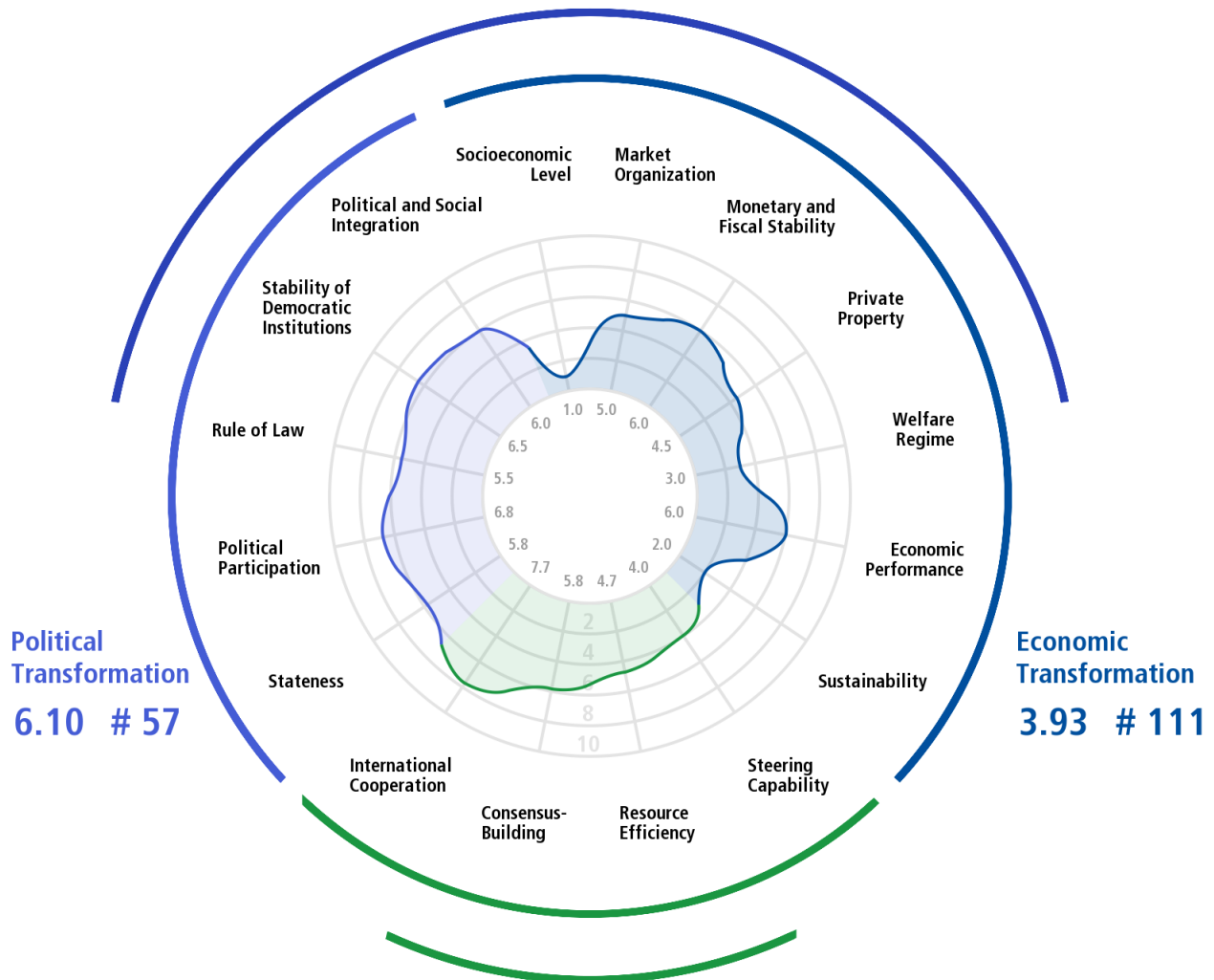


Niger

Status Index

5.01 # 85

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
6.10 # 57

Economic Transformation
3.93 # 111

Governance Index

5.25 # 56

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2020**. It covers the period from February 1, 2017 to January 31, 2019. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	22.4	HDI	0.377	GDP p.c., PPP \$	1048
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	3.8	HDI rank of 189	189	Gini Index	34.3
Life expectancy	years	61.6	UN Education Index	0.247	Poverty ³	% 76.9
Urban population	%	16.4	Gender inequality ²	0.647	Aid per capita \$	55.9

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2019 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2019. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.20 a day at 2011 international prices.

Executive Summary

The Issoufou administration continues to undermine democratic norms and institutions, and to actively prevent democratic consolidation. Waves of civil society protests against the new tax law, as well as general living conditions and state corruption have been severely suppressed by the state security apparatus. Prominent opposition members of parliament and critical journalists have been arrested and accused of working for Boko Haram. These accusations lack any substance and must be seen as a government strategy to suppress criticism. Several students were injured or killed by the state security apparatus during several large-scale student protests. The killing of students is reminiscent of the last days of the Saibou regime in 1990, which led to the end of military rule in 1991. The government uses the country's geostrategic location in the war against Islamic terrorism and illegal migration to Europe to portray itself as a bulwark of stability. The Western donor community has been exceptionally generous in its support for the current government, despite the government's authoritarian tendencies. In early 2019, the situation in Niger appears to have regressed to 2009, when the country was governed by President Tandja. Corruption in the public sector remains rampant with little sign that the government intends to do anything about it.

The military confrontations between the Nigerien armed forces and Boko Haram peaked in 2016 and 2017, but have since subsided. Nevertheless, Boko Haram remains a serious regional security threat. The border region with Mali remains a hotspot for terrorist attacks from the Malian side. Despite this, however, there is little that indicates that Niger is doomed to follow in the footsteps of Mali or Nigeria. Contrary to Western journalists' occasional doomsday predictions, the country at large is remarkably stable. Jihadi ideology does not have a local support base and appears unable to establish one. Although civil society remains an active political player and at times manages to challenge the president, the government can rely on a stable and large parliamentary majority. Since the exile of Hama Amadou, the opposition lacks an effective figurehead.

Despite promising macroeconomic growth rates and a stable inflation rate, most Nigeriens continue to live in abject poverty. Public spending and public debt are increasingly out of control,

threatening long-term fiscal stability. Overpopulation remains Niger's largest challenge. There has been no progress in any policy field that matters for socioeconomic development. There also has been no progress in improving gender equality or environmental protection.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Since independence in 1960, Niger has endured lengthy periods of authoritarian, military-dominated rule. Since the onset of multiparty democracy in 1993, the country has had five constitutions and one interim civilian government (1991 – 1993), three periods of civilian governments (1993 – 1996, 2000 – 2009 and 2011 – present), one period of military rule (1996 – 1999), and two interim military governments (1999 and 2010 – 2011). In April 2011, a civilian government led by Issoufou (PNDS-Tarayya) was democratically elected. In April 2016, the PNDS-Tarayya government was controversially re-elected. Niger has yet to experience a peaceful handover of power from one civilian president to another.

Authoritarian rule began in 1958, two years before the country gained independence from France, when Hamani Diori established a repressive one-party regime. In 1974, the military, led by Seyni Kountché, toppled Diori amid an economic crisis and severe drought. Following Kountché's death in 1987, the (civilian-led) Second Republic was established under the National Movement for the Development of Society-Nassara (MNSD-Nassara) party. Responding to regional and domestic pressure from trade unions, students and those behind the Tuareg rebellion, then-President Ali Saibou initiated democratic reforms in the early 1990s. Niger held a national conference in 1991 that resulted in a constitutional referendum and relatively free and fair elections in 1993 (the Third Republic). Mahamane Ousmane of the Democratic and Social Convention (CDS-Rahama) party became the country's first democratically elected president. He came, however, into conflict with parliament after opposition parties withdrew from the government coalition. Early parliamentary elections in 1994 forced Ousmane to appoint Hama Amadou (MNSD-Nassara) as prime minister. The subsequent paralysis of political institutions in this semi-presidential system ultimately provoked a military coup led by Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara on January 27, 1996. The coup reflected widespread dissatisfaction and persistent aspirations to power within the military. In response to foreign pressure, Maïnassara held new elections. Non-competitive conditions and a boycott by opposition parties allowed him to win the July 1996 presidential election and November 1996 legislative elections, which ushered in the Fourth Republic. Three years of superficially liberalized authoritarianism followed until Maïnassara was assassinated during a military coup launched in April 1999. The coup's leader, Major Daouda Malam Wanké, relaunched the process of democratization. This process led to a constitutional referendum, and parliamentary and presidential elections in July, October and November 1999, respectively. President Mamadou Tandja governed with the help of a coalition between the MNSD-Nassara and CDS-Rahama. The Fifth Republic (2000 – 2009) marked a period of comparative stability. Until August 2009, the work of political institutions progressed relatively smoothly despite the potential for conflict in the semi-presidential system. The free and fair general elections at the end of 2004 confirmed

