



BRIEFING PAPER

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Chad: prospects after the 2021 election

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Contents:

1. Background
2. 2021 Presidential election
3. Looking ahead



Contents

Summary	3
1. Background	4
2. 2021 Presidential election	5
2.1 Candidates	5
2.2 Election campaign	7
2.3 Election results	8
2.4 Post-election events	9
3. Looking ahead	12
3.1 National security and threats from rebels	12
3.2 Regional geopolitics	12
3.3 Relations with the West	13

Summary

Chad held a presidential election on 11 April 2021.

17 candidates applied to contest the election, although only seven challenged on the day. Many opposition figures had their candidacies invalidated by the Supreme Court ahead of the election, or later withdrew in the face of violence and intimidation by the state's security forces.

Incumbent President Idriss Déby, who first rose to power in a military coup in 1990, was widely expected to win a sixth consecutive term. He had already amended the constitution to potentially allow him to remain president until 2033.

As expected, Déby was re-elected, taking almost 80 per cent of all votes in a ballot boycotted by many opposition parties.

A planned victory speech was cancelled, though, as Déby instead chose to visit Chadian soldiers fighting insurgents advancing on the capital.

On 20 April, the day after his election victory was announced, President Déby died of injuries sustained following clashes with the rebel group Front for Political Change and Concord in Chad (FACT).

A Transitional Military Council (CMT) – led by Déby's son Mahamat Idriss Déby – immediately seized power, pledging to govern for the next 18 months, overseeing a transition period until new elections take place.

Chad's strategic position astride the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa is viewed by Western powers as critical in the fight against Islamic terrorism from the Sahel region, and acts as a vital buffer to the long-term instability coming from Sudan's Darfur region.

International observers will be monitoring the situation in Chad and neighbouring countries closely. France, Chad's former colonial power, which maintains a large military base in the country, will be keen for stability to continue.

1. Background

Elections in Chad have traditionally taken place every five years. However, the Constitution of the Republic of Chad, which was adopted on 4 May 2018 (replacing that of 1996) and further amended on 14 December 2020, introduced several changes to both presidential and legislative elections. These changes were to come into effect from the elections in 2021: the presidential election on 11 April and the legislative elections scheduled for 24 October¹.

The new constitution was approved in Parliament by a vote of 132 to two, with most opposition Members boycotting the vote.

Opponents suggest the constitution, which eliminates the post of prime minister and creates a fully presidential system, is aimed at installing a de facto monarchy in Chad².

The new constitution introduces six-year presidential terms (rather than five years) and reimposes the terms limits of presidents serving two terms in office.

However, the constitutional changes will not apply retrospectively and, for the presidency, only come into force from the 2021 election. Thus, President Idriss Déby, who first came to power in a military coup in 1990, could potentially stay in office until 2033³. The 2021 election would therefore see Déby vying to win the presidential election for a sixth consecutive time.

Other changes in the new constitution include lowering the minimum age for presidential candidates from 45 to 40 years⁴.

In presidential elections, candidates must win at least 50 per cent of the vote to claim an outright victory. If this does not happen, a run-off election takes place between the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round.

On 2 July 2020, Chad's Independent National Electoral Commission (Ceni) announced the next presidential elections would take place on 11 April 2021⁵.

¹ [The Constitution \(Chad\)](#), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. [Retrieved 10 May 2021]

² [‘Chad parliament approves new constitution expanding president's powers’](#), *Reuters*, 30 April 2018

³ Ibid.

⁴ [The Constitution \(Chad\)](#), in Europa World online. London, Routledge. [Retrieved 10 May 2021]

⁵ [2021 presidential election](#), BBC Monitoring, 28 April 2021

2. 2021 Presidential election

2.1 Candidates

In February 2021 the Chadian Supreme Court commission in charge of receiving candidatures for the April 2021 presidential election was reported to have registered 17 candidacy files⁶.

On 3 March the Supreme Court announced it had validated 10 presidential candidates and rejected seven⁷.

