

General information

- TL;DR—highly poor, highly underdeveloped, highly unstable post-conflict regime plagued by ethnic tensions, corruption, and an under-industrialized economy
- The Hausa ethnic group constitutes a majority (53.1%), but Niger is ethnically diverse, with nearly a half-dozen other ethnic groups present (e.g. the Zarma people making up 21.2% of the country, or the Tuareg people constituting 11% of the population). The country is overwhelmingly (99.3%) Muslim
- Niger was subject to French colonialism until independence in 1960; subsequently, between 1960 and 1974, a single-party civilian regime ruled over the country, until a coup d'état instituted military rule from 1974 to 1991
 - During the rule of the military dictatorship, state-run firms were created to extract and export uranium; however, when uranium prices collapsed, the IMF intervened and imposed austerity conditions, including the privatization of these SOEs
 - Gradually, trade unions and student activists put pressure on the military regime to liberalize and institute a multi-party democratic system. A series of brutal crackdowns resulted in fierce national and international retaliation, which eventually caused the military to agree to a gradual process of democratization
 - A transitional government was designed and implemented by November 1991; the nation's constitution, modified by the military in 1989, was rewritten and put to a national referendum in December 1992. Subsequently, presidential elections were held, and the democratic transition was complete
- The first several years of Niger's democracy were marked by large-scale instability: members of the minority Tuareg ethnic group engaged in militant violence in the Agadez Region; a peace deal was signed between the central government and the rebels in 1992, but internal factions within the Tuareg militias rendered this ineffective (although a successive peace deal in 1995 with the main Tuareg rebel group proved to have more efficacy). Moreover, economic deprivation remained widespread, and the governing coalition changed four times in just the first few years of the government's existence
 - Subsequently, Niger underwent two coup d'états, the first—motivated by government inaction and stagnation—in 1996 and the second—driven by the assassination of the incumbent president—in 1999
- In 1999, new elections were held, and a new President, Tandja Mamadou, was sworn in. Mamadou passed a series of political and economic reforms, and in 2004, was re-elected as President; however, over time, his popularity faded, particularly as his relationship with Niger's Prime Minister Hama Amadou deteriorated and as further violence broke out in the south of the country between the military and the Nigerien's Movement for Justice, a Tuareg-based rebel group. In 2009, Mamadou sought to run for a third presidential term, which was barred by the country's constitution, so he declared a national referendum to allow his presidency to continue. The Supreme Court struck this down as unconstitutional; in response, President Mamadou stripped the Court of its

powers and assumed emergency control of the federal government. He subsequently rewrote the constitution and put it to a referendum; the opposition boycotted, and, in a referendum widely decried as unfair and rigged, the new constitution was ratified by the popular vote

- However, this created serious unrest within Niger, and in 2010, the military staged a coup against Mamadou for his role in unconstitutionally extending the duration of his presidential administration. A one-year interim government was declared, followed by national elections in 2011, which were lauded by the international community for being free, fair, and open
- Since 2011, Niger's political system has functioned despite several attempted presidential assassinations and failed coup attempts. The elections held in December of 2020, when the incumbent president announced his plans to step down from office and not seek a third term, signified the first instance of a peaceful transition of power in Niger's history
- Niger has and continues to be threatened by a variety of threats to its physical and national security, such as spillover from terrorist groups in Mali (including the Tuareg-majority National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, or NMLA, or the Islamic radical group ISIS in the Greater Sahara, or ISIS-GS) and violent militias in northeastern Nigeria (notably including Boko Haram)
- Economically, Niger is one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in the world. Less than 20% of the population lives in cities. Subsistence agriculture constitutes 40% of GDP and is the main livelihood for 80% of the population. Low uranium prices, compounded by an inability to extract oil, have further limited growth prospects. Moreover, security concerns force Niger's government to spend significantly on national defense rather than economic stimulus. Significant emigration out of Niger into West African countries has further worsened economic prospects
 - Niger has accepted billions of dollars from the IMF and World Bank to facilitate irrigation and poverty-alleviation projects. However, foreign investment remains functionally nonexistent due to political instability: for instance, not a single US company operates in Niger!
- Statistically, Niger has the highest birth rate in the world: on average, women have seven (!) children. ~25% of Niger's population is younger than 25, and the birth rate is expected to remain high for the foreseeable future due to the agrarian nature of the economy. However, as families continue to grow in size, children will inherit smaller and smaller parcels of land, further exacerbating poverty into the long term