary agriculturalists.

Historically, these different settlement

patterns aligned with Chad's distinctive geographic regions and generally still hold today. The southern 1/5 of the country is home to Chad's sedentary agriculturalists, while the northern Sahara Desert region is populated by nomadic groups. By contrast, the country's central Sahelian region hosts a few of both types plus semi-nomadic groups. Of note, Chadians of all ethnicities now inhabit the country's urban areas. Further, many of these peoples also reside in neighboring Libya, Sudan, the CAR, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger.



**Sara:** The Sara and its numerous sub-groups comprise Chad's largest ethnic group, around 31% of the population. The Sara peoples live primarily in the South and are usually Christians or followers of traditional religion, though some Sara people living in urban areas are Muslim. Primarily farmers, many Sara peoples also raise livestock. Of all Chad's ethnic groups, the Sara had the most contact with the French during the colonial period. The Sara suffered under French forced labor and displacement policies yet benefitted from French educational opportunities. Consequently, they were better positioned to assume governing responsibilities

upon Chad's independence. Chad's first President, François Tombalbaye, belonged to a Sara sub-group.

**Toubou and Gorane:** The Toubou of Chad's far northern regions also divide into several sub-groups. Primarily Muslim and historically nomads, some Toubou today follow a semi-sedentary lifestyle, guiding their herds from pasture-to-pasture in the dry season and returning to permanent villages in the rainy season. While rebel leader Goukouni was a member of a Toubou sub-group called the



Teda, President Habré was a member of one called the Daza. Another prominent northern group, the Gorane, also includes several sub-groups.

**Kanembu, Bagirmi, and Maba:** These primarily Muslim groups are notable because their ancestors were the core ethnic groups of the Kanem-Bornu, Bagirmi, and Wadai empires, respectively (see p. 2-4 of *History and Myth*).

**Arabs:** Chad is also home to Muslim Arabs who divide into 3 major tribes. While the Juhayna began arriving from Sudan in the 14th century, the Hassun and Awlad Sulayman trace their history to Libya. Primarily living in Chad's central Sahelian zone, the Arabs traditionally are semi-nomadic animal herders.

**Other Groups:** Other notable groups include the Fulani, Hadjerai, Kotoko, Moundang, and Zaghawa, among many others. Current President Déby is a member of a Zaghawa sub-group. As noted earlier, Chad also houses refugees from several neighboring countries. Further, Chad's urban areas are home to Libyans, Cameroonians, Sudanese, Nigerians, and Yemenis who are mostly merchants and tradespeople. Finally, many of Chad's missionaries and aid workers are European or North American.

## Social Relations

Many of Chad's ethnic groups traditionally recognized several low prestige occupational groups and classes, such as hunters, tanners, potters, and blacksmiths. These classes or groupings often dictated potential marriage partners and were associated with particular types of speech or behavior.

While these class distinctions may still have some meaning in a few rural areas, they have largely eroded in most parts of the country, largely due to significant societal changes since independence. Specifically, improved access to education and the mobilization of armed movements have led to new societal divisions based on economic class and politics.



Chad's ethnic groups traditionally have their own distinctive social systems based on their lifestyles. Among Saharan nomads like the Daza, the basic societal unit is the family. Several families together form a clan, which typically has a name and symbol. Clans control their own palm groves, farmland, springs, and pastures.



By contrast, the basic social unit of the semi-nomadic Arab tribes is the **kashimbet**, a lineage of several generations of men, their wives, and children or grandchildren. Each **kashimbet** is headed by

an elder male or **sheikh**. Among the sedentary Sara, the basic social unit is traditionally the village. Within the community, residents trace their identity and rights to land through their patrilineage, or male side of the family.



### 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

#### Overview

According to a 2020 Pew Research Center report, about 55% of Chadians are Muslim and about 41% Christian. The remainder follow traditional beliefs and practices or claim no religious affiliation. Chad's constitution stipulates the separation of church and state and recognizes no national religion.

#### Traditional Beliefs

Before Islam and Christianity were introduced, Chadians

followed a variety of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Many Chadian groups practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate. Animism promotes the notion that all natural objects – for example, trees



and animals – are sacred, and this conviction establishes a close connection between animists and their environment. For example, the Mbaye, a Sara subgroup of Chad's South, traditionally believed in water, lightening, and sun spirits, among others.

Many groups also recognized a supreme being, a creator god who was good, merciful, and unknowable. Because the supreme god did not intervene in daily life, practitioners rarely made appeals directly to him. Instead, they petitioned a host of lesser spirits. Some Chadian groups also believed that the spirits of their ancestors intervened in daily life to guide or obstruct human behavior. To influence or understand the spirits' actions and intention, they held special ceremonies or performed certain rites. For example, offerings to ancestors were an important part of the Sara people's rituals marking the new year, the first new moon following the harvest.

Religious beliefs and practices also played an important role in some groups' political structures. Among such groups, the political leader was also a religious leader who was responsible for maintaining good relations with the spirit world. For example, one duty of the leader of the Moundang ethnic group was intervention with the sky spirits in order to maintain the community's appropriate social order.

Most Chadian groups had various ways to ensure that specialized religious knowledge was passed from one generation to the next. For example, some groups supported secret societies whose members educated children and young adults in religious beliefs. Traditionally, each ethnic group also held ritual ceremonies to mark birth and death, celebrate initiation, promote healing, and cast out evil spirits. Celebrants often offered food and drink to the ancestor and other spirits during the ceremonies, which also included making music, drumming, singing, and dancing.

Some Chadians today still adhere to traditional beliefs, including practicing certain ritual ceremonies and initiation rites (see p. 3-4 of *Family and Kinship*). Many Chadians who claim a Christian or Muslim identity also incorporate particular aspects of traditional religion into their devotional practices. Some Chadians experiencing misfortune seek counsel from diviners, ritual specialists who identify the source of the hardship and offer solutions to mediate it. Of note, Chadians rarely accuse one another of witchcraft, an act that can result in significant

mistreatment of the accused in other countries in the region.

## Islam

### Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in



Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

## Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is “a person who submits to God.”

## Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

## Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger.”
- Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- Pilgrimage to Mecca (*The Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.



## Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews “people of the Book,” referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

**Abraham:** All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

**Scriptures:** Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

**Jesus:** The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

**View of Death:** Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.



### **Concept of Jihad**

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's

command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

### **Ramadan**

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this

time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Chadian Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as *iftar*. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This “Night of Power” marks Muhammad’s receipt of the first verses of the Qur’an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** Also called **Korité** in Chad, this “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrates Ramadan’s end and is a national holiday in Chad.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** Also known as **Tabaski** in Chad, this “Festival of Sacrifice” commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is also a national holiday.

### The Arrival of Islam in Chad

Islam penetrated northern and central Chad in a series of waves. Although Arab traders may have brought Islam to the region as early as the 10th century, Islam’s initial impact was minimal. The situation changed with the rise of three powerful empires that adopted Islam between the 11th and 17th centuries (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Over time, several inhabitants adopted the new religion.



### Sufi Tradition:

Characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer, the Sufi tradition of Islam has been influential in Chad. The first Sufi movements emerged in the Middle East in the 13th century, when charismatic Islamic leaders sought to complement Qur’anic study with direct religious experience through prayer and contemplation. Followers of these leaders

formed brotherhoods to promote their versions of Islam. West African Muslim traders brought the Tijaniyyah order to Chad in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Founded in mid-19th century Libya, the Sanusiyya brotherhood enjoyed substantial influence in Chad around the turn of the 20th century. Its followers promoted Islam as a way to reject French cultural influences and colonialism (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*).

## Christianity

Christianity first arrived in Chad in the early 20th century, shortly after the French took control of the region (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). In contrast to colonialists in other African colonies, the French did not support the early efforts of



Christian missionaries. Instead, the French adapted the structures of the old Islamic states to colonial needs. Following World War I, the colonial government's opposition to the religion's introduction softened somewhat with the government eventually

tolerating the presence of Christian missionaries. In the 1920s, American Baptists were among the first Christian missionaries to arrive, quickly followed by other Protestant denominations. The Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Fathers founded their first mission in 1929. Following World War II, both Protestant and Catholic missions began offering medical services and opening schools (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). These efforts were concentrated in the South among Chad's animist populations. Few Christian missionaries attempted to proselytize among Chad's Muslim population.

## Religion Today

Religious ceremonies are popular social occasions for Chadians. While most urban areas are home to Chadians of all traditions, Muslims remain concentrated in the northern and central regions with Christians mainly in the South. Some predominantly Muslim groups include the Fulani, Toubou, Kotoko, Kanembu, Baguirmi, and Zaghawa, as well as the Arab tribes (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Generally, religious relations between Christians and Muslims are marked by mutual tolerance and cooperation. While the factions in Chad's decades of civil wars reflected the country's broad geographic, ethnic, and religious divisions, religious tension was not a contributing factor in the civil unrest.

### Islam

Most Chadian Muslims identify with the Tijaniyyah or Sanusiyya Sufi traditions while adhering to the Maliki school of Sunni Islam. Maliki is a generally tolerant school of thought that emphasizes community consensus and the primacy of the Qur'an over later Islamic teachings. A very small percentage of Chad's Muslims hold fundamentalist beliefs popular in Saudi Arabia known as Wahhabism or Salafism. Many Muslim children attend Qur'anic schools either in addition to or instead of attending public schools where they learn the practices and morals of Islam and memorize Qur'anic verses in Arabic (see p. 6 of *Learning and Knowledge*).