Of the ten selected, three candidates later withdrew from the race, although their names remained on the ballot.

Incumbent President Idriss Déby was widely expected to be re-elected, with Albert Pahimi Padacké the leading opposition candidate.

The leading candidates – in alphabetical order – were as follows:

Idriss Déby (Patriotic Salvation Movement)

Idriss Déby was born in 1952 in Fada, Ennedi, north-eastern Chad.

A Muslim of the Zaghawa ethnic group, Déby had a large family, many of whom hold or have held positions in government and the military.

He received officer training in N'Djamena and attended military college in Paris in 1985. He also gained his pilot's licence in France.

Déby helped Hissene Habre take power in 1982, ousting then-President Goukouni Oueddei. Eight years later Déby drove President Habre into exile in Cameroon, at the helm of the Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) that he founded in 1989⁸.

Déby was sworn in as President of Chad on 4 March 1991 and won the election held in 1996. He was re-elected in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

Déby had a reputation as the “warrior leader”⁹ and survived rebel attacks in the capital in April 2006 and again in February 2008.

He was active in regional conflicts, providing military support to Mali and the Central African Republic in 2013, as well as Cameroon and Nigeria in 2015 to fight jihadist group Boko Haram.

Déby won the 2021 presidential election – re-elected to serve a sixth term as President – but died on 20 April, the day after his election victory was declared. He died from injuries sustained during clashes with the rebel group Front for Political Change and Concord in Chad (FACT).

⁶ ‘[Chad supreme court receives 17 presidential nominations](#)’, *BBC Monitoring*, 27 February 2021 [Text of report by privately-owned Chadian news website [tchadinfos.com](#) on 27 February]

⁷ ‘[Chadian Supreme Court approves 10 presidential candidates](#)’, *BBC Monitoring*, 3 March 2021 [taken from [tchadinfos.com](#), N'Djamena, in French 3 March 2021]

⁸ [Biography: Mar Idriss Deby Into](#), *BBC Monitoring*, 21 April 2021

⁹ *Ibid.*

Albert Pahimi Padacké (National Rally for Democracy in Chad)

Albert Pahimi Padacké was born on 15 November 1966 in Gouin, Mayo-Kebbi West region, in the south-west of Chad.

He gained a Diploma in Law from N'Djamena University; later graduating with a Master's in Public Law from the same institution.

Pahimi Padacké has been active in Chadian politics for several decades and is President of the National Rally for Democracy in Chad – Revival (RNDD- Le Reveil) party. Despite running against Déby several times, they have been regarded as allies¹⁰.

The Paris-based *Jeune Afrique* magazine has described Pahimi Padacké as a veteran of Chad's politics and "a master of the back-and-forth between the opposition and the government."¹¹

From 1994 to 2011 Pahimi Padacké held several ministerial positions in President Déby's Governments, including portfolios as Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice and Minister of Agriculture.

He came third in the 2006 presidential election and second in 2011.

On 13 February 2016 Pahimi Padacké was appointed Prime Minister by President Déby. Chadian news website *Journal du Chad* described the appointment as an effort by Déby to "reduce the number of opponents" in the forthcoming election, which was held four months later¹².

President Déby secured a fifth term in office in 2016 and Pahimi Padacké was reappointed Prime Minister, a position he held until resigning on 3 May 2018 ahead of the adoption of a new constitution, which abolished his post of prime minister.

On 20 February 2021 Pahimi Padacké was appointed the RNDD party candidate for the upcoming presidential election.

Election results published a week later showed he came second in the election. However, following President Déby's death on 20 April 2021, Pahimi Padacké was appointed Prime Minister of Chad by the Transitional Military Council (CMT), whose members – led by Déby's son – had seized power.