Tandja and his governing coalition. This government was the first since 1992 to ensure that public sector and military personnel received regular payment. In doing so, it prevented another vicious cycle of general strikes, which had crippled Niger's economy throughout the 1990s and been a major source of political instability. Stability was nonetheless threatened by a renewed Tuareg rebellion that lasted from 2007 to 2009. The rebellion had a negative impact on speech and press freedoms in Niger. Journalists reporting critically on the government's activities regarding the Tuareg or on alleged government corruption were subjected to arbitrary arrests and police violence. Beginning in 2005, Tandja and then-Prime Minister Amadou (both from the MNSD-Nassara) began to fall out with each other. In June 2007, Amadou was forced to step down and replaced by Seyni Oumarou. Tandja's subsequent attempts to change the constitution to allow himself to remain in office beyond 2009 initially proved successful. However, Tandja was eventually ousted by the military in February 2010. The military organized a transition to democracy that resulted in a constitutional referendum, and free and fair elections being held in early 2011. At the time of writing, democratization is not under threat; all political parties have now accepted the 2016 electoral outcome. Recent years have again seen crackdowns on journalists and protesters.

The appalling socioeconomic conditions in Niger account for many of the political upheavals of the last decades. Since the early 1970s, drought, desertification, government intervention and bad governance have aggravated a weak economic environment. The uranium boom of the late 1970s subsided rapidly in Niger, whose economy is dominated by agriculture. The considerable national debt incurred by the country between 1983 and 1986 necessitated an IMF structural adjustment program. Given the political instability of the era, there were several irregularities in implementing the IMF program, which led to its intermittent suspension. The implementation of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) between 1996 and 1999 met with the approval of international financial institutions. After a brief disruption, the transitional government and the Tandja government normalized relations with international donors, which paved the way for several subsequent Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) programs. In April 2004, Niger reached the completion point under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), with debt relief totaling \$663.1 million. Niger has continued to receive extensive loans under the IMF's extended credit facility. Niger continues to be plagued by extreme poverty, unsustainable and inefficient public spending, widespread illiteracy, a rapidly growing population, and remains dependent on uranium and oil revenues.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The state holds a monopoly on the use of force throughout most of the territory. Elements of the Tuareg and bandits remain visible in the north and large parts of rural areas throughout the country are crime-ridden. The Malian border remains Niger's weakest spot as terrorist groups located in Mali continue to stage attacks on Nigerien territory. The border with Libya is also not secured, but poses less of an imminent threat.

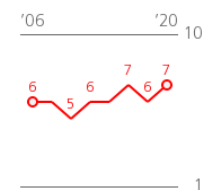
Since 2015, the Nigerien army has fought Boko Haram, a Nigerian Islamic terrorist organization, on Nigerien territory (Diffa region). Boko Haram is still present in the region, yet the number of deadly attacks in the Diffa region has declined over the course of the last two years. This does not mean that the Nigerien state has the full monopoly of force in the area but it shows that the Nigerien army is capable of containing the Islamic terrorist threat. The Issoufou government remains dedicated to the fight against terrorism. Military cooperation between Niger, the United States and the European Union as well as the formation of regional security arrangements like the G5 have led to a slight increase in state oversight in the affected regions.

The nation-state is widely accepted as legitimate. Having for decades perceived themselves as a marginalized group, the Tuareg – themselves a socially and politically heterogenous group – have initiated several rebellions (1961 – 1964, 1990 – 1995 and 2007 – 2009). Their basic demands, which include improving their access to state services and political representation in Niamey, have not been met. The (secret) peace agreement between the former Tandja government and the Tuareg rebels called for improvements with regard to both. The current prime minister (in office since April 2011) is a Tuareg, but this has had little effect on the relationship between the central government and the Tuareg in the north. Slavery was made illegal in the early 2000s. Yet, national and international research indicates that thousands of Nigeriens still live in servitude (precise and reliable data is unavailable). The Nigerien government continues to obstruct research into this topic. Traditionally, the

Question
Score

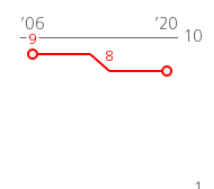
Monopoly on the
use of force

7



State identity

8



government has tried to maintain a balanced representation of ethnicities among its employees and within the cabinet. This has not changed. In fact, the war against Boko Haram in the Diffa region has led President Issoufou to appeal to all communities to remain united in the fight against Islamic terrorism. Although ethno-regional cleavages do exist in Nigerien politics, they have little effect in day-to-day party politics. It is notable that recent social relations between Nigerien communities have remained stable while in neighboring countries they disintegrated.

The constitution of the Seventh Republic (in place since 2011) calls for a secular state. Leading Nigerien politicians, both in the government and opposition, are clearly committed to this constitutional requirement.

However, the situation looks different at the societal level. Conservative Islamic groups, promoting Shariah law, are gaining popularity in several parts of the country. In most if not all rural areas, local communities practice Shariah law due to the absence of state courts. The Islamic Council of Niger has consistently advised the government to do more to monitor sermons. The Islamic Council and Nigerien government have been good at integrating conservative Salafi clerics into the Nigerien state. Contrary to its neighbors, political Salafism and jihadi Salafism do not enjoy a meaningful presence domestically. In early 2015, most catholic churches in Niger were burned to the ground in response to the government's participation in the Charlie Hebdo solidarity marches in Paris. Since then, the inter-religious dialogs between the Christian churches and the Muslim community have come to an end. Therefore, while the state and leading Islamic clerics consistently call on their followers to respect religious tolerance and secularism, there is reason to be worried that an influential segment of the faithful think otherwise. It is important to note that the incursions of Boko Haram into Diffa province enjoy little or no sympathy among the population. Although more Nigeriens are deeply religious and conservative, they continue to reject Islamic extremism.

The territorial scope of basic administration is limited. This is partly due to the vast territory of the country; the government would require substantially more resources to increase outreach. Its scope is much stronger in the urban south than in the rural north. The last Tuareg rebellion further impaired the government's influence in the northern regions. Initiatives to establish a decentralized administration have proven largely ineffective so far. Both the public administration and the judiciary suffer from a lack of resources. In the rural areas, chiefs collect taxes and frequently fail to transfer that money to the state. The government is often inefficient and plagued by corruption, which is further exacerbated by salaries that are low even by African standards. Only 9% of the population have access to sanitation, while only 52% have access to a water source. Outside of urban areas, citizens have little to no access to even the most basic public services.

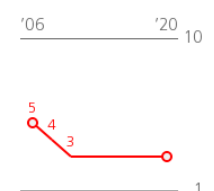
No interference of religious dogmas

5



Basic administration

3



2 | Political Participation

Since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1993, Niger has experienced several rounds of elections. With the exception of the elections in 1996 (rigged by the armed forces in favor of their candidate) and 2009 (boycotted by the opposition after President Tandja tried to circumvent the constitutionally prescribed two-term limit), the elections (1993, 1999, 2004 and 2011) have qualified as free and fair. The most recent elections, in January and March 2016, proved highly contentious. This has given rise to concerns that the incumbents might rig the upcoming 2021 elections.

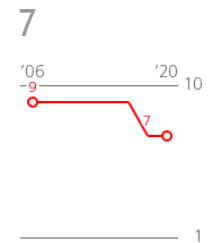
In the 2016 presidential elections, President Issoufou faced his former ally, Hama Amadou, one of the most influential political power brokers in the country. Amadou was accused to have been involved in the activities of a baby smuggling ring. It is impossible to verify whether the accusations against him are true. There were also serious issues with the voter registry. The fact that Niger has never seen an international election observation mission and that local election observers are highly politicized means that no one can arrive at a watertight judgment of the quality of Niger's current electoral quality. What is clear, however, is that the quality of the electoral regime has suffered compared to previous periods. Amadou and other opposition candidates were unable to pose a serious challenge to President Issoufou. The intimidation of opposition politicians and the arbitrary arrest of civil society activists have shaped Nigerien politics since around 2013. Recent months have seen a worsening of that trend.

