



## Niger

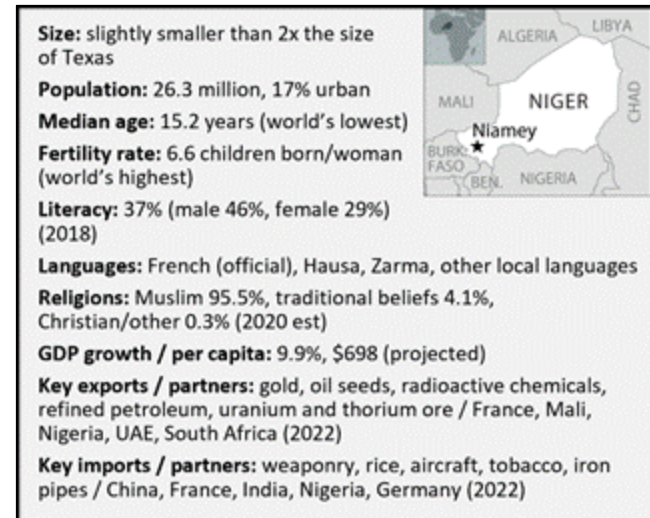
Events in Niger have deepened the challenges facing U.S. policymakers in the Sahel region, amid rising Islamist insurgencies, intraregional tensions, and Russian influence. A military junta seized power in mid-2023, part of a wave of coups in Africa. U.S. officials had previously characterized Niger as an emerging democracy and important regional security and development partner. The Biden Administration condemned the coup, restricted U.S. aid and security cooperation, and later voiced concerns about the junta's pursuit of ties with Russia and Iran. Prior to the coup, Niger hosted the second-largest U.S. military presence in Africa, about 1,000 U.S. personnel. Tensions with the junta led the United States in 2024 to withdraw troops and hand over military facilities in the country. A Russian military contingent arrived around the same time.

The ruling National Council for Safeguarding the Homeland (CNSP), led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, has declined to schedule elections and continues to detain former elected president Mohamed Bazoum. Authorities have cracked down on dissent, civil society activism, and the media. The CNSP has formed the Alliance of Sahel States with counterparts in Mali and Burkina Faso; the three countries have expelled French counterterrorism troops, withdrawn from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and drawn closer to Russia. ECOWAS leaders initially threatened a military intervention to reverse Niger's coup and imposed sweeping economic sanctions, although ECOWAS later downplayed the threat and lifted sanctions in early 2024. Tchiani has since accused Nigeria and Benin of conspiring with France to destabilize Niger; such tensions have impacted regional economic and security cooperation.

Security conditions appear to have deteriorated in the wake of the coup, the withdrawal of French and U.S. troops, and the CNSP's apparent abandonment of some local peace mediation efforts. Insurgents affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS, aka ISIS/ISIL) are active in border regions and in neighboring countries. Hundreds of thousands are internally displaced in conflict hotspots in Niger's west and southeast. The IS Sahel affiliate claimed the 2017 deadly ambush of U.S. soldiers in Niger, and several U.S. citizens have been kidnapped in Niger and held by regional terrorist groups over the past decade. (All were released, including one freed by the U.S. military in 2020.)

Niger exports uranium and is an emerging oil producer. Like the other Sahel juntas, the CNSP has sought greater control over natural resources and related revenues, placing acute pressure on a French firm that has been the dominant actor in the uranium sector. The CNSP has encouraged Russian investments in uranium mining, and reportedly discussed a potential uranium sale to Iran. Tensions with coastal neighbor Benin and attacks from a pro-Bazoum armed group have hindered oil exports at times.

Figure 1. Niger at a Glance



Source: CRS graphic. Data from CIA *World Factbook*, IMF; 2024 estimates unless noted.

### Context and Historical Background

Niger is one of the world's poorest and least-developed countries, with the lowest median age and highest fertility rate. Coups and armed rebellions have marked its history. Niger achieved relative stability under President Mahamadou Issoufou, a civilian politician elected after a 2010 military coup. President Bazoum, a close ally, was elected in 2021. Bazoum's inauguration represented Niger's first ever transition between two elected presidents, if also seen as a managed succession between two close allies. Under Issoufou and Bazoum, Niger cultivated strong ties with the United States and former colonial power France, along with Turkey and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Freedom House rated Niger as "Partly Free," amid state harassment of activists and journalists, and restrictions on some civil liberties, including protests.

Over the past 15 years, Niger assumed growing importance as an anchor of Western security cooperation in the Sahel, as Islamist insurgencies spread and as other governments in the region fell to military coups. President Bazoum was also one of the few regional leaders to openly criticize Russia's Wagner Group, which began operating in Mali in 2021. The growing foreign troop presence, President Bazoum's warm relations with France, and Niger's cooperation with the European Union to counter migrant flows prompted protests and other local backlash, potentially weakening popular support for the government. Some Bazoum policies, such as a military integration program for Islamist insurgent defectors, also reportedly spurred discontent within the military. By some accounts, former President Issoufou, who engaged in a power struggle with Bazoum over control of the ruling party and oil revenues, may have played a role in the coup, which he has denied.