Other candidates

The following candidates also contested the 2021 presidential election: Baltazar Alladoum Djarma (Chadian Socialist Action for Renewal), Lydie Beassemda (Party for Democracy and Independence), Théophile Bongoro (Party for Rally and Equity in Chad), Saleh Kebzabo (National Union for Democracy and Renewal), Brice Mbaïmon Guedmbaye (Movement of Patriotic Chadians for the Republic), Félix Romadoungar Nialbé (Union for Renewal and Democracy), Théophile Yombombé

¹⁰ '[Chad military council names transitional prime minister](#)', *Al Jazeera*, 26 April 2021

¹¹ [Biography: Albert Pahimi Padacké](#), BBC Monitoring, 26 April 2021

¹² *Ibid.*

(Union of Progressive Workers for Cohesion) and Ngarlejš Yorongar (Federation Action for the Republic).

2.2 Election campaign

The official election campaign period ran from 11 March to 9 April 2021.

Incumbent President Idriss Déby was widely expected to easily win a sixth term in office. Indeed, he had also predicted his success ahead of the election, telling supporters at a campaign event on 5 April:

Of course we are going to win. I know in advance that I will win, as I have done for the last 30 years¹³.

In the months leading up to the election, Déby's Government had banned all opposition demonstrations and any attempts to hold a rally had been thwarted by the police and military¹⁴.

The Government argued the restrictions on political gatherings was part of the strict lockdown to enable the country to contain the spread of coronavirus, but opposition parties accused the Government of using the Covid-19 pandemic to block their campaigns.

Mahamat Ahmat Lazina, President of the opposition party National Movement for Change in Chad (MNCT), told Human Rights Watch:

The authorities have used the pandemic as an excuse to quash the political opposition. They imposed a lockdown not because they cared about the health of people, but because they wanted to stop opposition parties from mobilising support. We watched President Déby travel to all of Chad's provinces and organise meetings with hundreds of people, while we were forced to stay home¹⁵.

As the election campaign began, Déby's most critical opponents had already left the presidential race. They were either invalidated by the Supreme Court or withdrew in the face of violence and intimidation by the state's security forces¹⁶.

One of the candidates who chose to withdraw from the race, Saleh Kebzabo, denounced what he called the "clear militarisation of the political climate" after the home of another opposition figure, Yaya Dillo Djerou, was targeted by police and troops, with fatalities reported in the raid¹⁷.

On the first day of the campaign, incumbent President Idriss Déby's Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) held a rally at a packed stadium in N'Djamena, shortly before Déby formally launched his campaign, with a plea for unity¹⁸.

¹³ [‘I know in advance that I will win’: Chad's Deby eyes sixth presidential term’](#), *Reuters*, 8 April 2021

¹⁴ [‘Chad's opposition candidate Albert Padacke kicks off campaign’](#), *Africa News*, 20 March 2021

¹⁵ [Chad: Pre-Election Crackdown on Opponents](#), Human Rights Watch, 8 April 2021

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ [‘Chad president kicks off campaign for sixth term’](#), *Africa News*, 14 March 2021

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The election campaign was uneventful, beginning at a “slow pace”¹⁹ and never really taking off. This was largely due to opposition calls to boycott the election, plus acceptance among Chadians that Déby would inevitably win re-election.

There were some calls for political change and an end to perceived social and economic injustices, with the Government’s opponents citing the high rates of poverty. Chad has vast oil resources, yet, despite this oil wealth, the country ranks 187th out of 189 in the UN’s Human Development Index²⁰.

However, opposition struggled to mobilise their supporters, with many potential voters doubting their ballot would make a difference. Fred Muvuyi, reporting from N’Djamena for Deutsche Welle, observed:

In general, voters decided to stay in their homes because they say that they have been voting in the previous election, but there has been no change. So, there was no point in them going out to vote.²¹

2.3 Election results

Following the presidential election, Chad’s National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) published the provisional results²². Turnout was just under 65 per cent²³.