Historically, Niger's elected politicians have been highly dependent on foreign donors, and the local support of chiefs and Islamic clerics. It is crucial to note that foreign donors now also include donors from the Middle East and China. The extent to which Nigerien politicians respond to their demands (and what these demands are) is unclear.

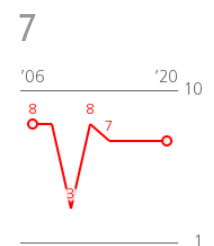
The military has been a constant factor in Nigerien politics, as the current political dispensation attests. The last two military coups (1999 and 2010), however, were undertaken in order to return to constitutional rule and not in order to claim power on a long-term basis (which was the case in 1996). This shows that over the course of the last decade a republican spirit has emerged inside the army. Nevertheless, as in all African societies, the military is a powerful interest group. In late 2015, the Nigerien government arrested a small number of officers who allegedly had planned to overthrow the government. Since then, there have been no further coup attempts or mutinies.

The growing influence of conservative Islamist groups in society has not resulted in their capacity to act as veto players in government. Instead, the government co-opts and consults with Islamic leaders. This provides Islamic leaders with potential influence but, at the same time, ensures their loyalty to the state and its

Free and fair elections



Effective power to govern



representatives. The clashes between the Nigerien armed forces and Boko Haram in Diffa province have not led to a worsening of relations between the secular political elites and conservative Sunni clerics. It is clear that in the instances of conflict, Niger's secular elite remains in the driving seat.

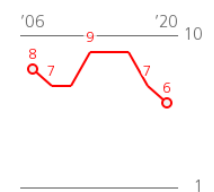
The constitution of the Seventh Republic explicitly protects freedom of association and assembly. The government does not restrict the formation of interest groups nor generally intrude on their right to express their opinions freely. Protest marches against both the government and opposition are a common feature.

The last half decade has seen growing state interference in and restriction of opposition marches. In recent months, this tendency has increased. Thus, unfortunately, association and assembly rights have become more curtailed than at any time since the beginning of the Seventh Republic in 2011. In June 2018, Nigerien authorities arrested 26 high-profile civil society activists. In response, Amnesty International, Oxfam and other NGOs called for their release. During his state visit to France in June 2018, President Issoufou responded to their request by accusing the NGOs of making an “unjustified fuss.” As in previous review periods, local authorities often withdrew permits for public demonstrations shortly before the demonstration was scheduled to take place. On several occasions in Niamey, the local authorities informally blocked demonstrators from entering the city's main squares. Critical journalists and civil society activists have become prime targets of government crackdowns. However, data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) shows that the number of protests against the government has increased. This indicates that it is still very possible for civil society groups and others to make their voices heard.

Freedom of the press and media is guaranteed in the constitution. The range and audience of print media is limited, but there is a certain diversity of opinion. Restrictions placed on press coverage have increased over the last four to five years. Freedom of information has declined sharply in recent years. In the annual Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index, Niger dropped Niger from a ranking of 29 in 2011 to 63 in 2018. Two prominent examples illustrate the modus operandi of the government vis-à-vis journalists. In January 2014, Soumana Idrissa Maïga, the editor of a private newspaper, was arrested after the government accused him of inciting hatred and violence. In March 2017, Baba Alpha, the owner of a private radio station, was accused of using false citizenship papers. He was imprisoned for two years and eventually deported to Mali after the government declared him a threat to Niger's internal security. Both journalists had reported critically on government conduct and corruption. At the same time, however, there are many media outlets that report critically without government interference. There is no outright state censorship.

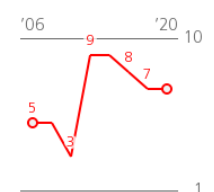
Association /
assembly rights

6



Freedom of
expression

7



3 | Rule of Law

The 2010 constitution explicitly highlights the importance of mutual checks and balances. Like several of those preceding it, the constitution foresees a semi-presidential system that provides for a distinct separation of powers between the president and the prime minister. In contrast to those preceding it, the current constitution strengthens the rights of the legislative vis-à-vis the executive in particular with regard to the right of the legislature to approve the prime minister (the president can propose and dismiss the prime minister). It also outlines the respective rights of the president and the prime minister in case of cohabitation (i.e., the majority of parliament can name the prime minister). The constitution further specifies the judiciary's control mechanisms allowing it to scrutinize more carefully the president and the prime minister. The Constitutional Court cannot be dissolved by the president and is the only institution with the mandate to interpret the constitution.

In practice, the Constitutional Court did not play a significant role in checking executive power during the period under review. President Issoufou enjoys a stable parliamentary majority and has successfully intimidated (potential) regime opponents. The military conflict against Boko Haram has been used to suppress opposition, with government opponents arrested based on (weak) accusations of collaborating with Boko Haram. In short, there have been few (if any) opportunities to see whether the separation of powers works in reality. Despite government harassment and intimidation, the opposition parties are still able to hold the government accountable in parliament. However, historically, the National Assembly has proven ineffective during periods in which the government has held a strong parliamentary majority.

The judiciary comprises of the Constitutional Court, the Court of Appeal (Cour de cassation), the State Council (Conseil d'état), the Court of Auditors (Cour des comptes) and the ordinary courts.

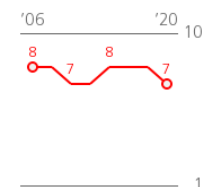
The Constitutional Court has a long tradition of rulings that contradict executive decisions. Often, however, these decisions are ignored.

High-ranking politicians are rarely subject to judicial action; if and when they are subject to investigation, cases are either abandoned or delayed indefinitely. If politicians are prosecuted, this is normally a sign that they have fallen out of favor with whomever is in charge of the executive. The trial against Hama Amadou, the former president of the National Assembly and prime minister, was not transparent.

Corruption is a problem in the judiciary. A 2016 Afrobarometer survey reported that 34% of respondents experienced problems in dealing with the courts such as paying bribes, delays and lack of access, though this is below the African average of around 40%.

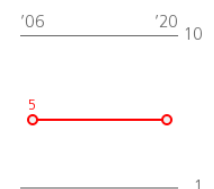
Separation of powers

7



Independent judiciary

5



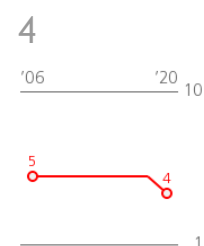
Niger further suffers from a lack of authorized lawyers. Fighting for one's rights in a court of law is very expensive. The vast majority of the population either does not have access to the legal system or cannot afford the legal fees. Outside of the capital, there is a distinct lack of local courts. Shariah law often replaces the legal system of the nation-state.

President Issoufou initially displayed great enthusiasm for the fight against corruption. In October 2011, the government also inaugurated two new institutions in order to curb corruption in the public sector. The "Bureau d'information de Réclamation contre la Corruption" is solely responsible for fighting corruption in the legal system and the "Haute Autorité de Lutte contre la Corruption" (HALCIA) aims to tackle corruption in the public sector at large. However, neither President Issoufou's initial announcements nor the HALCIA have lived up to expectations. Officeholders who break the law and engage in corrupt practices often attract adverse publicity, but are inadequately prosecuted. Trials of officeholders are often informed by political considerations. Personal and political proximity to the president and other members of the ruling elite ensures impunity. The involvement of government officials in corrupt activities is a major driver of the current wave of protests against the regime. Behind closed doors, representatives of Western donors often state that corruption has reached new levels, partly due to the growing influx of development and security aid. In contrast to previous review periods, Western donors depend on Nigerien cooperation against Islamic terrorism and illegal migration into Europe.