### Christianity

Some 23% of Chadians identify as Roman Catholic while about 18% are Protestant.

Most Protestants are evangelical Christians. Chad's Christian churches continue to be an important source of social, medical, and educational services for their members.

### Religion and Politics

While Christians and Muslims generally get along, some Christians resent their current lack of representation within the government. Chad's first President, François Tombalbaye, was a southerner who staffed most governmental positions with other southerners, thus giving northern Muslims a political disadvantage. Since about 1980, Muslims from Chad's North have held the Presidency (see p. 8-12 of *History and Myth*). Although many southerners have served as Prime Minister, northern leaders have generally given Muslims preferential treatment in hiring and promotion for civil and military positions.

## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Overview

The family is the center of Chadian life, often serving as a mutual support network for its members. Chadians typically respect their elders highly, care for their less fortunate relatives, and generally prioritize the desires and needs of their families over their own.

### Residence

Housing structures in Chad vary depending on location, family composition, and income. Some 76% of Chadians live in rural areas where electricity and sanitation services are unavailable (see p. 6 of *Sustenance and Health*). While these services are more readily available in urban areas, only Chad's wealthiest urban residents have running water and electrical power.



**Urban:** Housing in Chad's urban areas is varied. A few wealthy Chadians construct single-family, multi-room homes from modern materials like brick and cement often incorporating Western or Arabic architectural styles. Surrounded by high walls, these homes typically consist of multiple bedrooms, several bathrooms, a kitchen, living room, and an outdoor terrace. Chad's small middle class as well as most foreign nationals typically live in apartment complexes.

Chad's poorest urban residents construct small huts from straw, wood, and mud bricks. Families often gather in small compounds comprised of multiple huts, typically sharing an outdoor kitchen and latrine. Most urban residents collect water from wells or purchase it from vendors. Some residents may use generators to power air conditioners, televisions, and lights, while others rely on oil lamps to light their homes.



Interiors are generally sparsely decorated, though some families paint their walls, use curtains, and hang pictures.



**Rural:** Similar to poor urban dwellers, rural families tend to live in compounds of 5-6 single-room huts surrounded by a mud brick wall. Mud floors are common, although some families can afford to cover their floors with cement. In the

North, nomadic populations live in easily transportable, temporary shelters.

### Family Structure

Most residential compounds house multiple generations, including a man, his wife or wives (see “Polygyny” below), his parents, unmarried children, and other extended relatives. Urban and more Westernized Chadians may live as nuclear families, consisting of 2 parents and their children. As head of the household, the father makes all key decisions in consultation with family elders and other male relatives. The mother is typically responsible for the majority of domestic tasks, including childcare, housecleaning, collecting water and firewood, shopping, and food preparation.

**Polygyny:** Refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. Polygyny is legal and relatively common among Muslims and traditional religious practitioners (see p. 2 and 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In 2020, the Pew Research Center reported that 15% of Chadians were part of a polygynous household. By contrast, Christian families tend to be monogamous. Generally, polygyny is less common among younger and educated Chadians as well as urban dwellers.

In a polygynous family, the male head of household lives in his own residence within the family compound, while each wife lives with her daughters and young sons in a separate accommodation. Adolescent sons typically have their own quarters.

In non-polygynous families, a husband and wife may share a residence. Aging parents generally live with or near their eldest son, who physically and financially cares for them. Extended families play an important role in daily life, gathering frequently for meals, birthdays, religious ceremonies, and other special occasions.

## Children

Non-polygynous Chadian couples typically have 2-3 children, while polygynous families may have as many as 12 (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*). Chadians consider children of their fathers' co-wives as their brothers and sisters, though siblings of the same mother share the strongest bonds. Children usually live at home until they marry. An exception is young men who move away for education or employment opportunities. Chadians expect children to respect and obey their older family members while helping younger siblings in daily chores. Children in poorer families often must work to supplement the family's income. By contrast, children from wealthy, urban

families have fewer responsibilities and greater access to education.

## Rites of Passage

Chadians observe rites-of-passage ceremonies to mark the various stages of life, including birth, puberty, marriage,



and death. Rituals may vary considerably based on the celebrant's ethnic and religious heritage.

**Birth:** Chadians have a particular fondness for babies and view children as a sign of vitality, good fortune, and wealth. While southern Chadians publicly announce and celebrate pregnancies, people from northern regions tend to be more private about an expectant mother's condition.

Following a birth, the newborn's grandmother and other female relatives help care for the mother and child. Muslim families typically hold a naming ceremony 7 days following a child's

birth. During the festivities, an *imam* (Islamic religious leader) offers prayers while the father presents the child to family and friends who bring gifts of money, clothes, and toys. Christians typically baptize their children.

**Circumcision:** About 80% of Chadian males, mostly Muslims but some traditional religions practitioners (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and a few Christians, have undergone circumcision. In the North, Muslims typically circumcise boys by age 4, while other Chadian groups perform the procedure at varying ages. Some southern communities practice female circumcision (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*).

**Coming-of-Age:** Many Chadian ethnic groups traditionally celebrate young people's (and particularly boys') passage into adulthood with special rituals and ceremonies. In some communities, all adolescents are segregated from their families by gender and undergo a series of initiation rites designed to teach them traditional customs and enforce gender roles. Once they successfully complete certain tasks, some of which last several weeks, the youth are acknowledged as adults and may return home. The youth may then participate in celebrations held in their honor, adopt new names, and become eligible for marriage.



### **Dating and Marriage**

Boys and girls typically socialize from a young age at school, markets, dances, or work. Chadians typically consider the Western style of courtship inappropriate, although some urban dwellers and residents of the South may date with their parent's permission. For the most part, few Chadians engage in courtship or pursue romantic relationships with partners of their own choosing.

Instead, most Chadians view marriage as a way to improve social status and economic opportunity for both spouses, while

strengthening and extending ties between families and ethnic groups. Consequently, most Chadians enter into arranged marriages. Although the legal marriage age is 18, some rural Chadians marry at age 15 or younger (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*). By contrast, urbanites generally strive to finish their

educations and achieve financial stability before marrying in their mid-20s.



### **Bridewealth:**

Refers to a sum paid by the groom's family to the bride's as compensation for

the loss of her presence and labor. Once a union is arranged, the families negotiate a mutually-agreeable bridewealth prior to making wedding preparations. Typically consisting of items such as jewelry, clothing, livestock, and money, the bridewealth may be paid before or after the wedding.

**Weddings:** While specific practices vary by ethnic group and region, weddings are generally joyous events celebrated by the community. Muslim couples typically sign an Islamic marriage contract in the presence of close friends and family. By contrast, Christian weddings are typically performed by a minister and occur in a church. Among followers of traditional religions (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), family members gather at the bride's home to escort her to the groom's residence. Once she arrives, the couple is declared married. Alternatively, some couples of all faiths choose to marry in a civil ceremony held at a city hall, where the bride and groom recite vows, exchange rings, and sign a marriage contract.

During a marriage ceremony, some Chadians choose to wear traditional clothing (see p. 1-2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), while others wear Western-style white dresses and dark suits. Following most ceremonies, family and friends gather for

celebrations that sometimes extend for several days and include lavish meals, dancing, and singing.

**Divorce:** Divorce is uncommon in most rural areas where it carries significant social stigma for both men and women. Chadians generally view divorced women as failed wives, housekeepers, and cooks while assuming divorced men are irresponsible and unable to provide for their families. Village leaders or family elders often try to help couples resolve marital disputes in order to avoid divorce. By contrast, divorce in urban areas is more common and carries little social stigma.



### Death

In line with Islamic tradition, Muslim Chadians bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased's body is washed, wrapped in a white shroud, and transported by male family members to a mosque where a cleric offers prayers. Relatives then transport the deceased for burial in a cemetery or within the family compound. Mourners typically gather at the family home to honor the deceased. Some families may ceremoniously slaughter a lamb or goat to serve their guests.

Following a death, Christian Chadians usually hold a memorial service for mourners to view the deceased and offer prayers. Afterwards, mourners attend a burial service led by a religious leader. Following the burial, family and friends gather for a meal to honor the deceased. Followers of traditional religions (see p. 1-2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) may engage in rituals to honor ancestral spirits and ease the deceased's transition into the spirit world.

## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Overview

Although Chadian women and men have equal rights before the law, patriarchal traditions continue to grant men most social power and authority. Further, many ethnic, religious, and cultural norms reinforce female subordination and traditional gender roles. Consequently, women face significant discrimination in educational, economic, political, and social spheres.

### Gender Roles and Work

There is a distinct division of labor between the genders in Chadian society. Women are responsible for the majority of household chores such as preparing meals, cleaning, and caring for children and elders. Rural women perform additional physically demanding tasks around the home. These include collecting water and firewood, building and tending fires, and working the fields alongside their husbands. In addition, some rural women operate small businesses, such as selling spices, produce, charcoal, oil, and clothing to supplement the family income. Meanwhile, as household heads, men make the majority of family decisions and are the primary financial providers. Men are also typically responsible for some domestic tasks, such as repairing the home and taking their children to school.