Candidate	Party	No. of valid votes	% of valid votes
Idriss Déby	Patriotic Salvation Movement	3,663,431	79.32
Albert Pahimi Padacké	National Rally for Democracy in Chad	476,464	10.32
Lydie Beassemda	Party for Democracy and Independence	145,867	3.16
Félix Romadoumngar Nialbé	Union for Renewal and Democracy	87,722	1.90
Brice Mbaïmon Guedmbaye	Movement of Patriotic Chadians for the Repu	64,540	1.40
Baltazar Alladoum Djarma	Chadian Socialist Action for Renewal	59,965	1.30
Saleh Kebzabo	National Union for Democracy and Renewal	47,518	1.03
Théophile Bongoro	Party for Rally and Equity in Chad	34,610	0.75
Théophile Yombombé	Union of Progressive Workers for Cohesion	19,923	0.43
Ngarlejy Yorongar	Federation Action for the Republic	18,693	0.40
Total		4,618,733	100.00

Incumbent President Idriss Déby was re-elected for a sixth term, taking almost 80 per cent of all votes.

A planned victory speech was cancelled as Déby instead visited Chadian soldiers fighting insurgents advancing on the capital.

¹⁹ [Chad presidential campaigns begin at 'slow pace'](#), BBC Monitoring, 11 March 2021

²⁰ [2020 Human Development Index \(HDI\)](#), United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Reports [accessed 12 May 2021]

²¹ [‘Chad awaits presidential election result’](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 12 April 2021

²² [Le resultat de l’élection présidentielle / The result of the presidential election](#), National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) [accessed 11 May 2021]

²³ [‘Chad: President Deby wins reelection, extending 30 years in power’](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 20 April 2021

Déby's campaign director, Mahamat Zan Bada, said:

The candidate would have liked to have been here to celebrate... but, right now, he is alongside our valiant defence and security forces to fight the terrorists threatening our territory.²⁴

2.4 Post-election events

President Déby killed

On 20 April President Déby died of injuries sustained following clashes with the rebel group Front for Political Change and Concord in Chad (FACT). This came a day after provisional election results projected he'd won an a sixth term in office.

The FACT group had established a base in the Tibesti mountains, which straddle northern Chad and part of southern Libya. On election day the group had mounted an attack on a border post and started an advance on the capital, N'Djamena.

President Déby subsequently went to the front line to visit his troops, as further clashes erupted. The Chadian Army reported 300 insurgents killed and 150 captured. Five government soldiers were also killed and 36 injured²⁵. These figures have not been verified.

On 19 April the FACT group issued a statement on its Facebook page, saying it had killed and injured 15 senior military officials, including President Déby, following fighting in Kanem Province from 17-19 April. President Déby was listed as "wounded and on the run"²⁶.

The next day Chadian Army spokesman Brig Gen Azem Bermandoa confirmed that President Déby had died, saying he "took his last breath while defending the integrity of the country in the battlefield"²⁷.

A long-time ally of France, the French presidency issued a statement describing Déby as a "brave friend"²⁸. Later, when attending Déby's state funeral in N'Djamena, French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute to Déby and reaffirmed France's commitment to Chad:

I share the bereavement of a nation touched to its core by the sacrifice of its first soldier and I share the bereavement of a loyal friend and ally because you were the first to respond to the call of regional countries to defend Africa against armed terrorism in the Sahel in 2013.

France will not let anybody put into question or threaten today or tomorrow Chad's stability and integrity²⁹.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ '[Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels](#)', *BBC News Online*, 20 April 2021

²⁶ [Biography: Mar Idriss Deby Into](#), BBC Monitoring, 21 April 2021

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ '[Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels](#)', *BBC News Online*, 20 April 2021

²⁹ '[In tribute to friend Deby, Macron says France will not tolerate threats to Chad](#)', *Reuters*, 23 April 2021

Transitional Military Council (CMT) installed

Following the announcement of President Déby's death, a Transitional Military Council (CMT) seized power. This military-appointed council pledged to govern for the next 18 months, to oversee a transition period until new elections can take place³⁰.