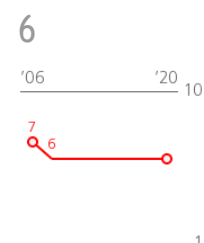
Civil rights are guaranteed by the constitution, yet these rights are often violated in practice and not respected throughout the country. In the run-up to the 2016 parliamentary and presidential elections, the government arrested several journalists and opposition protesters without providing a justifiable reason. In addition, several journalists were arrested for criticizing the government's handling of the Boko Haram insurgency. These worrisome developments, which are reminiscent of the autocratic Tandja era, have increased in recent months and years.

Outside Niamey, where lawyers and sufficiently trained legal aid are rare, citizens have almost no legal recourse. Access to legal protection is very expensive and thus impossible for 95% of the population. Despite constitutional protections, nomadic peoples have little or no access to government services. Significant traditional structures prevent large segments of the population from expressing their civil rights. In the eastern part of the country, women among the Hausa and Peul (also known as Fulani or Fulbe) communities are often not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort. In the Diffa region, the military confrontation between the Nigerien state and Boko Haram has displaced thousands of people. Anyone in that region is without sufficient legal protection. Although recent months have seen a decrease in fighting, the socioeconomic situation of the affected populations have not been addressed by the government.

Prosecution of office abuse



Civil rights



Family law gives women inferior status in property disputes. According to human rights groups, around 7% of the population are subject to forced labor. Slavery still exists despite an official parliamentary ban in 2003. Child marriage and child prostitution is a problem across the country. Human- and drug-trafficking is very common in the north of the country, particularly in the city of Agadez. Various EU and Western donor programs operate in the region. The programs are designed to undermine the trafficking of drugs and humans. It is not clear to what extent these programs are successful. In addition, bribery is pervasive among Nigerien security personnel.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

The return to democracy in April 2011 entailed re-establishing Niger's democratic institutions. Historically, such institutions have been unstable and weak, as evidenced by several military coups between independence and 2010, and former president Tandja's highly contested attempt to prolong his term of office in 2009.

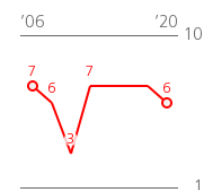
So far, President Issoufou has successfully circumvented the instability that had plagued previous administrations. The removal of his most influential ally, Hama Amadou, while maintaining the coalition between Issoufou's PNDS and MNSD (and other smaller parties) suggests a high degree of stability. However, this stability is based on the ability of the government to co-opt opponents rather than on joint policy positions. External economic shocks, for example, are likely to provoke a parliamentary crisis and instability. It does deserve notice that ethnicity does not lead to political friction or tension, a major contrast between Niger and some of its neighbors. There were a number of instances where the executive did not inform the legislative about the context of new laws. The recently passed tax law was a prominent example. It is fair to say the legislative branch does not perform its functions due to outside interference. Another problem concerns the inactivity of actors represented in these institutions, who appear unwilling to use institutional powers in the interest of accountability and transparency.

Local government officials are often not aware of their competencies and thus remain inactive. In several regions, local government structures only exist on paper.

In principle, democratic institutions are accepted by the majority of the political actors. All political parties and civil society actors support multiparty competition. However, in reality all Nigerien governments have tried to bend or simply ignore (as Tandja did in 2009) institutional rules. Following most elections, the losing parties eventually accepted the official results. However, on many occasions, the losing parties refused to acknowledge that the elections had been fair. The absence of international and domestic observer teams during the last elections means that there

Performance of democratic institutions

6



Commitment to democratic institutions

7

is little to no reliable information about the extent to which the last elections were free and fair.

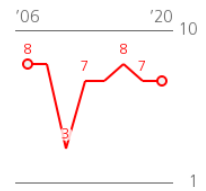
The most recent elections in January and March of 2016 polarized many. The incarceration of the main challenger, Hama Amadou, and contradictory court rulings on his case damaged the image of Niger as a stable democracy. The opposition called for a (last minute) boycott of the presidential run-off. Although the circumstances of the elections raise doubts about the validity of their results, the opposition has de facto accepted the outcome. In May 2017, Amadou Djibo, the head of a coalition of opposition parties, spent six months in prison for inciting the overthrow of the government. Djibo had called on his followers to force Issoufou out of office by any legal means. It seems fair to say that since the 2016 elections democratic institutions and norms have been undermined by the current administration.

At the same time, however, democratic norms are not questioned in principle and democracy remains the only institution in which all relevant actors wish to resolve their issues.

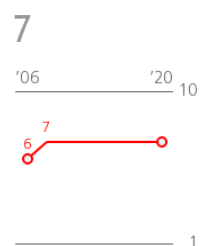
Although conservative Islamist groups have gained political influence in recent years, they do not engage formally in political processes. Currently, there is no alternative to the democratic secular nation-state. A few opponents of democracy within the main opposition party, the MNSD, remain. These forces constitute a minority. Furthermore, the Tuareg rebels do not respect Niger's democratic institutions either, though they might claim otherwise. The military's respect for democratic institutions and processes is mixed. The military intervention in February 2010 illustrated that the army is still able and willing to intervene in civilian politics, but the particular circumstances of the intervention, which had the explicit goal of re-establishing democracy, revealed that the army regards itself as the guardian of democratic rule rather than its opponent. In December 2015, a small number of officers attempted to stage a military coup. They failed dismally, confirming that the majority of the armed forces support the political status quo.

5 | Political and Social Integration

Since 1993, Niger has held seven presidential and nine legislative elections. There are no reliable data on party membership. It seems fair to say that most, if not all, parties have low levels of organizational capacity outside of the capital and urban centers in the interior of the country (e.g., Diffa, Dosso and Zinder). The last two elections have seen the rise of several new parties, which are breakaways from older and more established parties such as the PNDS and MNSD. There are now 16 parties represented in parliament, which is an increase of seven parties compared to 2011. Although the party system is now more fragmented than before, there are still not



Party system



more than three to four politically relevant parties (PNDS, MNSD, MODEN/FA-Lumana and CDS – although the CDS has declined in importance).

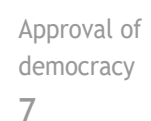
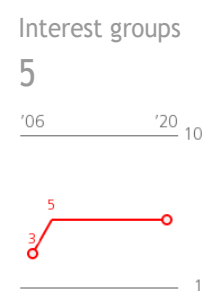
Clientelist and personalistic linkages rather than ideological cohesion is what unites parties with their followers. A significant share of MPs are entrepreneurs and normally do not serve more than one parliamentary cycle. Political alliances are fickle, which makes the political environment unstable and unpredictable. The ability of the party system to produce different alliances, however, also indicates a low level of ethnic and political polarization.

Compared to previous elections, the voter turnout was comparatively high in the 2016 elections (69% in the legislative and first round of the presidential elections; in 2011: 51.6% in the first round of the presidential and legislative elections). A reason may be the higher degree of polarization surrounding the arrest of the main presidential challenger. All parties have regional strongholds. Cooperation between parties and civil society organizations is ad hoc and has never been institutionalized.

Since the early 1990s, a variety of interest groups have formed. Most of these have very few members and lack the ability to aggregate interests, and hence, they lack the ability to influence policy-making. However, recent years have seen reoccurring waves of protest against particular government policies, such as the new tax law that came into effect in 2018. In addition, there are frequent demonstrations against corruption and the increasing authoritarian tendencies of the administration. The support of interest groups is based on universal demands (“end corruption”). As a result, these demands remain vague and have little to no influence on policy-making. The Coalition Équité/Qualité contre la Vie Chère au Niger, which has long demanded better living conditions, is a case in point: Its success can be explained by the fact that everyone in Niger supports its main goal of reducing the cost of living given the extremely dire economic conditions.

Civil society rarely, if ever, influences policy-making. For such groups, very few coordination mechanisms exist, the capacity to analyze political issues is severely undermined due to lack of funding, and most lack a clearly defined purpose. The bottom line is that civil society groups lack money, education and active members. Outside of Niamey and the regional main cities (e.g., Dosso, Diffa and Zinder), interest groups are virtually nonexistent. The trade unions have been weakened as the formerly powerful umbrella organization for trade unions, Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Niger, has split into several smaller umbrella organizations.