**Labor Force:** In 2023, about 49% of women worked outside the home, lower than the rates of neighboring Cameroon and the Central African Republic, and lower

than the US rate of 57%. Chadian women work in many sectors, including agriculture, healthcare, education, and finance. Women holding office jobs typically work in administrative and clerical positions, though some women have attained high level positions in government, business, and politics. Despite their significant workforce participation, women typically receive lower wages and fewer promotions than their male colleagues.

Moreover, they face discrimination in hiring and are vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace.

### Gender and the Law

While the constitution guarantees women equal rights in education, employment, and social welfare, gender discrimination persists. It is particularly evident in rural regions and among conservative religious communities where certain cultural and religious traditions are biased against women or restrict their rights. Notably, many rural Chadian communities follow customary law (traditional and unwritten laws of the indigenous population), while some conservative Muslim Chadians follow *sharia* (Islamic law).

It is not uncommon for constitutional rights to be overruled by these customary and religious laws. For example, while the constitution grants

both men and women equal rights in property ownership and family life, some customary laws prohibit women from owning or inheriting land. According to Islamic law, widows may only inherit a portion of the family property, while daughters are entitled to just 1/2 the share granted to sons.



Moreover, traditional family codes require wives to obey their husbands. In some Muslim communities, women may only leave the home with their husband's permission or when escorted by a male guardian. By contrast, Christian women and those women residing in urban areas generally enjoy more autonomy, more easily acquire property, and are more likely to be financially independent.

### Gender and Politics

Rates of women's participation in Chad's political process have been historically low at both the national and local levels. In 2021, prior to the dissolution of the National Assembly, just 26%

of NA members (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) were women, compared to 29% in the US Parliament and 33% in neighboring Cameroon (2024 estimates). Even Chadian women supporting local political movements and governance as office workers and assistants rarely assume more significant positions. There is currently no law or quota to promote female participation in the political process.

### **Gender Based Violence (GBV)**

More than 29% of Chadian women experience physical violence and 12% of women endure sexual violence each year. There is no law criminalizing domestic violence, and GBV by husbands, fathers, and other male family members is both common and socially acceptable. Although rape is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment, it often goes unreported. When victims do come forward, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare. In some cases, authorities actively discourage victims from seeking justice, instead advocating internal resolution. In some rural or conservatively religious



areas, victims may even marry their attackers to avoid an accusation of adultery or family shame.

GBV is particularly pervasive along Chad's borders and in humanitarian aid camps populated by

displaced Chadians and refugees fleeing regional conflict (see p. 8-9 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2019, authorities documented over 1,600 sexual and GBV cases committed in refugee camps by other camp residents, Chadian military personnel, and members of rebel groups.

Finally, studies have found that more than 61% of Chadian women marry before the legal age of 18 and some 24% before the age of 15. Many are forced or unwanted marriages common within poor and less educated communities, where families may encourage their daughter's under-age marriage to secure her economic future.



**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** FGM, also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision, is a procedure whereby a woman's sex organ is modified in a way that reduces her ability to experience sexual pleasure. Proponents of FGM see it as a way to discourage women from premarital sex and infidelity. Although FGM is illegal in Chad and its use is decreasing among urbanites, the procedure is widespread among rural dwellers in eastern and southern Chad. As of 2021, about 34% of Chadian women have experienced some form of FGM.

### Sex and Procreation

In line with Islamic teachings, many Chadians traditionally view sexual intimacy as a private matter appropriate only within marriage. While attitudes in urban areas and among non-Muslim communities have liberalized somewhat in recent years, Chadians typically do not discuss sex openly and highly value virginity and fidelity in women.

Chadians also prize fertility, considering children a reflection of their parents' physical strength, health, and wealth.



Due in part to these traditional values, Chad's birthrate of 5.35 children per woman is higher than all neighboring countries but Niger and significantly higher than the US rate of 1.84. Abortion is legal only in the case of risk of death to the mother or malformation of the fetus. The government criminalizes and strictly prosecutes all other uses of the procedure.

### Homosexuality

In 2016, the Parliament of Chad voted to criminalize same-sex acts for the first time in its history, albeit as a misdemeanor punishable by a fine and suspended prison sentence. The next year, in May of 2017, a law was approved which punished same-sex sexual relations with 3 months to 2 years imprisonment and a fine ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 francs (\$82 to \$840 USD).

## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Language Overview

While French and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are the official languages of Chad, most Chadians speak one of 131 indigenous languages as their primary language. This diversity of native languages encompasses 10 language groups representing 3 of the 4 African language families. No more than 15% of the population has the same first language. Chadians in central and northern parts of the country having different primary languages often interact using a modified form of Arabic. By contrast, French and the indigenous Ngambay are shared languages among Southerners.

### Arabic

Nomadic Arab traders first introduced Arabic to the region around the 10th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Today, MSA is used across the Arab world for education, media, government,



and religious purposes. Among Chadians, however, MSA is used primarily for writing, formal speech, and Qur'anic education (see p. 6 of *Learning and Knowledge*). For day-to-day oral communication, most Chadian Arabic speakers prefer an Arabic dialect. While there are dozens of these dialects in Chad, about 1.7 million Chadians speak one known as Chadian Arabic.

Chadian Arabic is primarily an oral language combining Arabic, French, and other local languages. It is most similar to Sudanese Arabic and sometimes called Shuwa Arabic. Speakers of Chadian dialects are usually able to communicate with Arabic speakers from other North African countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. Nevertheless, Arabic speakers from beyond North Africa typically find Chadian Arabic difficult to understand.

## French

A remnant of the colonial era that ended in 1960 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), French is the primary language of instruction in most schools. Only a few thousand Chadians



speak French as their first language. While some 2.3 million Chadians speak it as a 2nd language, their command of the language is often poor, primarily because of inadequate French instruction (see p. 4-5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). French is most commonly spoken in

N'Djamena and other urban areas. Further, it is more widespread in the South than in the North and is typically the preferred language of the government, media, and business elite.

## Indigenous Languages

Chad's 131 indigenous languages exhibit substantial variety and are generally not mutually intelligible. Indigenous languages do not always correspond with ethnicity or religious affiliation, nor are they typically taught in public schools.

**Nilo-Saharan:** Chad's most commonly spoken indigenous languages belong to the Nilo-Saharan language family. Speakers of these languages comprise some 60 million people across north-central Africa. Notable Nilo-Saharan languages in Chad include Bagirmi, Dazaga, Fula, Kanembu, Maba, Naba, Zaghawa, and Ngambay.

Chad's most prevalent indigenous language is Ngambay, spoken by over 1.4 million Chadians, mainly of the Sara ethnic group in the Southwest. Also spoken in Cameroon, Ngambay is a Central Sudanic tonal language.

**Afro-Asiatic:** More than a dozen Afro-Asiatic languages are spoken in Chad, including Semitic forms like Arabic and Chadic versions like Hausa – West Africa's most widely-spoken language and shared by about 442,000 Chadians. Other

prominent Afro-Asiatic languages include Marba, Masana, and Musey, each spoken by over 239,000 people, primarily in southern Chad.

**Niger-Congo:** Chad is home to a few Niger-Congo languages, most commonly Kanuri, Mundang, and Tupuri, each having over 191,000 speakers. Most Niger-Congo-speakers live in southwestern Chad.

## English

Few Chadians speak English, though some businessmen and Chadians with higher education may have some knowledge of the language. While

English instruction is available in public secondary and private schools (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*), the instruction is often poor. Despite an increasing interest in the language, young Chadians typically only know a few English words, often as a part of slang used when speaking other languages.



## Communication Overview

Effective communication in Chad requires not only knowledge of French or Chadian Arabic but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

## Communication Style

While communication patterns vary due to Chad's religious and ethnic diversity, they generally reflect Chadians' common respect for community elders and preference for moderation. Typically friendly and relaxed, many Chadians believe people should ideally remain calm, reserved, and quiet, denying their

personal needs for the greater needs of others and enduring hardship and pain without complaint.

During conversation, most Chadians consider attentive listening and limited eye contact as signs of respect. They prefer to gaze past the speaker, stare at the floor, cross arms, or lean back, all with concentrated facial expressions.



Chadians typically avoid appearing selfish or arrogant, instead striving to appear modest and unassuming. When discussing problems or serious matters, Chadians seldom laugh or joke to ease the tension. Instead, they prefer to demonstrate their concern and seriousness by remaining calm and focused on the discussion.

## Greetings

Chadians typically extend greetings with great care and respect. While verbal greetings vary by language, the most common greeting is the Chadian Arabic **Lalê** (hello). Most Muslims and some Arabic-speakers may also say **as-salam alekum** (peace be upon you), to which the response is **was alekum as-salam** (and upon you be peace). Almost every greeting involves inquiries about the conversation partner's health, family, and property.

Following this verbal exchange, Chadian men often shake right hands, typically avoiding the use of the



left hand during social interactions (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*). If greeting a group, raising both palms while saying *lalê*

to the group as a whole is sufficient. When shaking an elder's hand, Chadians typically kneel or bow, sometimes supporting the right elbow with the left hand to signify the weight of respect for the elder. In predominantly Muslim and northern areas, Chadian men may place the right hand to the heart after shaking hands to convey deep respect and sincerity.