In a state address to the country, CMT spokesperson Gen. Agouna explained the establishment of the Transitional Military Council and the immediate measures that it had taken:

A Transitional Military Council has been set up to ensure the defence of our beloved country, in this situation of war against terrorism and the forces of evil, in order to ensure the continuity of the state.

Thus, the following measures will be taken as of today:

- the Transitional Military Council guarantees national independence, territorial integrity, national unity, respect of international treaties and agreements, and will lead the transition for a period of 18 months,
- a 14-day national mourning period is decreed throughout the country,
- flags will be flown at half-mast and a state funeral will be organised,
- the national assembly and the government have been dissolved,
- a transitional charter will be promulgated by the president of the military transitional council,
- a nationwide curfew, from 6.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. will be implemented,
- land and air borders will be closed until further notice,
- a transitional government will be set up. New republican institutions will be put in place at the end of the transition, through the organisation of free, democratic and transparent elections following the spirit of sacrifice for which the marshal of Chad fought throughout his life until his last breath³¹.

Déby's son Mahamat Idriss Déby, a four-star general, was put in charge of the CMT and will lead the 14 other generals who make up the new governing body.

The CMT also announced that an interim Prime Minister post would be established, with former opposition presidential candidate Albert Pahimi Padacké (who finished second in the 2021 election) taking on the position³². The Prime Minister will not be a member of the CMT.

Some commentators viewed this appointment as a means to deflect international calls for the creation of a civilian-led National Unity

³⁰ ['Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels'](#), *BBC News Online*, 20 April 2021

³¹ ['Chadian transitional military council to govern for 18 months'](#), *BBC Monitoring*, 20 April 2021 [Text of report by Chadian State TV on 20 April]

³² ['Explainer: The potential risks of political crisis in Chad'](#), *Africa News*, 27 April 2021

Government³³, as well as placating political opponents who maintained that the President of the National Assembly should have been named interim leader, under Chad's constitution³⁴.

Mahamat Idriss Déby has insisted that he has no long-term political ambitions, although many Chadians have noted that he is the same age his father was when he overthrew then-President Hissene Habre, and then stayed in power for more than 30 years.

On 10 May 2021, Mahamat undertook his first trip abroad since taking power, visiting President Mohamed Bazoum on a state visit to Niger. President Bazoum had been appointed by the G5 Sahel leaders as mediator for Chad's peaceful transition³⁵.

Profile of interim leader Gen. Mahamat Idriss Déby

Gen. Mahamat Idriss Déby, aged 37, is described as having a reputation for discretion and is often referred to as “General Kaka” because he was brought up by his grandmother (Kaka means grandmother in Chadian Arabic)³⁶.

Mahamat was the head of the elite presidential guard – the Directorate-General of the Security Services of State Institutions (DGSSIE) – until his father's death. He had received military training in Chad, followed by three months at the Aix-en-Provence Military School in France. In 2010 he secured rapid promotion and was appointed a General³⁷.

Mahamat took part in operations against Timane Erdimi's rebel forces at Am-Dam, in the eastern region of Chad, in 2009.

In January 2013 he was appointed deputy commander of the Chadian Armed Forces on Intervention in Mali (FATIM), where he took part in operations against the Islamist insurgency, alongside the French Army.

Chad has one of the region's most capable armies and Mahamat has close ties to the military, which he uses to his advantage. According to the Paris-based *Jeune Afrique* magazine, citing a source close to Mahamat on 20 April 2021, Mahamat had “become the eyes and ears of his father within the army and the Zaghawa clan, both in Chad and beyond its borders”³⁸.

³³ [‘France shifts stance on Chad transition calling for civilian government’](#), *Reuters*, 27 April 2021

³⁴ [‘Explainer: The potential risks of political crisis in Chad’](#), *Africa News*, 27 April 2021

³⁵ [Biography: Gen Mahamat Idriss Deby](#), BBC Monitoring, 11 May 2021

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ [Name in the News: Mahamat Idriss Deby, from 'secret emissary' to Chad leader](#), BBC Monitoring, 21 April 2021

³⁸ [Biography: Gen Mahamat Idriss Deby](#), BBC Monitoring, 11 May 2021

3. Looking ahead

3.1 National security and threats from rebels

The Chadian Army has battled with various rebel groups for many years and such groups have made it to the capital in the past; in 2008 a rebel group even reached the presidential palace before being pushed back towards the border with Sudan³⁹.