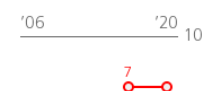
The number of citizens supporting democratic norms and procedures continues to grow. According to Afrobarometer in 2015/2016 (latest survey out of the only two representative surveys on political attitudes in Niger), 69% of respondents support democracy over any other form of government. Meanwhile, 70% of respondents believe that Niger is either a fully developed democracy or a democracy with only minor shortcomings. 66% of respondents are generally satisfied with democracy in



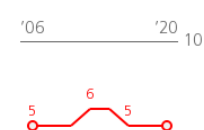
Niger. Therefore, approval of democracy is fairly high and most citizens think the country to be developing in the right direction. 71% trust parliament a lot or somewhat, 70% trust the police and 81% trust the armed forces. It is important to interpret these numbers alongside recent political developments: Since 2013, demonstrations against the authoritarian tendencies of the government have increased. This indicates that support for democratization remains high despite recent setbacks.

There is little reliable information about self-help groups and the degree to which they are institutionalized.

Interpersonal trust and solidarity among citizens seems to be limited, although only limited survey data is available. According to the most recent Afrobarometer (2016), Nigerien respondents place enormous trust (81%) in their religious leaders. By and large, respondents refrain from associational activities: 88% say that they are not a member or an inactive member of a voluntary association or interest group. Half of all respondents have never attended a community meeting



Social capital
5



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

For several decades, Niger has been one of the (and sometimes the) poorest nations in the world. In the latest HDI ranking (2017) it ranked 189 out of 189. Since the inception of the index in 1990, Niger consistently has been ranked among the poorest five countries. The poor ranking has occurred despite fairly impressive annual economic growth rates (between 4% and 7% over the last five years). This indicates that macroeconomic growth and extensive donor support does not reach ordinary citizens.

According to U.N. criteria, 60% of the population suffer from multidimensional poverty. Life expectancy at birth is 55 years. On average, every Nigerien attends school for two years of his or her life. The Gini coefficient is 34.3%, which initially does not appear too bad. That 75% of the population live on less than \$2 a day puts this rating into perspective. Less than a third of the population is able to read and write. These statistical facts have remained almost unchanged for several years. While 71% of the population receives primary education, only 14% receives secondary education and less than 2% make it to college. The quality of schooling outside of cities is extremely poor and often nonexistent despite official declarations to the contrary. Very often parents do not send their girls to school out of fear the girl might marry a teacher. The formal sector of employment does not extend beyond the

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers
1



civil service. A subsistence economy forms the basis of survival for a large share of the population (though reliable data is difficult to obtain). In general, women suffer more from exclusion and poverty than men. The country's latest score on the Gender Inequality Index stands at a miserable 0.649, one of the worst in the world. Droughts and flooding in the summer months remain pressing challenges. Rapid population growth (the average Nigerien woman gives birth to seven children) and limited arable land make matters worse.

It is safe to assume that the confrontation with Boko Haram has had a negative effect on spending for education and social welfare.

Niger has not achieved many of the Millennium Development Goals. However, the Issoufou government has expressed its commitment to the U.N. Global Goals (Sustainable Development Goals). It is not clear to what extent there has been progress with regard to these goals.

Economic indicators		2015	2016	2017	2018
GDP	\$ M	7217.7	7528.3	8119.7	9239.5
GDP growth	%	4.3	4.9	4.9	5.2
Inflation (CPI)	%	-0.6	1.7	2.8	3.0
Unemployment	%	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	7.3	4.0	4.2	5.0
Export growth	%	-9.0	-7.2	7.1	-
Import growth	%	7.4	-14.5	2.1	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-1485.6	-1180.9	-1271.2	-
Public debt	% of GDP	39.9	44.7	54.4	53.8
External debt	\$ M	2239.5	2535.0	3058.9	3260.0
Total debt service	\$ M	88.3	112.4	131.2	123.7

Economic indicators		2015	2016	2017	2018
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	17.9	16.9	15.8	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	6.0	4.1	3.5	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.5	1.5	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	-	2.2	2.5	2.5

Sources (as of December 2019): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The institutional framework for market competition is weak at best and driven by informal rules.

The World Bank 2019 Doing Business report ranked Niger 143 out of 190 economies. This is a minor improvement compared to previous years. In the Heritage Foundation's 2018 Index of Economic Freedom, Niger ranked 160 out of 179 countries. Within sub-Saharan Africa, it ranked 36 out of 46 countries. Accordingly, trade freedom and labor freedom have decreased over the last few years.

Establishing a business in Niger, however, is easy, according to the World Bank's 2019 sub-index Starting a Business. It takes seven days and three procedures, and costs 8.1% of GNI per capita, ranking the country a respectable 27 out of 190. This is an impressive improvement compared to previous years. However, these statistical improvements often do not translate into material improvements. The country's investment code foresees tax and custom exceptions. Additional tax benefits are possible but need to be discussed with the Ministry of Commerce. The National Council of Private Investors was re-established in 2007.

Overall, the informal sector is huge, but difficult to quantify. There is a distinct lack of economic diversity and little prospect of a broad-based private sector emerging in the next few years. Niger remains highly vulnerable to external shocks and continues to have an underdeveloped financial sector. It is fair to say that this has been the case since independence. With the exception of petroleum, the market sets prices, but the government influences prices through state-owned utilities. Foreign capital and domestic capital are legally equal. All sectors are open to investment. Land ownership

Market organization

4

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requires approval by the government. As in all francophone countries, the CFA is pegged to the euro.

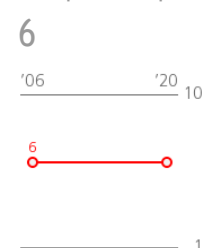
Various foreign firms operate in the nascent gold and oil sectors, but several businesses have been turned off by the outdated and opaque bureaucratic investment framework. Further privatization is held back by the unattractive returns these investments are likely to generate. Meanwhile, the military confrontations between the Nigerien armed forces and Boko Haram have led to new security restrictions across the country, which have decreased investor confidence.

The legal framework for competition policy in Niger is based on the Competition and Consumer Protection Law of 2015, which replaced a 1992 law that was never fully operational. Niger also adheres to the Community Competition Law of West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

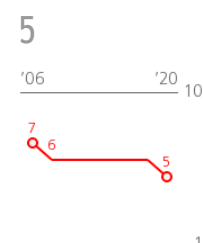
For more than three decades, Niger has tried to privatize several state-run companies. Under the guidance of the World Bank, it divested itself of monopolies in water and telecommunications. The privatization of other state monopolies has stalled and there has been no significant progress. The state still co-owns around one-third of several uranium companies, including the Compagnie Minière d'Akouta (COMINAK), Société des Mines d'Azelik (SOMINA) and Imouraren S.A. The oil-distribution company (SONIDEP) and national electricity company (NIGELEC) still hold monopolies. However, three mobile phone and two internet licenses have been granted and genuine competition in these sectors has commenced. An independent multi-sectoral regulatory body has been created to help ensure free and fair competition. For 30 years, the French government-owned company AREVA held a virtual monopoly over Niger's uranium. Four years ago, the Issoufou government signed a new contract with AREVA. The details of that contract have not been released to the public. Recent years have also seen the emergence of a solar industry, but details about regulation and profits in the sector are impossible to come by. All in all, the protection of competition remains very weak in Niger.

In principle, trade is liberalized. Niger has been a member of the World Trade Organization since 1996. Its participation in international trade is very limited with regard to both imports and exports. According to data from the World Trade Organization (2017), Niger ranks 148 with regard to exports and 156 with regard to imports worldwide. However, import and export accounts for 57% of GDP. Several factors are responsible for this: The lack of suitable infrastructural facilities, a rigid foreign exchange rate (pegged to the euro), a lack of transparency in fiscal planning and informal trade activities. Importation of goods is time-consuming and costly. Domestic and foreign investors are generally treated equally under the law. The average MFN applied tariff rate was 12.2% in 2017. Numerous non-tariff barriers impede trade.

Competition policy



Liberalization of foreign trade



The Heritage Foundation's 2018 Index of Economic Freedom rates Niger's trade freedom as repressed. The World Bank states that Niger's trade regime is in line with the trade regimes of other low-income countries. Niger also participates in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Membership entails a customs union marked by a considerable degree of de facto protectionism and state regulations.

The Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) governs the banking system. According to the BCEAO, 10 commercial banks operate in Niger. According to the World Bank, Niger has retained a small banking sector with a moderate degree of concentration. Four of the 10 banks account for 80% of total assets. There is no data on the bank capital to assets ratio and the percentage of nonperforming loans.

