



CHAD

Area: 496,000 sq. miles

Population: 16.9 million (est.)

Capital: N'Djamena

Ethnic Groups: Sara (Ngambaye/Sara/Madjingaye/Mbaye) 30.5%, Kanembu/Bornu/Buduma 9.8%, Arab 9.7%, Wadai/Maba/Masalit/Mimi 7%, Gorane 5.8%, Masa/Musseye/Musgum 4.9%, Bulala/Medogo/Kuka 3.7%, Marba/Lele/Mesme 3.5%; Other groups, less than 25%.

Languages: French (official), Arabic (official), Sara (in south), more than 120 different languages and dialects

Religion: Muslim 52.1%, Protestant 23.9%, Roman Catholic 20%, other Christian 0.2%, animist 0.3%, none 2.8%, unspecified 0.7% (2014-15 est.)

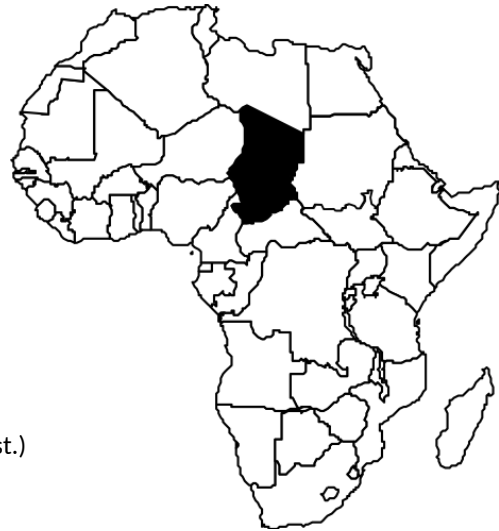
Life Expectancy: 54.9 years

Literacy: 22.31% adults; 31% youth

Economy: sorghum, groundnuts, millet, yams, cereals, sugar cane, beef, maize, cotton, cassava, oil, cotton textiles, brewing, natron (sodium carbonate), soap, cigarettes, construction materials

Gini (Income Inequality) Index: 43.3 (2011 est.); country comparison to the world: 40

Gender Inequality Index: 0.71; Rank 187.



Excavating a Mega History

Located in northern Central Africa, the vast, landlocked nation of Chad is the fifth largest nation state on the African continent. Its multiple geographical zones include forest, grasslands, desert, and the tallest mountain in the region, Emi Koussi at 11,204 ft. More than 10,000 years ago, the region was part of the “greening of the Sahara,” when the African Humid Period of the Holocene supported Lake Mega-Chad and other paleolakes. Currently, the area of Lake Chad is approximately 521 sq. mi., and, by comparison, Lake Mega-Chad was 390,000 sq. mi. With the find of the six to seven-million-year-old skull of *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, scientists began debating the region’s role in the long history of hominid evolution. Numerous remains of bone and stone tools, ancient pottery, and rock paintings point to an early and long-lasting occupation of Chad by humans.

More than 3,000 years ago, people known as the Garamantes, likely Saharan ancestors of Amazigh, established large kingdoms comprised of settlements stretching from the Mediterranean coast of present-day Libya to the shores of Lake Chad. Even with the expansion of the desert, the Garamantes continued to move and trade in salt, slaves, and other goods along one of the oldest routes of the trans-Saharan trade. Beginning around 600 BCE, the Sao (possibly the ancestors of the modern Kotoko), made terracotta and later bronze sculptures and their society flourished for more than a thousand years. In the 2nd century CE, Ptolemy wrote of some of the Roman explorations into the region to trade and observe the remarkable rhinoceros on lakeshores.