It is difficult to assess the exact threat currently posed by the rebels, due to the conflicting reports emerging from the region and the remoteness of the landscape they are crossing. However, the latest rebel group, the Front for Political Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), has been threatening to advance on N'Djamena for several weeks and may feel emboldened after killing President Déby.

A Chadian military spokesman has suggested the rebels were nowhere near N'Djamena and had instead retreated to neighbouring Niger, but a representative from the group denied this claim, telling the Associated Press they still intended to move on the capital, unless an agreement is reached with the interim government⁴⁰. This appears unlikely.

3.2 Regional geopolitics

During Déby's presidency, Chad's military was a major contributor to operations across the region, including in Darfur, Libya, Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

Chadian forces played a major role in the peacekeeping mission in northern Mali and Chad's capital hosts the headquarters of Barkhane, the French counterterrorism force operating in Mali.

Chad is a major contributor to the regional security force, known as the G5 Sahel Joint Force (namely Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad), established to counter Islamist armed groups in the Sahel region. Chad has contributed 1,200 troops to the Sahel and Chadian forces are considered to be the most effective of the G5 countries⁴¹.

A further 3,000 Chadian military personnel form part of the Multinational Joint Task Force, the joint military force mandated by the African Union to respond to Boko Haram attacks across the Lake Chad basin⁴².

Chad is considered to be the more stable country in a region that includes Libya, Sudan and the Central African Republic. In these countries, says the BBC's Catherine Byaruhanga, armed groups roam freely, trading weapons and lucrative resources⁴³.

³⁹ ['Explainer: The potential risks of political crisis in Chad'](#), *Africa News*, 27 April 2021

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ ['Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels'](#), *BBC News Online*, 20 April 2021

⁴² [Chad: Pre-Election Crackdown on Opponents](#), Human Rights Watch, 8 April 2021

⁴³ ['Chad's President Idriss Déby dies after clashes with rebels'](#), *BBC News Online*, 20 April 2021

There are fears of unrest in Chad, with rebel groups potentially exploiting the death of the country's long-serving, combative president and testing the resolve and leadership of the new leader.

Any protracted battles could require the diversion of Chadian soldiers, which would weaken the regional fight against militants linked to al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State group.

3.3 Relations with the West

Chad's strategic position astride the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa has largely been viewed by Western powers as critical. Geographically, it is ideally located to help prevent the spread of radical Islam and terrorism from the western Sahel region, and acts as a buffer to the long-term instability coming from Sudan's Darfur region on Chad's eastern border.

Sharing its northern border with Libya, Chad has also helped stem the tide of instability following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

Chad was a French colony until 1960 and France continues to regard Chad as a key ally. At President Déby's state funeral, French President Macron sat beside Déby's son Mahamat Idriss Déby, Chad's interim leader.

Chad hosts a large French military base and the US also has military personnel based in the country⁴⁴.

The West is keen for Chad to maintain stability, given its strategic importance in the region, and it has been suggested France is providing intelligence to the Chadian military, with rebel groups claiming French reconnaissance flights are giving away their positions⁴⁵.

The UK's ties with Chad are less established, although the UK backs the G5 in Sahel and values Chad's strategic position.

Since the FACT rebels convoyed across the border on 11 April, engaging with Government forces, the UK has advised against all travel to Chad and instructed British nationals to leave the country as soon as possible⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ '[Chad Holds Another Sham Election](#)', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 13 April 2021

⁴⁵ '[Explainer: The potential risks of political crisis in Chad](#)', *Africa News*, 27 April 2021

⁴⁶ [Foreign travel advice: Chad](#), UK Government [accessed 12 May 2021]

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