The deposits to GDP ratio remains one of the lowest in the West African region. The financial sector has few links to the world economy. Although liquidity is high, access to credit is difficult because there is a general hesitancy to loan. Participation in banking is very low among the population and confined to the major cities.

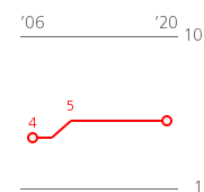
8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Successive administrations, including the current administration, have been successful at keeping in-country inflation under control. In 2017, the inflation rate stood at 2.4%, while in 2016 it stood at 0.2%. Niger's membership in the CFA franc zone pegs the CFA franc to the euro. This keeps the exchange rate stable but also prevents Niger from pursuing its own currency policy. Monetary policy is determined by the regional central bank, the Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO), which prioritizes inflation-targeting in its eight member countries, as well as maintaining the CFA franc's euro peg. Policy is therefore heavily influenced by the European Central Bank (ECB). Consequently, monetary stability has been a major political objective historically.

Niger's current account balance has been negative for a very long time. This has not changed under the current administration. On the one hand, this is the result of adverse structural economic conditions. On the other, it is the outcome of corruption and economic mismanagement. In 2000, Niger qualified for the HIPC Initiative, and received extensive debt relief between 2000 and 2008. Consequently, Niger's debt burden went down significantly. In recent years, it has gone up dramatically. Its external debt is over \$3,233 million. Niger's public debt now stand at 51.5% of GDP. The total debt service has increased from \$27.4 million in 2008 to \$96.1 million in 2017. These are very worrisome tendencies, which increase the country's dependency on outside funding. The government claims that the military confrontation with Boko Haram has put further pressure on the annual national budget. Though such claims are difficult to verify, as Niger does not share the annual national budget with the public and (most recently) has also excluded the opposition from access to it.

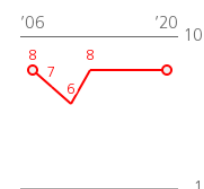
Banking system

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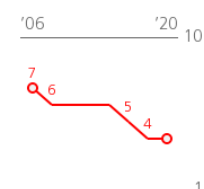
Monetary stability

8



Fiscal stability

4



9 | Private Property

In 2018, Niger made registering property faster by decreasing the time needed to transfer and register property. It now takes 13 days and 4 procedures to register a property (down from 35 days and four procedures). In the World Bank Doing Business Report, Niger ranks 111 worldwide for the registration of property. Niger has made the enforcement of all contracts easier by creating a specialized court in Niamey. This, however, does not help affected parties outside of the capital where an effective legal enforcement mechanism remains absent. Property disputes are common in rural areas subject to customary land titles. The state respects property rights. There are no known cases where the state arbitrarily appropriates land or property.

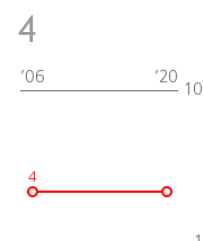
The 1993 Rural Code decentralizes land administration and allows for registration of customary land rights, but confusion exists over what rights can be registered, and the lack of capacity to manage land registration has caused an increase in land disputes. Those with less power to assert claims frequently lose land rights. The laws outlined in the code have significant regional variations in subjects such as the right to inherit land, individual and family tenure, and women's land access. Most customary practices reflect the influence of Shariah law.

Outside the oil and mining sectors, there are very few domestic or foreign private companies. In 2017, Niger attracted \$3.5 billion in foreign direct investment. This is a small amount and a decrease from \$4.45 billion in 2016. As the first country in the Sahel, Niger hosted a fair to showcase small business and entrepreneurship in 2017. However, the devastating combination of climate change, mass migration, human- and drug-trafficking, and a rise in violent extremism has not been good for existing private enterprises and has deterred investment. These issues, however, are not new. The regulatory framework for private enterprises is seen as outdated and inconsistent. The formal labor market is poorly developed, making it difficult for private enterprises to find well-trained staff.

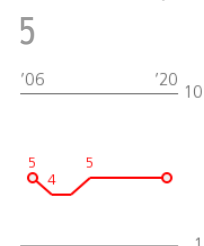
10 | Welfare Regime

The constitution of the Seventh Republic outlines the right to social protection. Various previous poverty reduction strategies and other official documents by the government highlight the need to improve the country's safety net. The Issoufou administration is aware of the lack of basic services across the country. However, there appears to be little that indicates that there is any effective social welfare net. The only exception are civil servants, who have access to pensions and state-funded health care. Average life expectancy is 60.1 years old (2016 data). Public expenditure on health care is 3.2% of the GDP – although this data is from 2014, prior to the onset

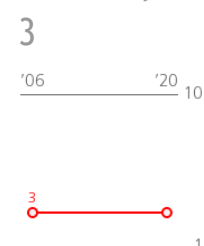
Property rights



Private enterprise



Social safety nets



of the military confrontations against Boko Haram in 2015. According to the Open Budget Survey in 2017, the Nigerien government provides the public with zero budget transparency. Available data is typically outdated, rendering any reasonable assessment of welfare spending somewhat obsolete. Even if Niger has a social welfare system to speak of, the high fertility (each woman gives birth to on average 7.2 children) and population growth rate (3.8%) would put that system under immediate pressure. Poverty is widespread and ordinary citizens have to rely on family members or other social contacts to access welfare support.

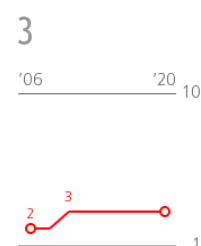
Nigerien society remains strictly hierarchical and heavily segmented. Opportunities largely depend on personal background rather than merit. While the very small political and economic elite are free to consider any educational and professional option, the poor have little to no opportunity to advance. The literacy rate reveals the low level of education. In 2012, only 15% of Nigeriens were able to read and write. Among the male population, 23.2% are literate while over 90% of female Nigeriens are illiterate. The enrollment rate in the education system is 73.7% in primary education, 23.6% in secondary education and 1.7% in tertiary education. The female to male enrollment ratio for primary and secondary education stood at 0.8 in 2016.

The change of government in 2011 has not changed this situation, and there is nothing that indicates that this will change any time soon. In fact, one could argue that the situation has become worse, as all political parties are now led by members of the same generation. The situation is particularly dire for women due to religious and cultural factors. Women, who represent 43.1% of the country's labor force, even face legalized discrimination with regard to inheriting property. Quota laws increasing the political representation of women in parliament have been passed, but are not enforced in practice. Niger signed the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1999. However, a large number of politicians disagree with many of the convention's provisions. The implementation of all laws fostering female participation or the rights of other marginalized groups face considerable obstacles.

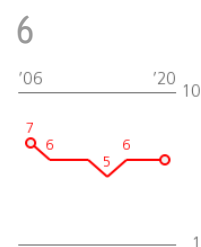
11 | Economic Performance

For the last five years, Niger has displayed stable GDP growth rates (between 4% and 7%) and the inflation rate has consistently remained below 3%. Over the course of the last decade, the GDP in absolute numbers has increased from \$5.4 billion to \$8.1 billion. Over the last decade, the GDP per capita has also increased from \$729 to \$1,017 (current U.S. dollars). The GDP per capita grew 1% in 2017. Inflation increased from 0.2% in 2016 to 2.4% in 2017. Foreign Direct Investment has decreased from 12.1% of GDP in 2012 to 4.1% in 2017. However, foreign direct investment is largely contingent on developments in the oil and mining sectors, and thus dependent on international market developments.

Equal opportunity



Output strength



Despite these seemingly promising figures, there are very worrisome signs. The current account balance has been in the red for more than 10 years and currently stands at -\$1.1 billion. Public debt is increasingly out of control and has increased from 25.1% of GDP in 2007 to 51.5% of GDP in 2017. Although donor countries have asked Niger since the early 1980s to start collecting data on its tax base, this has not happened. There is also no reliable data on the current employment rate. However, it is known that the vast majority of the population is underemployed or unemployed. Niger's current political elites are not translating macroeconomic gains into fiscal consolidation.