Chadian women typically greet each other verbally, although close friends may also hug. Greetings between men and women are often nonphysical. They may comprise a nod or a brief verbal exchange, or greeters may clasp their own hands together to symbolize a physical handshake. While some



Chadian women may shake hands, foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate a handshake.

### Forms of Address

Chadians use distinct forms of address to demonstrate respect based on the nature of

the relationship. Chadians may address their superiors or first-time acquaintances with the appropriate rank or title, such as the French *monsieur*, *madame*, or *mademoiselle* and *asayid* or *asayeda* in Arabic.

Most Chadians address elders as “mother” or “father” in their native language. They may address others as the mother or father of their eldest child. For example, the mother of Djoua might be called *Am-djoua*. Male friends may call each other *chef* (chief, in French) to signal a close relationship.

### Conversational Topics

After the initial greetings, Chadians typically participate in brief light conversation before progressing to more serious topics. Topics such as sports, movies, art, travel, and work are generally acceptable when conversing with Chadians of both genders. To further establish rapport, foreign nationals should show an appreciation for common interests, such as soccer

(see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). It is noteworthy that despite their modesty, some Chadians are more direct in their comments and opinions than most Westerners.

Chadians tend to avoid potentially sensitive topics such as sex, religion, and politics that could cause disagreement or embarrassment.

Of note, Chadian men typically do not inquire about another man's female relations or family members, and neither should foreign nationals.



### **Gestures**

Chadians often use gestures to emphasize or replace spoken words. For example, clicking the tongue on the roof of the mouth and thrusting the chin upward means "I agree." To beckon, Chadians typically retract all fingers into the right hand, held with the palm facing down. Chadians often raise their eyebrows to indicate interest. They communicate "just a moment" by joining all fingertips of 1 hand with the palm facing up, then lowering the hand in that position. Instead of knocking on the door to see if someone is home, Chadians typically clap loudly outside of the house.

Foreign nationals should avoid certain offensive gestures, such as showing the soles of feet or shoes or walking in front of a praying person.

### **Language Training Resources**

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

### **Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration**

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. Although Arabic dialects generally are consistent in the way words are spelled and pronounced

using Arabic script, there are many different ways of converting Arabic sounds into the Roman alphabet. Countries like Chad that were under French rule often spell words differently. Some common consonant differences are summarized below.

Common English Transliteration	Common French Transliteration	Romanized Arabic
S or ss	C	Said vs. Caid (name pronounced SI-eed)
Sh	Ch	Sheikh vs. Cheikh (an honorific title, often for the ruler of a tribe)
J	Dj	N'Jamena vs. N'Djamena (the capital of Chad)

Some Arabic words often include sounds or letters having no equivalent in the Roman alphabet. The following symbols and letters are used to represent those sounds and letters when they are transliterated into the Roman alphabet.

Letters or Symbol	Description	Example
gh	Like the guttural French "r"	Paris (as pronounced by a French person)
Kh or x	Strong "h"	loch (as pronounced by a Scottish person)
H	Whispered "h"	hoot
dH	Soft "th"	this
' or ʔ	Glottal stop	Pause in the middle of "uh-oh"
q	"k" sound from the throat; "g"; or glottal stop	cough; golf; pause in the middle of "uh-oh"



## Useful Words and Phrases

English	French	Romanized Chadian Arabic
Hello	Bonjour	Lalê
Are you well?	Êtes-vous bien?	Inta (m) / inti (f) âfé?
I am well	Je suis bien	Anâ âfé
Yes	Oui	Aye
No	Non	La
Please	S'il vous plaît	Samini
Thank you	Merci	Shukran
You are welcome	De rien	Afwân
What is your name?	Quel est votre nom?	Usumak shunu?
Where are you from?	D'où venez-vous?	Wên inta?
Goodbye	Au revoir	Agod(u) âfé [s (p)] (if speaker leaves) / amshi/u âfé (s/p) (if speaker stays)
What does ____ mean?	Que veut dire ____?	Ma' anata ____?
What is this?	Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?	Da shunu?
How do you say ____?	Comment dit-on ____?	Kikef tigul ____?
...in English?	...en anglais?	...be inglezi?
...in French?	...en français?	...be fransawi?
What do you want?	Qu'est-ce que tu veux?	Inta tidoor shunu?
What time is it?	Quelle heure est-il?	Al-saa'a kam?
Where is the doctor?	Où est le médecin?	Wên al daktor?
Who?	Qui?	Yaatu?
When?	Quand?	Mata?
Which?	Quel?	Ween/weenu?
Why?	Pourquoi?	Mâla?

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

### Literacy

- Total population aged 15 and older who can read and write French or Arabic: 27%
- Male: 36%
- Female: 19% (2022 estimate)

### Traditional Education

Although the delivery of education varied across time and ethnic groups, the most common Chadian teaching approach was informal, experience-based, and oral. This style was used to transmit values, skills, historical knowledge, a sense of community, and religious beliefs and practices to younger generations (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). In some Chadian families today, elder family and community members still tell stories, sing songs, recite poems, and use coming-of-age rituals to pass on knowledge and skills (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*).



**Early Islamic Education:** Arab traders brought Islam to the region as early as the 10th century (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). As Islam began to gain popularity, scholars founded some **masik** (religious schools) to educate students in basic Arabic and Qur'anic verse. Students seeking advanced studies typically traveled to well-known sites of Islamic learning in Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt, or the Middle East.

### Formal Education in Colonial Chad

After colonizing Chad in the early 20th century (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), France introduced formal primary education, mandating French as the language of instruction. While the French intended their education system to immerse Chadians in French ideals and assimilate them into French culture, the

project largely failed because the French devoted far too few resources to the colony's development (see p. 5 of *History and Knowledge*).

Beginning in the 1920s, the French began allowing Christian missionaries into Chad (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Both the Protestants and Catholics began opening schools primarily in N'Djamena and the South with the intent of promoting their missionary activities through education. Of note, Chad's first secondary schools only opened in 1942. Until then, Chadians seeking an education beyond primary school were forced to travel to Brazzaville (present-day Republic of Congo).



While the colonial government required French to be the language of instruction for most subjects, it permitted religion

classes to be taught in local languages (see p. 2-3 of *Language and Communication*). Due to a lack of local-language resources, well-trained teachers, supplies, and school buildings, among other reasons, only about 8% of Chadian children aged 6-8 attended formal schools in the mid-1950s.

### **Education after Independence**

Upon gaining independence in 1960 (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), Chad's new government established a goal of achieving universal primary education. While this objective has not been reached, Chad's education system has slowly improved over the decades, including the opening of new schools, enhanced teacher training programs, and increasing enrollment.

Seeking to reform the educational system it inherited from France, Chad revised the curriculum to focus more on practical and technical skills. Further, it introduced remedial instruction in French, since few primary students spoke French before arriving at primary school (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*).

Despite these and other changes, political instability and civil war limited significant improvement. Most schools were forced to close for an extended period in the early 1980s due to civil unrest (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*). Although enrollment has increased since then, Chad's education system remains underfunded and of poor quality. Despite a constitutional guarantee of free universal primary education, no level of education in Chad is presently free or universal.

### Modern Education System

Based on the French model, the Chadian education system consists of primary and secondary programs. While the primary language of instruction is French, some schools also deliver some subjects in Arabic, local languages, or a combination of each. Classes often consist of lectures with lessons emphasizing memorization. Most classes meet 6 days weekly for a 1/2 day in the morning or afternoon.

Government spending on education as a percentage of total GDP rose to 2.5% in 2022. Despite this increase, Chad still spent less on education than neighboring countries like Cameroon (2.6%) and Niger (3.8% in 2020), as well as the



US (4.1%). Consequently, the Chadian government relies heavily on international aid to finance education. Even with this assistance, schools remain underfunded, frequently requiring families to pay fees for supplies and to supplement teacher salaries. These costs prohibit many students from attending school.

The Chadian education system faces other challenges such as a chronic teacher shortage, causing class sizes to reach as large as 57 students in primary and 21 students in secondary. Further, many teachers are underqualified: in 2022 only 65% of primary teachers held the proper training credentials. Many

schools lack basic supplies, such as blackboards, desks, and toilets. Insecurity and the threat of civil unrest are constant (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), and as a result, school attendance is often low. Finally, since many families do not recognize the value of formal education, they may prohibit education after primary school or keep their children at home altogether.

The Chadian education system reflects significant regional, socio-economic, rural-urban, and gender disparities. While primary school enrollment is nearly 100% among wealthy Chadians and in some southern urban areas, poor Chadians and residents of northern and rural areas are much less likely to attend school. Chadian girls are also less educated than



boys. In 2022, the youth literacy rate was 41% for males and 31% for females, and only 38% of girls of the appropriate age completed primary education compared to 49% of boys in 2021.

In recent years, Chad has improved aspects of its educational system such as offering instruction in languages other than French. Likewise, students receive instruction in technical and practical skills beginning in primary school, while improved vocational programs are available at the secondary level. New university and other post-secondary programs now offer expanded studies. Despite these improvements, education standards in Chad remain some of the world's lowest.

**Pre-Primary:** Pre-primary education is optional and uncommon. In 2021, about 1% of children of the appropriate age attended private preschools available only in large cities.

