

Sudan

Sudan: Introduction

Enoch Randy Aikins

Last updated 29 May 2026 using IFs v7.38

Sudan: Introduction

Chart 1: Political map of Sudan

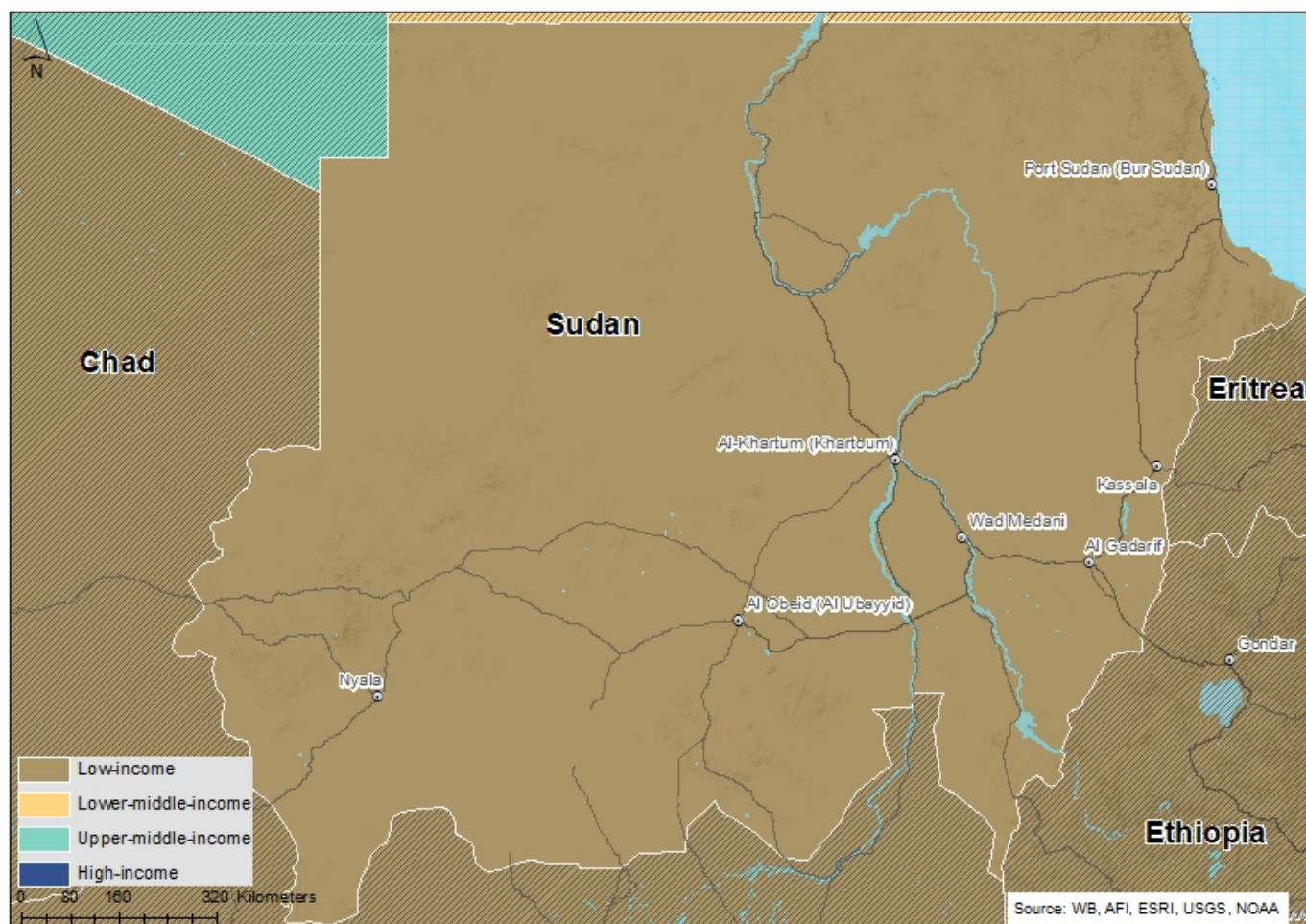


Chart 1 is a political map of Sudan.

Sudan gained independence in 1956. Despite attaining nearly seven decades of autonomy and self-rule from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, the country's socio-economic achievements do not match its potential, given its geography, natural resource endowments, and population size. A poor governance record, evident in protracted conflicts and authoritarian rule, has constrained effective state-building and left few prospects for transformative development.