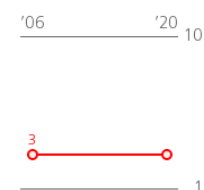
12 | Sustainability

Niger's environmental deficiencies are as long-standing as its economic underperformance. Niger has committed itself to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which have an environmental dimension. Various Nigerien governments have passed legislation and decrees aimed at the protection of forests and water. The 2018 U.N. Voluntary National Review of the High-level Political Forum of Sustainable Development notes some progress in the area of reforestation. However, overall there remain many areas in which little to nothing is being done about any of the following challenges: overpopulation, pollution of the environment, environmental degradation, extensive flooding, overgrazing, overuse of land, soil erosion and desertification. Out of 180 countries, Niger ranked 172 on the Environmental Performance Index in 2018. It ranks particularly poorly in the field of water and sanitation. The Nigerien state and multinational companies exploit oil and uranium without any regard for environmental consequences.

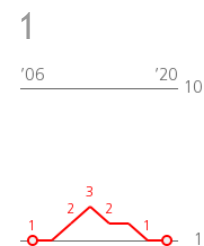
Education policy has failed to deliver a degree of training for the last four decades.

In the U.N. Education Index, Niger scores 0.214, a poor score even by the regional standards of the Sahel. There is no recent data on public expenditure on education. On the ground educators state that spending has gone down and that the educational sector is increasingly stressed by high population growth rates. There are significant regional differences in the quality of the education provided, which display an urban-rural divide. The war against Boko Haram has led to the closure of schools and other educational facilities in the Diffa region. In Niamey, classes are often cancelled for no discernable reason and many teachers go unpaid for months. There is also a small research and development sector, though it does not receive sufficient support by the government. Recent efforts to improve the university system have not led to substantial improvements.

Environmental
policy
3



Education policy /
R&D
1



Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

The structural concerns on governance remain very high. Extreme poverty is endemic and visible all over the country, but particularly in the urban areas, which are most affected by overpopulation. Niger is a landlocked country and has failed to bring its educational sector in line with the needs of a competitive economy. Infrastructure projects are often announced but rarely completed, excluding infrastructure projects led by the Chinese government. Natural disasters such as flooding and deforestation are now common occurrences. Located between Mali, Libya, Algeria, Chad, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, Niger is severely affected by the situation in Mali, Burkina Faso, Libya and Nigeria. Given its location, it is remarkable that it has managed to remain somewhat stable.

Civil society as a whole rests on weak foundations. Most of the regular activities of local NGOs are dependent on donor funding. However, on a number of occasions, civil society has effectively challenged the government and pressured the administration into making concessions. The various protests against high living costs over the course of the last four years are prominent examples. Many protest leaders are susceptible to the cooptation attempts of the government. It is important to note that civil society has been unable to formulate policies or strategies outlining how Nigerien politics and the economy can move ahead. Instead of putting forward alternative visions, civil society organizations support universal goals such as the fight against corruption or poverty. While this is sufficient to mobilize large sections of the population, it is not enough to cultivate a civil culture and social trust.

In contrast to many countries in Africa, Niger does not suffer from long-standing ethnic conflicts. The relationship between the central government and the Tuareg constitutes an exception. The last Tuareg uprising occurred between 2007 and 2009, and there has been no indication that another one is in the making. Due to decentralization in the country's north, the state has effectively coopted many Tuareg leaders. Politics has become a lot more confrontational due to President Issoufou's increasingly ruthless approach toward dissent. Relations between the government and opposition have worsened due to the 2016 election campaign and its aftermath. Civil society and political parties are able to mobilize large numbers of people, though violence remains fairly rare. Niger's main cleavage is between the wealthy few and impoverished masses. The lack of political representation for poor Nigeriens has been detrimental to social justice, but beneficial to stability.

Jihadi extremists are known to operate in Niger, but so far have been unable to create a sizable following. Niger has not seen the formation of a homegrown jihadi group,

Structural constraints

9



1

Civil society traditions

7



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Conflict intensity

5



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in contrast to Mali and Nigeria where international jihadism has become domesticated. Tensions between the Christian minority and the Muslim minority have increased since the 2015 Charlie Hebdo riots.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

To protect the southern border against infiltration by Boko Haram fighters and to protect the capital and the major cities from terrorist attacks is the main priority for the Issoufou administration. Beyond security (war against Boko Haram), the Issoufou administration does not prioritize its goals. This used to be different during Issoufou's first term in office (2011 to 2016) when poverty reduction strategies, nutrition programs and the inclusion of the north were central to government rhetoric. In recent years, the government has stopped communicating its long-term vision. A new plan for economic and social development (2017 to 2021) was adopted but it also prioritizes security. Rural populations remain excluded from political decision-making.

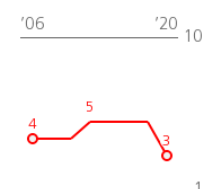
There are very few, if any, policies in place that mitigate against the structural constraints that Niger suffers from. Niger has not achieved many of the Millennium Development Goals. The government is committed to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, but has not outlined how it will achieve the goals. There is no policy to tackle overpopulation despite rhetoric to the contrary. There are no policies to improve the country's crumbling infrastructure. There is no new poverty reduction strategy. Niger's geostrategic location, and its growing importance in the war against terror and illegal immigration to Europe has led to an influx of donor funding and a concomitant decrease in government responsiveness to the needs of the people. Donor countries focus on programs designed to increase community resilience, fight radicalization and undermine immigration to Europe. There is no reliable information about the extent to which these programs are implemented or are successful.

Niger has de facto ignored almost all policy lessons since the (failed) implementation of the first IMF loan in the mid-1980s. As recruitment to most senior public sector positions is based on personal proximity to those in power rather than on merit, the Nigerien bureaucratic apparatus lacks institutional memory. Based on meetings with Western and Nigerien officials, the situation has worsened over the last few years, as a growing number of administrators loyal to Issoufou have taken over important positions within the government. There is no shortage of academic and other consultants, but their advice is either driven by the West's geostrategic considerations or is ignored by the government.

Question
Score

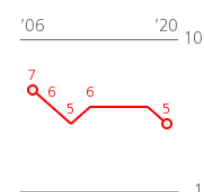
Prioritization

3



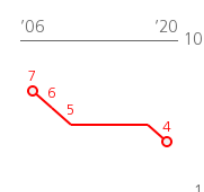
Implementation

5



Policy learning

4



15 | Resource Efficiency

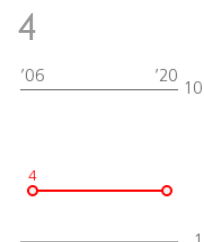
The Nigerien state does not make efficient use of its personnel. Historically, the public sector has employed too many civil servants. Career promotion is based on loyalty rather than merit, a tendency that is said to have increased in the last two years under President Issoufou. The management of budget resources has worsened, too. The government has failed to balance the state budget for several consecutive years, which is aggravating the debt burden. State debts appear to be manageable. However, this is due to demand for oil and uranium rather than any substantial reform. Over the course of the last decade, the debt burden has risen dramatically from 25.1% of GDP in 2007 to 51.5% of GDP in 2017. There is a distinct lack of budget transparency, as the Nigerien government does not provide citizens with information about individual budget items – something international NGOs have criticized for years. Little to nothing is known about the modus operandi of decentralization or other issues related to the organization of public administration.

Niger's civil service is overstaffed and many civil servants lack the technical skills required to work effectively. Appointment to a leadership position in public administration is often the result of personal connection. This is not to say that all leading civil servants lack basic competencies. Indeed, by regional standards the Nigerien administration works well. However, there are many significant redundancies and gaps. The government has been successful in integrating former Tuareg rebels through the decentralization of the country's north and the cooptation of former rebel fighters.

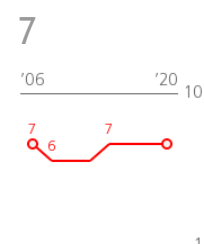
In contrast to previous periods, the relationship between the president and prime minister is without conflict. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the prime minister, Brigi Rafini, is more of a technocrat than a politician. On the other hand, both belong to the same party (PNSD), which was not the case under previous coalition governments.