**Primary:** Chad's primary education program consists of 6 grades, typically starting at age 6 in cities and age 7 in rural areas. While primary education is compulsory, only 74% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in 2022. The

curriculum includes math, French, history, geography, natural sciences, animal husbandry, civics, and other subjects. Most schools provide instruction in French, though some also teach Arabic or are trying to incorporate other local languages. Although most attendees enroll in public primary schools, some attend private schools that may offer 1-2 hours of English instruction per week..



**Secondary:** Chad's second level of education comprises lower (grades 7-10) and upper (grades 11-13) schools. In 2021, only about 31% of boys and 18% of girls of the appropriate age were enrolled in upper secondary schools, both public and private. Academic lower secondary schools called **lycées** or **collèges** typically offer courses in French and/or Arabic, math, history, social and natural sciences, English, art, and physical education.

After completing 4 years, students who pass the **Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle** (First Round Studies Exam) may



advance to upper secondary school. There, students may choose between humanities and sciences tracks. Some students attend specialized public secondary schools for business (**lycée technique commercial**) or

technology (**lycée technique industriel**). To complete upper secondary school and proceed to a higher education institution, students must pass the **Baccalaureat de l'Enseignement Supérieur**.

**Vocational Schools:** Chad offers a 6-year vocational studies program for students who do not receive the necessary exam scores to attend *lycées* or *collèges*. Vocational schools provide students instruction in technical and practical skills for careers as brick masons, carpenters, mechanics, and other similar professions. Upon completion of a vocational curriculum, students receive a **Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle** (Certificate of Professional Competence).

### **Post-Secondary:**

For decades after its founding in 1971, the University of N'Djamena was Chad's only institution of higher learning. Modeled on the French university system, this public university



offers 3-year bachelor's degrees as well as master's and doctoral academic programs taught in French or Arabic. Other notable specialized institutions of higher education now include King Faisal University and the Institut Supérieur de Gestion, among a few others, mostly located in N'Djamena. In 2020, only 5% of students enrolled in tertiary education. Due to limited offerings, many Chadians pursue post-secondary programs abroad.

### **Islamic Education**

As an alternative or complement to the public school system, some Chadian children attend Islamic Qur'anic schools, where they learn Arabic and study the Qur'an (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Many of these *masik* have no specific curriculum, structure, or trained **marabout** (Muslim religious teachers). By contrast, Chad's so-called "Arabic schools" follow the Chadian public school curriculum in addition to providing Islamic religious instruction and receive some state support. Islamic schools remain most common in Chad's northern and eastern regions, although enrollment at Qur'anic schools across the country has risen in recent years.

## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Overview

Chadians consider respect, honor, and modesty as vital to building strong personal and professional relationships. While customs often vary by context or ethnic group, most Chadians tend to exhibit a casual attitude towards time and punctuality.

### Time and Work

Chad's work week runs Monday-Thursday from 7:00am-3:30pm and Friday from 7:00am-12:00pm. Chadians in some industries also work on Saturdays. While hours vary greatly, many shops and markets open



Tuesday-Saturday from 9:00am-12:00pm and 4:00pm-7:30pm, with a break for lunch. Although most businesses close on Sundays, some food shops open on Sunday mornings. Chadian Muslims typically do not work on Friday (Islamic holy day) afternoons, while almost all Chadians take Sundays off.

Many banks are open Monday-Thursday and Saturday from 7:00am-1:00pm and on Friday from 7:30am-10:30am. Post office hours are typically Monday-Friday from 7:00am-11:30am and 3:30pm-6:30pm, with reduced hours on Saturday. Generally, businesses in urban areas are more likely to adhere to fixed schedules than rural ones. While most businesses close on public holidays, food shops, stalls, and some markets may open for reduced hours.

**Working Conditions:** The legal work week in Chad is 39 hours or 46 hours for agricultural work. In practice, Chadians employed informally in the agricultural sector (see p. 3-4 of *Economics and Resources*) often exceed the legal limit. While Chad has many labor laws to protect workers, lax enforcement and a large informal sector enable violations like overtime without pay, workplace discrimination, deficient work safety standards, and even forced labor.



**Time Zone:** Chad adheres to West Africa Time (WAT), which is 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Chad does not observe daylight savings time.

**Date Notation:** Like the US, Chad uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Chadians often write the day first, followed by the month and year.

**Lunar Calendar:** Chadians use the Islamic calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

### National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March / April: Easter Monday (dates vary)
- April 23: National Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- August 11: Independence Day
- November 1: All Saints Day
- November 28: Republic Proclamation Day
- December 1: Freedom and Democracy Day
- December 25: Christmas Day

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- **Korité (Eid al-Fitr):** End of Ramadan
- **Tabaski (Eid al-Adha):** Festival of Sacrifice
- **Maouloud-AI-Nebi:** Prophet Muhammad's birthday

## Time and Business

Business in Chad typically moves much slower than in the US. While Chadians may expect foreign nationals to be punctual, few consider significant tardiness as rude. Most Chadians prefer to build trust and develop personal relations both before and while doing business, which typically requires extra time and communication. Consequently, meetings often start late and run long. While some business occurs during scheduled office meetings, the development of a good business relationship often requires frequent informal meetings in the

place of work, in other community settings, and over meals.

Business meetings typically begin with inquiries about health, family, property, and other light conversation. While most Chadians are



relaxed and friendly while conducting business, they also typically strive to behave in a way that demonstrates respect for elders and superiors, moderation, and reserve (see p. 3-4 of *Language and Communication*).

Chadians' respect for age and authority often necessitates a hierarchical work place, where upper management tends to run meetings and make most decisions. Conducting business in Chad is often difficult due to ongoing political instability, insecurity, and corruption. Developing good relations with a particular family, community, or ethnic group is often vital for maintaining successful business operations.

## Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Chad depends on the nature of the relationship. While Chadians of the same sex typically maintain less than a distance of an arm's length when conversing with strangers, the space is often greater between unrelated Chadians of the opposite gender.

## Touch

Chadians of the same sex often engage in more conversational touching than Americans. Same-sex friends, particularly men, often touch each other on the arm or shoulder to emphasize a point or to demonstrate their close platonic relationship. Unrelated Chadian men and women rarely have physical contact.

## Left Hand Taboo

As in other cultures across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, Chadians consider the left hand unclean and use it only for personal hygiene. Foreign nationals should avoid using the left hand when eating, gesturing, accepting items, or greeting another person, as these actions may offend some Chadians.

## Eye Contact

While Chadians typically consider extended eye contact offensive or aggressive, intermittent eye contact is common during greetings and business meetings. Women typically avoid eye contact with men, so do Chadians of lower social status among people of a higher social status, particularly in religious and rural settings.

## Photographs

Photographers must acquire a permit from the Ministry of Communications before taking photos. Government and military sites, airports, parks, wildlife reserves, and religious buildings generally prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Chadian's consent before taking his photo. Some Chadians may expect compensation in return.

## Driving

Traffic law enforcement suffers from corruption – soldiers, police, and citizens commonly setting up roadblocks to solicit bribes. In 2019, Chad's rate of traffic-related deaths was 32 per 100,000 people, more than double the US rate of 13. Vehicles are also subject to attack by armed bandits in many areas.



## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

### Overview

Chad's dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the country's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural past. They exhibit Central African traditions, French and Arab influences, modern global trends, and Chadians' adaptations to a harsh climate and prolonged civil conflicts.



### Dress and Appearance

Many Chadians wear traditional attire on a daily basis. Influenced by local climate and customs, traditional clothing is typically loose and covers most of the body to protect it from heat, insects, and dust. Most Chadians wear sandals made from foam, plastic, or leather.

Chadians value a neat appearance, typically maintaining clean and mended clothing. Clothing style and design sometimes indicate social identity or status. For example, ornamentation such as patterned embroidery on necklines, sleeves, and cuffs often represent social class or the wearer's affiliation with a particular ethnic group (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*).

In professional settings in N'Djamena and other urban areas, Chadians tend to wear formal, dark-colored, and modest Western-style clothing. Some men may prefer more casual attire consisting of a collared shirt with traditional designs paired with black or khaki pants. Chadian youth and urban dwellers commonly wear more casual Western-style clothing, sometimes in combination with traditional fashions.

**Men:** Men from the South typically wear a light cotton **complet** (long-sleeved tunic) over loose, tapered pants, usually paired with a hat. Men from northern, central, and eastern Chad prefer a white cotton **boubou** (ankle-length, long-sleeved robe) worn

over baggy cotton pants. Residents of these areas as well as Muslims may wear **jalabiyas** (long loose-fitting robes) combined with a white or red-and-white **tagiya** (turban) used to cover much of the face. Wearers typically complete the outfit with an ornate dagger tucked into one sleeve.

**Women:** Most women's attire includes a **pagne** (a large piece of colorfully patterned cotton fabric wrapped around the body and tucked in at the side) worn over a short-sleeved shirt with a wide neckline and matching head wrap. Some women prefer to wrap a **lafai** (15-foot-long scarf) around their bodies in various styles, while married women typically wear a second **pagne** as an apron. Many women from the South style their hair in elaborate braids. Generally, attire in the South tends to be more colorful and less modest than women's wear in northern, central, and eastern Chad. In those areas, Muslim and conservative women prefer loose robes that cover the entire body except the face.