When Islam expanded in the 8th century via Tuareg merchants and the largest of several kingdoms, Kanem, was founded in the next century. Although the Sayfawa dynasty faced continued revolts, they successfully conquered the region southwest of Lake Chad to establish the Bornu empire in the 14th century. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Bornu under Mai Idris Alooma (r.1580-1603 CE), forged many alliances with North African powers including Al-Mansur (r.1578-1603 CE) of Morocco and Ottoman rulers in Tunis and Egypt. In the late 19th century, the eastern Sudanese leader Rabiḥ az-Zubayr (1842-1900) led a military campaign and managed to conquer the established and larger kingdoms of Ouadai, Baguirmi and Kanem-Bornu. However, his reign was short-lived, when multiple French expeditions marched out from three different points of French colonial Africa. One came from Senegal in the West, the Northerly unit came from Algeria, and the final unit came from the South from French Central Africa. The three converged and defeated Rabiḥ az-Zubayr’s armies in 1900. The Colonial Era After Chad came under French military rule, it took years for French armies to put down the African resistance and make Chad a French Colony. Between 1910 and 1959, Chad was a part of the federation of French Equatorial Africa. During the colonial period, many Chadians were forced into labor schemes, and they were heavily taxed during World War I and II. During World War I, Sanusiyya militants began attacking various French outposts seeking freedom from French imperialism. Yet during World War II, more than 15,000 Chadians sided with De Gaulle (1890-1970)

and fought against Germany. The governor of French Equatorial Africa (1940-1944) was the statesman Félix Éboué (1844-1944), a West Indian born in French Guiana. He cultivated Chadian support for the Free French and Chad became the first of the French colonies to rejoin the Allies after the French defeat of Germany in 1940. Éboué's daughter married the poet Leopold Senghor, who became the first president of Senegal.

Birth of the Modern Nation State

On August 11, 1960, Chad gained independence from France. The leader of the Chad Progressive Party (PPT) François Tombalbaye (1918-1975) was elected. In 1962, Tombalbaye banned all other parties and began an autocratic rule in Chad. In part, due to his pitting of the Islamic North against Southern Chad, Tombalbaye started a nearly 24-year-old civil war. Multiple militant groups emerged. In April 1975 Tombalbaye was killed during a military coup led by General Felix Malloum, whose national reconciliation efforts brought Hissein Habré, the leader of the Northern Army Forces, back to Chad from Libya. Habré seized power in 1982, with help from Sudan, France, and the United States. Under his dictatorship, human rights, freedom of the press and political opposition were brutally suppressed, while the regime's secret police engaged in systematic ethnic cleansing. Over 43,000 people were summarily executed or disappeared. In 1990 Colonel Idriss Déby deposed Habré, who fled and found refuge in Senegal. After decades of hard work fighting for justice and reparations, the Association of the Victims of the Hissein Habré Regime brought Habré to trial in Senegal for crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture. On May 30, 2016, the Senegalese court sentenced Habré to life imprisonment. He died in prison in August 2021, after testing positive for Covid-19. Although Mr. Habré's successor, Idriss Déby, allowed the creation of political parties and civil society organizations, most freedoms and human rights remained suppressed. Déby died on the battlefield in April 2021 and was succeeded by his son Mahamat, a 37-year-old four-star military general. With its strong presence in the region, Chad's army has played a major role in fighting jihadist groups in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Mali, and in peace-keeping missions in Congo and Central African Republic.

Today women make up over half of the work force in Chad yet represent a little more than 10 percent of the political government of Chad. One of them, development economist Ammo Aziza Baroud (1965-), was appointed to represent Chad as an ambassador abroad, including as Permanent Representative to the United Nations since 2020. Most Chadian women have a low rate of education and among the current issues women face are female genital mutilation and early-age marriages of young girls. According to the United Nations, very slow progress towards gender equality is being made. Chad currently has limited natural resource production, despite many more resources that likely include gold, diamonds, and other minerals. The volatile political climate has made it difficult to attract investors to develop and explore these resources. An exception has been the interest of the Chinese government, which has been increasing and diversifying its investments in Chad. In the early 1970s, oil was found in the country and Chad is ranked currently as the 10th largest producer of oil on the continent. Both the visible and buried treasures of Chad continue to astound and promise new twists and turns in the land's long history.

----- Written by Fredrick Hardyway, 2022

Further Reading and Viewing

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