When Issoufou first came to power in 2011, anti-corruption efforts were top of his agenda. However, by the middle of his second term, very little has been translated into action. Niger's anti-corruption agency (the Haute autorité de lutte contre la corruption et les infractions assimilées, HALCIA) is de facto dormant. Many state employees complain about the rapid increase in corrupt activities, which started with the influx of Western aid designed to fight human trafficking and development activities in the north. Journalists who report critically on corruption often find themselves in prison. According to the IMF, Niger has not seen a thorough audit of public expenditure for several decades. The financing of political parties might be regulated on paper, but does not take place in reality. There is no transparent (or indeed any) procurement system in place.

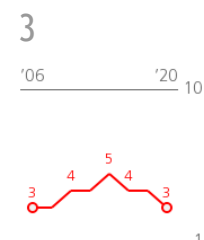
Efficient use of assets



Policy coordination



Anti-corruption policy



16 | Consensus-Building

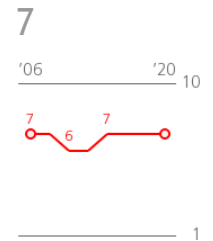
The major political actors agree on the desirability of democratic institutions. None of the major political parties or societal forces, including the armed forces, has the intention to introduce a nondemocratic political system. The last two coups (1999 and 2010) ushered in the return of multiparty democracy. The last (alleged) coup attempt of December 2015 failed. However, as soon as powerholders feel threatened by the opposition or civil society, they refer to authoritarian measures to consolidate their power. This has become particularly clear over the last two years, which have seen significant political setbacks. Unfortunately, this has applied to almost all political parties that have been involved in running the government since 1991. Beyond the general commitment to democracy, Niger lacks democracy in action and hence lacks genuine democrats. Conservative Sunni groups so far have been unable to yield sufficient influence to create a more Islamist society. This is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future.

The principles of the free market are also not under threat. Many Nigerien citizens might be opposed to the current neoliberal climate and aid conditionality, but this does not mean that they would prefer to live in a different economic system. Many privatization initiatives failed due to the lack of sufficient capital or the absence of a dynamic economic market rather than opposition to free market principles. Most Nigeriens are employed in the informal economy, which is driven by the basic logic of free enterprise.

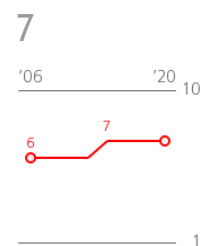
The only anti-democratic actor, which is strong enough to bring about regime change, is the Nigerien military. Nothing indicates that anti-democratic forces yield sufficient influence to be able to overthrow the government, but more detailed information is not available.

Other anti-democratic actors include Islamic groups and self-interested politicians. Islamic groups continue to oppose political liberalization, especially with regard to the rights of women and with regard to secularism. However, they lack the will and capacity to bring about change: in contrast to several neighboring countries (in particular, Mali), conservative Salafi movements do not engage in party politics, but rather remain confined to the religious sphere. Although the political class as a whole has accepted election outcomes, powerful self-interests of individual leaders still have the potential to override democratic principles.

Consensus on goals



Anti-democratic actors



In contemporary Niger, the main political cleavage runs between government and opposition supporters. Ethnicity historically has been less of a divisive factor. Instead, personal rivalries have shaped Nigerien politics. All political parties have strong personal and clientelistic elements. Regional and ethnic divisions between the Tuareg and the rest of the country and between the Tuareg and other tribes in the north exist, but are seen as less salient. Most governments have tried to prevent the escalation of cleavages.

The relationship between the government and civil society has worsened considerably over the last few years. All previous administrations ignored civil society advice whenever that advice was not in line with their own convictions. More recently, the government has actively cracked down on civil society groups, which criticized the government for its economic policies and its failure to root out corruption in the administration.

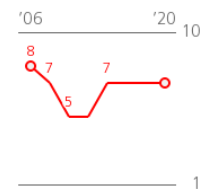
Reconciliation between perpetrators of crimes and their victims has never been addressed in earnest. This applies to the victims of the Kountché regime (1974 – 1987) and the Maïnassara regime (1996 – 1999). The attempts by the National Conference in 1991 to identify previous political and social injustices resulted in the humiliation of the army, which was one cause for the 1996 coup. While various governments have established numerous deliberative councils, all of which are supposed to contribute to national cohesion and reconciliation, in reality, these councils have had little to no effect. The Issoufou government has not engaged with these shortcomings in any meaningful way.

17 | International Cooperation

All governments have worked closely with Western donors, the World Bank and the IMF. This also applies to the current government. The Nigerien government has published various roadmaps and benchmarks, but has consistently failed to achieve most of them. The MDGs are powerful examples in this regard. Since the beginning of its second term (2016), the Issoufou government has provided less and less information about its use of donor funding. At the moment, it is unclear what the aims of the government are beyond fighting Boko Haram and ensuring security. Short-term expediencies and rent-seeking behavior continue to hamper the effective use of available support.

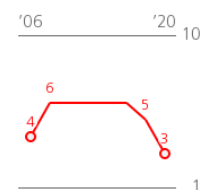
Cleavage /
conflict
management

7



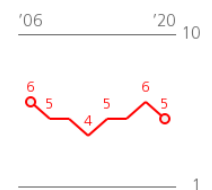
Civil society
participation

3



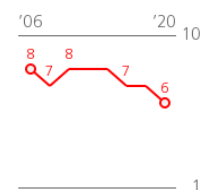
Reconciliation

5



Effective use of
support

6



Niger is widely seen as a reliable regional and international partner. In recent years, Niger has emerged as the West's main security partner in the fight against Islamic radicalism in the Sahel. Increasingly, Niger is also seen as an important ally in fighting illegal immigration into Europe. In its second assessment of Niger's performance under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, the IMF concluded that Niger has made satisfactory progress. President Issoufou likes to portray himself as a reliable ally in an otherwise unstable region. The authoritarian tendencies of his government have done little to shake international trust in him. In fact, Niger has never received more international aid and support as it does today.

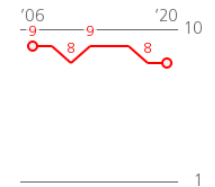
Niger is a charter member of the African Union, and the West African Economic and Monetary Union. It belongs to the Niger Basin Authority, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Economic Community of West African States, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Niger has demonstrated its commitment to a U.N. intervention in Mali by providing between 500 and 700 troops. It is a founding member of the "G5," an institutional framework for the coordination of security and development issues between five Sahel countries. Its foreign policies are in line with the foreign policies of other ECOWAS members.

In recent years, Niger has extended its cooperation with China, India, South Africa, the Arab world and Turkey. The extent and nature of these cooperation agreements are shrouded in secrecy and cannot be quantified.

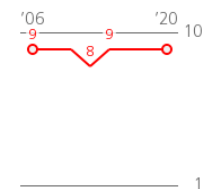
Credibility

8



Regional cooperation

9



Strategic Outlook

To confront its long-standing economic challenges, the current administration needs to implement a process that diversifies the economy and creates a competitive education system. This will be impossible without the inclusion of Nigerien civil society and meaningful cooperation with Western donors. Ultimately, the government will also have to move away from its reliance on Islamic leaders for public support. This is particularly true when it comes to population growth rates, which restrict economic progress. It deserves to be noted that Islam is an equally potent societal force in Mali and Nigeria, although population growth rates in these two countries are much lower. Since 2013, President Issoufou has lost the trust of large segments of the population due to his dismal treatment of parliamentary opposition and civil society actors critical of his conduct. To stop the growing political polarization between government and opposition supporters, the government needs to engage in a systematic dialog with the opposition. Although everyone agrees that Niger faces enormous environmental challenges, it is remarkable how little is done to mitigate the effects of climate change. Almost all environmental initiatives are driven by multilateral donors, particularly the World Bank.

The biggest foreseeable political challenge will be the 2021 elections, which hopefully will result in the first handover of power from one civilian president to the next. Western donors should work toward that goal. Western donors should continue to help Niger with its manifold security challenges, but should not prioritize “stability” at the expense of democratic norms and institutions. Western donors should work with Nigerien civil society in order to identify and combat corruption in the public sector. There also needs to be more transparency in the provision and use of donor funding. There remains very little knowledge about how the Nigerien government spends its money, which has been the case for several decades.

Western donors should continue to support the G5, a regional organization that brings together five Sahel countries in the fight against terrorism. However, Western donors should focus on the economic cooperation aspect of the G5, which is often overlooked. Closer economic cooperation between the five countries can only benefit Niger.