### Recreation

Chadians typically spend their leisure time with family members and friends. Popular pastimes include socializing, walking to markets, playing soccer or other games, dancing, and participating in community events. Men often gather to tell stories, play cards, and drink tea or **bili-bili** (local millet beer – see p. 3 of *Sustenance and Health*).



Women typically socialize at the market or home, where they knit, crochet, and braid hair. Many Chadians enjoy fundraising parties called **pari-vente**, where organizers collect money for local students' school fees, transportation, and other basic needs (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Wealthy Chadians may travel for vacation in the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Cameroon.

**Festivals:** Chadians commemorate many national and religious holidays with festivals incorporating traditional music, singing, and dancing. Popular festival activities in northern,

central, and eastern Chad include camel and horse races, archery, and wrestling. Inhabitants of southern Chad enjoy harvest celebrations, horseback riding, and boating competitions. During the well-known **Guérewol** festival, men of the semi-nomadic Mbororo group of the South decorate themselves with vibrant paint and jewelry then run races, feast, and dance in a quest to find a potential marriage partner.

Chad's most popular festivals align with Christian or Muslim holidays (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). During **Eid al-Adha**,



also known as **Tabaski**, Muslim families sacrifice a sheep or goat then host a feast featuring the meat. During the 3-day **Eid al-Fitr**, Chadian Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan by feasting, singing, and dancing. To

celebrate Christmas and Easter, Christians typically decorate their homes, attend church services, sing, visit, and share meals.

**Sports:** Football (soccer) is Chad's most popular sport. Most boys, men, and some girls play in community games, often with improvised materials. The national football team, nicknamed **Sao**, has a loyal following. Although Chad has never qualified for the Africa Cup finals or the World Cup, many Chadian footballers have played for French professional teams.



Other popular sports include basketball, track and field events, martial arts, handball, rugby, and traditional forms of wrestling. Horse racing is popular in the country's central Sahelian region. While courts, fields, and athletic gear are usually available in cities, they tend to be scarce in rural areas.

**Games:** Chadians enjoy an array of traditional games that often include cards or strategy. **Mancala** is a popular 2-person strategic game in which players try to capture an opponent's game pieces. During the rainy season, men and boys often play a game translated as "war" in the local languages (see p. 2-3 of *Language and Communication*). During this game, 2 opposing players or groups of players attempt to move sticks assembled in "weapon" formations across a 25-space board drawn in the sand. Children's games typically include rhyming, clapping, dancing, singing, and jumping. Girls especially enjoy **tokolé**, a game similar to jacks as well as a version of hopscotch that requires players to pick up and hold a stone with their toes while hopping.



### Music and Dance

Chadians enjoy distinct musical varieties that often correspond with particular ethnic or cultural groups (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Many traditional songs teach prescribed duties for boys and girls or play an important role during rites of passage (see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*). A valuable member of many communities, the **griot** (historically, a traveling poet, musician, and storyteller) is a repository of Chad's traditional songs.



Chadians from many different ethnic groups play the **kinde** (bow harp), **kakaki** (long tin horn), **hu hu** (stringed instrument with gourds as loudspeakers), and **tam-tams** (drums). Instruments common to the Sara people include whistles, balafons (large xylophones with wooden bars), harps, and **kodjo** drums.

The Kanembu often pair drums with flute-like instruments, while the Fulani prefer single-reed flutes and horns. The Baguirmi often play drums and zithers, and the Teda, a subgroup of the Toubou people, and others from the Tibesti region typically play lutes, fiddles, and **keleli** (chordophones).

In some ethnic groups, men and women play separate roles in music and dance performances. For example, Teda women typically sing while men accompany them on string instruments. Among the Baguirmi, only men perform a dance

featuring a mock battle, while in other dances men and women perform together.



Modern Chadian musicians often mix traditional instruments and styles with other African and international genres, such as Western pop music. Several Chadian

musicians, including Clément Masdongar, a ballad artist popular in francophone Africa, and Tibesti, an acclaimed dance-music group, regularly perform at international festivals. African Melody and International Challal are also popular Chadian musical groups.

### **Cinema and Theater**

Some 3 decades after Chad's only cinema closed due to civil war violence (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*), the Normandie Theater in N'Djamena reopened in 2011 with government support. Despite this historical lack of local cinema access, Chad has produced 2 important filmmakers. From their bases in France, Chadian directors Mahamat Saleh Haroun and Issa Serge Coelo have won international recognition for their films on Chad's civil instability and African social issues. Haroun's most well-known films include *Bye Bye Africa*, *A Screaming Man*, and *Grisgris*, the latter nominated for a Cannes Film Festival award in 2013.



Theater groups in urban areas offer live performances that are often satirical of public figures. In rural areas, community members often gather for religious or cultural rituals and performances. Of note, foreign aid organizations have used theater as a means to reintegrate communities following civil unrest and to combat recruitment to violent extremist causes (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*).

### Literature

Chad has a rich tradition of oral literature that includes histories, family information, folklore, legends, proverbs, poems, and stories passed down through the generations. Due to low literacy rates (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*), production of written literature in Chad has been limited. Moreover, most Chadian authors write from exile as a result of ongoing political turmoil, civil unrest, and political repression (see p. 11-13 of *History and Myth*). Notable authors include playwright Baba Moustapha and autobiographer Joseph Brahim Seïd, who produced works in French critical of life in Chad, social issues, military dictatorships, and political oppression.

### Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Traditional Chadian folk artists typically make pottery, textiles, tools, and instruments from metal, leather, wood, or clay. While traditional handicrafts vary by region and ethnic group, most Chadian folk art and handicrafts have practical uses that can generate income at local markets. Straw is a common material used to make woven baskets, mats, and fans, among other objects. Other



traditional items include jewelry, bronze figurines, masks, and paper products like stationary and greeting cards, often colored with natural violet and green dyes.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Sustenance Overview

Chadian cuisine varies by region and reflects the nation's distinctive geographic characteristics. Depending on climate and location, Chadian dishes primarily incorporate seasonally available, local ingredients.

### Dining Customs

Chadians eat 2-3 daily meals, snacking throughout the day. Typically, women prepare all meals. While Muslim women usually greet and serve guests water, tea, or warm milk upon their arrival, they rarely join a meal when unrelated male guests are present. In more conservative Muslim households, even female and male family members may eat separately.

In some ethnic groups, guests and male family members eat first, followed by children and then women. Rural communities typically reserve meat for men and the animal delicacies (the head, neck, heart, and intestines) for guests.

Although some Chadians use Western-style tables and chairs, most Chadians traditionally sit on floor mats when dining.

Families eat from large, centrally-placed, shared dishes, using their fingers and thumb to scoop food into their mouths. Of note, Chadians eat only with their right hand, reserving the left



hand, reserving the left hand for personal hygiene (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*). Of note, Chadians consider it rude to consume food without also offering it to others in the vicinity. Chadians also find it rude to refuse food, so guests are typically expected to sample some of each dish offered by a host. When guests depart, hosts may escort them a short distance beyond the home as a sign of respect.

## Diet

Chad's main staples include millet, sorghum, and cassava and are served in various forms with almost every meal. Wealthier Chadians enjoy the more expensive rice and pasta dishes, particularly on holidays and on special occasions. Fish is an important dietary component for northern Chadians and in communities situated along Lake Chad and the Logone and Chari rivers. Common varieties include carp, tilapia, eel, and perch, typically served smoked, fried, boiled, or sautéed alongside a grain and seasonal vegetable.



Other common sources of protein include peanuts, dried fish, goat, mutton, chicken, and beef. Popular vegetables include squash,

beans, tomatoes, okra, and cucumbers. Southern Chadians also consume various fruits, including guavas, mangos, papayas, bananas, and avocados. In the North, the most prevalent fruits are figs and limes. While not popular among Chadians living in the South, dairy products comprise a large part of the diets of northern nomadic communities.

Some of Chad's ethnic groups adhere to certain dietary restrictions. Observant Muslims (see p. 2-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they observe particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is **halal**, allowed by Islamic law.

## Popular Dishes and Meals

Popular dishes include **boule** (a thick dough made from corn, sorghum, cassava, rice or ground peanuts, formed into balls and served with various sauces, dried fish, meats, tomatoes, and onions); **bouillie** (a peanut and millet porridge flavored with sugar and lemon); **nashif** (chopped beef or goat cooked with a spicy tomato sauce and served with a light sourdough crepe); **daraba** (okra soup); and **jarret de boeuf** (strips of beef served with a vegetable soup).

Breakfast is usually a light serving of tea and bread. Lunch is the largest and main meal of the day, while dinner is usually smaller. Most lunch and dinner dishes incorporate a protein, starch, and vegetable, served alongside a sauce. Although the exact preparation of sauces varies by region, the most common components include okra, garlic, **piment** (red pepper powder), and dried tomato.



Northern sauces tend to be spicier and incorporate more meat, while those in the South are more lightly seasoned. Peanut paste and dried fish sometimes substitute for the more expensive and occasionally unavailable fresh fish and meat. For dessert, Chadians may enjoy **beignets souffles**, fluffy, fried dough balls or **jus de fruit**, a mixture of fresh fruit juices.