### Terrorist and Insurgent Threats

The IS Sahel affiliate and a rival Malian-led Al Qaeda affiliate, known as JNIM, are active in western Niger and in adjacent strongholds in Mali and Burkina Faso. Southeast Niger is threatened by Nigerian-led IS-West Africa, an offshoot of Boko Haram. Parts of Niger also face the spillover of criminal, communal, and vigilante violence from neighboring Nigeria. Since the 2023 coup, some former ethnic separatist rebels have taken up arms in support of deposed President Bazoum, claiming an attack in mid-2024 on the Niger-Benin oil pipeline. Some factions have sought to combine forces with separatist groups in Mali who oppose the ruling junta there.

The U.S. State Department has also documented allegations of “arbitrary or unlawful killings” by state security forces and militias during counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. Nigerien authorities, including the CNSP, have also used antiterrorism laws to pursue critics and civil society activists. Human rights groups have criticized the CNSP’s creation of an “automated” terrorism database under which individuals can be stripped of their nationality or subject to other actions without due process or redress.

### Russia

For leaders in Niger and elsewhere in the Sahel, outreach to Russia appears to serve as a symbolic rejection of France’s postcolonial influence, a populist bid for domestic legitimacy, and a means to seek external security support on new terms. About 100 Russian military “trainers” reportedly arrived in Niger in April 2024, alongside the delivery of Russian anti-aircraft defense systems. This followed Russian deployments to Mali (an apparent regional hub for Russian security operations) and Burkina Faso. The CNSP has encouraged greater Russian involvement in the uranium mining sector, including as a substitute for French firms, and signed a deal in late 2024 to buy satellites from Russia’s space agency.

### The Economy and Humanitarian Conditions

Landlocked and arid, Niger is one of the world’s poorest countries and ranks near the bottom of the UN Human Development Index. While most Nigeriens are engaged in agriculture or livestock herding, the formal economy centers on uranium (of which Niger accounts for about 5% of global mining output) and oil production. Niger also has deposits of coal and other minerals.

Niger’s uranium sector has historically been of particular importance to France, which relies on the mineral for domestic electricity and nuclear defense. The prominent role of a French state-controlled firm, Orano (formerly known as Areva) has long drawn criticism from local activists calling for a larger share of revenues and citing environmental and health concerns. Oil production began in the early 2010s, and is mostly used for domestic consumption. An export pipeline to Benin, developed and operated by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), came online in 2024, but security incidents and tensions between the CNSP and the government of Benin (which supported ECOWAS measures after the coup) have disrupted exports at times. Turkey has also been a prominent economic partner.

Limited arable land, high population growth, and regular droughts and flooding—possibly worsened by climate

change—have fueled widespread food insecurity and malnutrition. Other health challenges include endemic malaria and outbreaks of measles, meningitis, cholera, and polio. Child marriage and adolescent motherhood are common; access to education is limited, especially for girls and in rural areas. Conflict-related displacement has further strained local communities and obstructed service delivery.

### U.S. Policy, Aid, and Military Withdrawal

The Biden Administration condemned the 2023 coup, pressed the junta to release President Bazoum, and expressed support for ECOWAS’s efforts to “return Niger to a democratic path”—albeit without explicitly backing ECOWAS’s threat of military intervention or economic sanctions. U.S. Ambassador Kathleen FitzGibbon presented her credentials to the military-led government in December 2023, after initially declining to do so.

U.S. development and security assistance for Niger grew significantly in the decade preceding the coup. Bilateral aid allocations in FY2023 (latest public data) totaled \$106 million, supporting health (\$58 million), agriculture (\$25 million), education (\$13 million), governance (\$6 million), and other programs. Prior to the coup, Niger was also implementing a \$443 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact. Niger also received tens of millions of dollars in security assistance per year under regional and global programs. In response to the coup, the Biden Administration applied coup-related aid restrictions under §7008 of annual aid appropriations acts, affecting military aid and certain other aid “to the government.” The Administration imposed additional restrictions on security cooperation pursuant to policy decisions. Citing statutory eligibility, the Administration ended implementation of Niger’s MCC compact, along with preparatory work on Niger’s portion of a planned MCC regional compact with Benin, and terminated Niger’s eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, Title I of P.L. 106-200, as amended).

Some U.S. development and humanitarian assistance has continued since the coup. Section 7008 applies to aid “to the government,” and certain funds—including support for democracy and humanitarian relief—are either exempted under §7008 or authorized “notwithstanding” such restrictions. The provision is silent with regard to U.S. military operations. Prior to the U.S. troop withdrawal in 2024, U.S. officials stated a willingness to resume some aid and security cooperation if the junta released deposed President Bazoum and issued a calendar for elections.

The U.S. military withdrawal, which was completed in September 2024, came after the junta publicly rescinded Niger’s status of forces agreement with the United States. This followed the U.S. suspension of security cooperation and private statements of concern about the CNSP’s pursuit of “potential relationships with Russia and Iran,” as U.S. officials later confirmed. U.S. forces were previously located at multiple facilities in the country, including in Niamey and at a U.S. Air Force-constructed installation in Agadez that hosted U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations.

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