Straddling and connecting north, east and central Africa, Sudan is the third-largest country in Africa after Algeria and DR Congo, with a land area of approximately 1 868 000 square kilometres. It shares borders with seven neighbouring countries, including Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Egypt. Sudan's maritime access to the Red Sea has the potential to serve as a logistical hub for countries in East Africa and as a gateway to landlocked countries in Central Africa. This geographical setup offers development opportunities through trade and regional integration. However, it has also brought geopolitics into a region with a long history of destabilisation, external interference, persistent intra-state conflict and proxy efforts, most notable in the context of the ongoing war.

Sudan's capacity to serve as a hegemonic player in the region is heightened by its natural resource endowments. Sudan's mineral deposit catalogue includes gold, uranium, chromite, gypsum, mica, marble and iron ore. Arable land and a wealth of livestock give Sudan the potential to serve as a key regional player in food value chains. However, these endowments

have not translated into broad-based growth, employment creation, or improved welfare. Recurrent conflict, weak institutions, and policy inconsistency have constrained investment, undermined productivity, and limited value addition, leaving natural resource wealth insufficient to drive structural transformation.

Before South Sudan's secession in 2011, Sudan was one of the largest oil producers. Categorised as a petro-state, oil exports accounted for **approximately** 50% of government revenues and between 90-95% of total export earnings. Other prominent sectors comprising the Sudanese economy include agriculture, manufacturing, mining and services. Chronic trade deficits, particularly after South Sudan's secession, and a lack of diversification created a contracting economy with high inflation, growing debt and chronic unemployment.

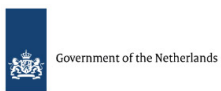
For most of its post-independence political history, the country has been beset by internal conflicts that have weakened its ability to play a leadership role in the region. Decades of internal conflicts have eroded Sudan's governance and economic resilience, leaving its agricultural systems vulnerable. Today, this legacy of instability continues to undermine food security, as disrupted supply chains and weakened institutions struggle to meet the population's needs. For example, continuous food price hikes due to a drop in export earnings led to the December 2018 demonstrations that resulted in the removal of President al-Bashir from power in April 2019. This led to the formation of a transitional government in September 2019. The power-sharing agreement between the military and civilian forces, which was expected to last 39 months, was cut short on 25 October 2021 when the Sudanese military, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, seized power in a military coup.

Since April 2023, Sudan has been embroiled in another civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The conflict has led to catastrophic humanitarian consequences. More than **150 000** people have been killed and nearly **15 million** have been displaced, with **24 million** people facing food insecurity, while 19 million people lack access to safe water and sanitation. The war has paralysed governance and resulted in the near-total collapse of state institutions. Beyond displacement and food insecurity, the war has disrupted health and education service delivery, damaged market infrastructure, and weakened production systems across agriculture, manufacturing, and services, deepening vulnerabilities and complicating recovery.

Despite its potential given its natural resources, youthful population, arable land, blue economy and maritime attributes along the Nile and access to the Red Sea, Sudan often ranks amongst the poorest countries according to the world's human development indicators. According to the 2023-2024 Human Development Report (HDR), Sudan ranks **170** out of 193 countries. This low ranking reflects multi-dimensional constraints, including economic hardship and inequality, disrupted schooling and low learning outcomes, and a health system under severe strain. Recent years suggest stagnation and, since the outbreak of war, a likely regression in key human development outcomes, such as service delivery and household welfare deterioration.

While Sudan's future looks precarious given the nature of the war and the tremendous investments required for post-conflict reconstruction, once a permanent ceasefire is achieved, there's hope for stabilisation and recovery scenarios. The trifecta of natural resources, a youthful population and propitious geography could help Sudan to realise its development potential and act as a pivotal player in the region. However, there is an urgent need for a political solution to end the conflict and address the humanitarian crisis. Building resilience and reimagining development in Sudan could be crucial steps towards achieving peace and stability.

Donors and sponsors



Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY license](#). You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

Cite this research

Enoch Randy Aikins (2026) Sudan. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/countries/sudan/> [Online Resource] Updated 29 May 2026.

About the authors

Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021 as a Researcher. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra in charge of local governance reforms, poverty and inequality and public sector reforms. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. Enoch is a Young African Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute in Florence and has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.