### Eating Out

Located mostly in urban areas, restaurants are popular among wealthy Chadians and foreign nationals. The average Chadian cannot afford to eat out. While Chadians generally consider eating or snacking in public rude, markets and small vendors in urban areas sell a variety of street foods, such as bread, peanuts, porridge, and fresh juice.



### Beverages

Chadians enjoy green or red rooibos tea (an herbal blend also known as redbush) throughout the day and also regularly consume freshly squeezed juices from papaya, guava,

pineapple, and mango. In the North, Chadians may enjoy warmed milk spiced with sugar and cardamom. Across the country, popular beverages include **bili-bili**, a sour drink made from fermented millet, and **carcaje**, a sweet beverage made from stewed hibiscus leaves.

## Health Overview

Although the government has made modest improvements to Chad's healthcare infrastructure in recent years, the population's overall health remains poor. Generally, the healthcare system suffers from a lack of funding and a severe shortage of medical professionals, particularly in rural areas where modern healthcare is inaccessible. With 1,063 deaths per 100,000 live births, Chad's maternal mortality rate is the world's 2nd highest. Meanwhile, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) is the world's 7th highest, at 64



deaths per 1,000 live births. Significantly, trained medical personnel or midwives attended only 39% of births in 2019.

Close to 19% of Chadian children under age 5 are underweight, the

world's 21st highest rate of child malnutrition. Although life expectancy at birth increased from 46 to 60 years between 1981 and 2023, it remains lower than that of neighboring Cameroon (64) and Nigeria (62), as well as that of the US (81). Finally, 42% of the total population (87% of rural dwellers) lives below the poverty line, with persistent famine affecting 1/3rd of Chadians.

## Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Chadian medicine centers use herbal remedies, not surgical procedures, to identify and treat illness. With modern medicine unavailable in rural and remote regions, many Chadians rely on traditional healers and remedies to treat diseases and other ailments. Traditional healers often incorporate a spiritual component in their treatments, helping to cleanse the body of illness, ward off spirits who bring sickness, and restore physical and mental wholeness.

## Modern Healthcare System

As noted earlier, Chad's severely underfunded healthcare system is unable to provide preventative, long-term, and emergency care for the majority of the population. Since facilities are concentrated in cities, rural dwellers generally must travel long distances on poor, unpaved roads to receive treatment. Consequently, modern healthcare is completely unavailable for many. Further, rural clinics often lack the resources and medical expertise to treat serious illnesses.

While there are a number of modern and well-equipped hospitals in the capital city of N'Djamena, the majority



of Chad's medical facilities are dilapidated, ill-equipped, and severely understaffed. In fact, some facilities operate without electricity, running water, or sanitation. As of 2021, Chad had just 6 physicians per 100,000 people, well below the World Health Organization's recommendation of 23 physicians per 100,000 people and significantly below the US rate of 360.



With the goal of improving its healthcare system, in 2012, Chad's government pledged to increase the number of health care workers and raise health sector spending from 3.6% to 15% of its total budget by 2022. However, that goal has not yet been met.

## Health Challenges

As is common in developing countries, the leading causes of illness and death in Chad include communicable, infectious, and parasitic diseases, accounting for 63% of all deaths in

2019. The most prevalent diseases include bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis, typhoid fever, malaria, dengue fever, and meningitis. In addition, widespread poverty, cyclical droughts, and a lack of pre-natal, maternal, and child health services results in rampant, nation-wide malnutrition – the leading cause of death for children below age 5. Notably, Chad’s infant mortality rate is significantly higher than the Sub-Saharan average and higher than all but 2 of its neighbors.

Nearly 120,000 Chadians live with HIV/AIDS, a relatively high prevalence rate of 1.1% of the population but lower than the rates of other West and Central African countries. Of note, HIV disproportionately affects women, yet only 1 in 10 women ages 15-25 has comprehensive knowledge of HIV prevention. Non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and digestive diseases accounted for about 27% of all deaths in 2019. Meanwhile, preventable “external causes” such as car accidents, suicides, and other injuries caused about 10% of all deaths.

### **Water and Sanitation Shortages**

The Chadian government struggles to provide clean drinking water and sanitation to the population. As of 2022, about 78% of urban dwellers and just 44% of rural residents had access to clean drinking water while just 39% of urban and 5% of rural dwellers had access to sanitation facilities. This lack of potable water and sanitation contributes to Chad’s high rates of communicable disease and places Chadians at risk of infection from parasites and bacteria. In addition, intermittent drought-related water shortages further strain Chad’s limited water supplies and occasionally result in widespread humanitarian crises (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Overview

For centuries, most regional residents subsisted as small farmers or animal herders. Until the end of the 19th century, the empires that ruled vast areas of Chad maintained their influence through control of trans-Saharan trade routes (see p. 1-3 of *History and Myth*).

After colonizing Chad in the early 20th century, France focused most of its development efforts in other African holdings (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). What appeared to be Chad's chance for economic development began in the 1920s with France's promotion of large-scale cotton production. In 1928, Cotonfran, a private company, acquired the rights to manage all Chadian cotton production and export.



Nevertheless, this new export industry benefited few Chadians. Viewing Chad solely as a source of raw cotton, France prohibited cotton processing and textile production in the colony. Thus, France neither invested in industrialization nor developed a services economy that could have enabled economic growth and diversification. Instead, Chad's economy was vulnerable to unstable global cotton prices.

When Chad gained independence in 1960, it was ill-prepared to develop its own advanced economy. Besides failing to pursue economic development, the French had neglected Chadians' education (see p. 1-2 of *Learning and Knowledge*). In the early 1970s, the Chadian government nationalized Cotonfran, renaming it Cotontchad. To further develop its cotton industry and to explore exploitation of its proven oil reserves, Chad encouraged foreign direct investment (FDI). Nevertheless, civil war violence, insecurity, political instability, and chronic droughts caused the economy and standard of living to remain stagnant for decades.



When President Déby took office in 1990 (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), Chad was one of the world's poorest countries, with a per capita GDP of just \$290 (the US per capita GDP that year was almost \$24,000). While encouraging some liberal free-market economic policies, Déby also promoted the creation of new "parastatal" enterprises, private firms with some government control and investment. In the end, poor state oversight and corruption often led to inefficiency and mismanagement in these firms. Despite some attempts to reform and diversify the economy, persistent conflict and instability continued to impede development. By 2000, continuing corruption, a lack of long-term investment, poor infrastructure, and dependence on cotton exports in a volatile market caused Chad's per capita GDP to shrink to \$774.

In the early 21st century, proceeds from an emerging oil industry began to fuel some economic growth. In 2003, an alliance consisting of Exxon Mobil, Shell, Elf, and other large international firms began developing oil fields in southern Chad. By 2004, the group was pumping over 200,000 barrels per day. While production levels have since declined, a decade of high oil prices combined with a surge in cotton prices allowed GDP per capita to reach \$1,669 in 2022. Even so, few Chadians have benefited from these oil profits (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Instead, most remain subsistence farmers reliant on small farm plots and good rains.



Chad has natural resources, including land suitable for agriculture, gold, uranium, and bauxite. Primarily due to the country's extended conflict and insecurity, there has been little exploitation of these resources. Many challenges continue to impede Chad's economic development, including long distances to global markets, poor infrastructure (see p. 1-3 of *Technology and Resources*), a poorly-educated workforce, endemic corruption, and an ongoing loss of farmland due to desertification. In recent years, violence and instability in

bordering countries, declining oil production, and low commodity prices have also negatively impacted the economy. Chad continues to rely heavily on foreign aid, which has accounted for nearly 25% of GDP in some years.

Despite limited improvements and an average annual growth rate of 2.4% from 2010-19, most Chadians remain poor, with few prospects for upward mobility. In 2023, 35% of the population were living in extreme poverty, below \$2.15/day per capita. Meanwhile, in 2019, about 39% of children aged five to 14 had to work to help support their families. In 2020 and 2021, the economy contracted by 1-2% annually before rebounding by 3.4% in 2022 due to a slight increase in oil prices. Even so, without major economic, fiscal, and labor-market reforms, Chad could remain one of the world's poorest countries for years to come.

### **Agriculture**

The agricultural sector consists of farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and is the largest component of the Chadian economy, accounting for about 23% of GDP and 70% of employment. Despite the central role of agriculture in Chad's economy, productivity is limited by lack of water and technology and the threat from natural hazards like locust swarms and desertification (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Some 75% of cultivated land is in the southern savanna region. By contrast, most livestock herding and limited farming occurs in the semi-arid central Sahel. In the northern Sahara desert region, agricultural production is limited to dates and legumes, as well as camel herding.

**Farming:** Almost 40% of Chad's land is suitable for agricultural purposes, though only a small portion is used for farming. Most Chadian farmers use traditional slash-and-burn and crop rotation techniques. Some Chadians residing along the riverbeds and lakeshores employ some irrigation. Typical crops include millet, sorghum, sesame, corn, rice, cassava (starchy tuberous root),



yams, potatoes, and onions. While cotton is cultivated on a large scale for export, most Chadian farmers work on small plots for their own subsistence.

**Livestock:** Many Chadians in the central Sahel region raise cattle, goats, and chickens, while camel-herding is common in the northern desert. Although these activities are important sources of income for many Chadians, much of these profits is not reflected in the national economy because most transactions are informal. Nonetheless, livestock and derived products account for less than 1% of all registered exports.

**Fishing:** Fishing in Lake Chad and the Chari and Logone rivers is traditionally an important component of the Chadian economy. In the 1970s, Chad was among Africa's largest



freshwater fish producers, with production peaking at 120,000 tons per year. Largely due to the rapid disappearance of Lake Chad (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*), the fishing industry has been declining since the 1980s. While Chadians consume much of their catch today, some fish are salted and dried for export, primarily to neighboring countries.

**Forestry:** Chad's forests have shrunk considerably in recent decades due to desertification, traditional herding practices that damage the environment, and the clearing of forests for farming and firewood. In 2021, only about 3.3% of Chad's total land area was covered by forests. Important forestry export products include gum arabic (made from the sap of the acacia tree and used in the food industry) and shea butter (extracted from the nut of the shea tree and used in cosmetics).

## Services

Accounting for about 26% of GDP and 21% of employment, services is the 2nd largest sector consisting mainly of public sector jobs and retail trade. While Chad has some telecommunications and banking services, they are primarily limited to N'Djamena and other urban areas.

**Tourism:** While the annual number of tourists declined to 10,400 in 2020, it rebounded to 40,000 in 2021. Chad attracts relatively few visitors, primarily due to a lack of infrastructure, ongoing political unrest, and the threat of violence and disease. Nevertheless, Chad has several notable sites including Zakouma National Park, the Sahara's Tibesti Mountains, and the Ouara ancient ruins.



## Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 50% of GDP and 10% of the labor force. The most significant subsectors of this smallest economic component include oil and manufacturing.

**Oil:** The dominant industrial activity in Chad is oil extraction, accounting for about 76% of export earnings. In 2021, Chad had about 1.5 billion barrels of proven oil reserves located primarily in southern fields near Doba and by Lake Chad. To reach global markets, Chad transports its oil via the 665-mile-long Chad-Cameroon pipeline. Africa's 9th-largest oil producer, Chad exports most of its oil to the US. Oil production has decreased in recent years primarily due to corruption and mismanagement. In 2022, Chad exported \$3.33 billion worth of mineral fuels.

Chad's national oil company, Société des Hydrocarbures du Tchad (SHT) lacks the technology needed to develop its own fields. Consequently, Chad relies on international investors to expand the industry. While the US's Exxon Mobile now has the largest stake in the association begun in 2003, the China National Petroleum Corporation opened Chad's only refinery near N'Djamena in 2011.

**Manufacturing:** Cotontchad's cotton ginning and textile production activities comprise Chad's primary manufacturing pursuits, accounting for about 3% of GDP. Other industries include food processing, sugar refining, cigarettes, cement, beverages, natron (sodium carbonate), soap, and construction materials.

## Currency

Chad uses the Central African CFA Franc, issued in five banknotes (500, 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000 CFA) and eight coins (1, 2, 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 500 CFA). While the CFA subdivides into 100 **centimes**, no *centime* currency is currently in use. CFA Francs are pegged to the Euro at a rate of €1 = 655.96 CFA and are backed by the French treasury. In 2023, the exchange rate averaged 607 CFA to \$1. Regulated by the Bank of Central African States, the CFA franc serves as the

official currency of the Central African Financial Community comprised of Chad, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.



## Foreign Trade

Chad's exports, totaling \$3.5 billion in 2022, primarily consisted of petroleum, gold, oily seeds, resins, and cotton sold to Germany (25%), China (21%), and the UAE (20%). In the same year, Chad imported \$2.1 billion of medications, jewelry, and electrical equipment mainly from China (25%), the UAE (20%), and France (7%) A large portion of Chad's trade goes unrecorded by customs officials due to traditional and informal cross-border trading practices. If informal trade were formalized, data would likely show Cameroon and Nigeria among Chad's most significant import and export partners.

## Foreign Aid

The International Development Association is Chad's largest donor, giving an average of \$143 million in humanitarian aid between 2020-2021 to assist malnourished children, refugees, and displaced people and improve food, water, and sanitation services. During that same time, the US gave Chad an average of \$100 million of aid in the form of food assistance, refugee and migration assistance, security, and other aid programs. The US provided \$96.4 million in assistance in 2021 and an additional \$112.2 million in 2022. The International Monetary Fund, EU, African Development Fund, and other multilateral aid agencies are also substantial annual contributors.

## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Overview

Chad's ongoing civil conflicts and political instability have resulted in some of Africa's most underdeveloped physical infrastructure. Most Chadians lack access to modern telecommunications. The government often arbitrarily limits free speech.

### Transportation

Few Chadians can afford a privately-owned vehicle (POV), instead making local trips primarily by walking. Travel by bicycle, oxcart, donkey, and camel is also common. N'Djamena, Moundou, and a few other towns offer public transportation such as minibuses, **clandos** (motorcycle taxis), and trucks, often sharing the road with pedestrians, bikes, and domesticated animals. For inter-town travel, Chadians rely on buses and small pickup trucks called "bush taxis" or **taxi brousse**. Most travel beyond major towns requires POVs or 4WD vehicles due to the poor road conditions.



**Roadways:** In 2018, less than 1% of Chad's 24,900 mi of roads were paved. Beyond N'Djamena, most of Chad's roads are unpaved dirt. Due to erosion during the rainy season, many roads are impassible for much of the year. While roads account for 95% of the transport of people and goods, poor conditions induce substantial extra fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. A paved road runs from Massakory near Lake Chad through N'Djamena, Bongor, and Kélo to Moundou in the far southwest, while another connects N'Djamena to Abéché in the east.

**Railways:** While Chad presently has no railways, there are plans to link Chad with regional rail systems. In 2022, the World Bank approved \$538 million in International Development Association funding for the Cameroon-Chad Transport Corridor Project. The project is aimed at improving

the road and rail infrastructure from Douala, Cameroon to N'Djamena, Chad. The Chadian Ministry for Infrastructure, Cameroon Ministry of Transport, and CAMRAIL, a private company, are overseeing the project which is expected to be completed in 2032. The nearest existing railway network ends in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

**Ports and Waterways:** As a landlocked country, Chad has no ports, although the Chari River, Logone River, and Lake Chad are major waterways. While total waterways cover about 3,000 mi, less than 1,200 mi are navigable year-round.



**Airways:** Chad has 42 airports, 9 with paved runways. The primary air transit hub is N'Djamena International Airport, which serves global carriers with flights to many cities in Africa, as well as Paris and Istanbul. In 2012, authorities suspended the operations of Chad's national carrier, Toumaï Air Tchad, due to safety concerns. In 2022, Tchadia Airlines ceased operations as well, due to 3 consecutive years of financial losses.

## Energy

Since the development of its oil industry in 2003 (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), Chad relies mostly on oil to meet its energy needs. In 2021, Chad produced 116,000 barrels/day (b/d), while it consumed about 15,000 b/d (see p. 6 of *Economics and Resources*). A single power station uses oil to generate electricity for Chad's inadequate electric grid.

Chad has one of the world's lowest energy consumption rates. Various estimates suggest that only 11% of Chadians have access to electricity. Even this statistic does not tell the whole story: while the urban electrification rate is about 43%, most rural inhabitants (99%) have no access to the electric grid at all. Even Chadians with electricity spend an average of 75 days/year without power. To meet their energy needs, most Chadians burn manure or wood, though some wealthy Chadians utilize private diesel generators.

## Media

The Chadian constitution protects freedom of expression and the press; however, the government arbitrarily censors journalists and has arrested the directors of several private newspapers. While the government permits some criticisms, its High Council of Communication exerts particular control over the dissemination of media content related to security and political issues. The government rarely jails journalists for extended periods. Instead, governmental pressure and the threat of reprisal results in journalists' self-censorship.

**Print Media:** Chad has a variety of local and national periodicals. State-owned newspapers *L'Info* and *Horizons Nouveaux* appear in both French and Standard Arabic versions. Popular private newspapers include *Abba Garde*, *Le Progrès*, *La Voix*, and *L'Observateur* in French and *N'Djamena Al-Djadida* in Arabic.

**Radio and TV:** Due to its low cost, radio is most Chadians' primary source of information. The public station *Radiodiffusion Nationale Tchadienne* (RNT) broadcasts programs in French, Arabic, and 8 other languages. Television viewing in Chad is limited to just 3 channels, including the public TeleTchad and 2 private stations launched in 2011 and 2013.



## Telecommunications

Chad has some of Africa's lowest telecommunication penetration rates, with less than 1 landline and 68 mobile phones per 100 people. Chad's telecommunications network is limited, with expensive and typically unreliable connections that are often completely unavailable in rural areas.

**Internet:** Chad has one of the world's lowest rates of Internet use, with just 18% of Chadians using the Internet in 2021. The government occasionally blocks content or limits access, most recently the government blocked social media platforms for over a year (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*).





For more information on  
the Air Force Culture and Language Center visit:  
[airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC](http://airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC)

For more information on  
United States Air Forces Europe & Africa visit:  
<http://www.usafe.af.mil>



## CULTURE GUIDE

Access all of the AFCLC's expeditionary culture field  
guides in our mobile app!



GET IT ON  
**Google Play**



Available on the iPhone  
**App Store**



DoD Enterprise Mobility  
**Personal Use  
Mobile Apps**