

# Niger

## General statistics

Population: 15,306,252 (2009)  
Area: 1,267,000 km<sup>2</sup>  
Independence: 3 August , 1960 (France)  
Capital: Niamey  
Government: Semi-presidential republic  
Administrative language: French  
Currency: Guinean franc (GNF)  
GDP: 10.206 billion USD  
GDP per capita: 370 USD  
Calling code: + 227  
Motto: *Fraternité, Travail, Progrès* (Fraternity, Work, Progress)  
Anthem: : La Nigérienne



**Minerals:** Uranium, gold, coal, tine, phosphate, gypsum, molybdenum, oil

The Republic of Niger, is a landlocked country in Western Africa, named after the Niger River. It borders Nigeria and Benin to the south, Burkina Faso and Mali to the west, Algeria and Libya to the north and Chad to the east.

## History:

The nomadic Tuaregs were the first inhabitants in the Sahara region. The Hausa (14th century), Zerma (17th century), Gobir (18th century), and Fulani (19th century) also established themselves in the region now called Niger.

Niger was incorporated into French West Africa in 1896. There were frequent rebellions, but when order was restored in 1922, the French made the area a colony. In 1958, the voters approved the French constitution and voted to make the territory an autonomous republic within the French Community. The republic adopted a constitution in 1959 but the next year withdrew from the Community, proclaiming its independence.

During the 1970s, the country's economy flourished due to uranium production, but when uranium prices fell in the 1980s, its brief period of prosperity ended. The drought of 1968–1975 devastated the country. An estimated 2 million people were starving in Niger, but 200,000 tons of imported food—half U.S.-supplied—substantially ended famine conditions. The 1974 army coup ousted President Hamani Diori, who had held office since 1960. The new president, Lt. Col. Seyni Kountché, chief of staff of the army, installed a 12-man military government. A predominantly civilian government was formed by Kountché in 1976.

In 1993, the country's first multiparty election resulted in the presidency of Ousmane Mahamane, who was then deposed in a Jan. 1996 coup. In July, the military leader of the coup, Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, was declared president in a rigged election. Considered a corrupt and ineffectual president, Maïnassara was assassinated in April 1999 by his own guards. The National Reconciliation Council, responsible for the coup, kept its promise and held democratic elections; in Nov. 1999, Tandja Mamadou was elected president. As a result, foreign aid, primarily from France, was restored.

The nomadic Tuaregs, of Berber and Arab descent, have a fiercely insular culture and share little affinity with the black African majority of Niger. Conflict between the Tuaregs and the other tribes of Niger first surfaced in the early 20th century. Cease-fires between the government and various Tuareg rebel groups went into effect in 1995 and 1997. The impoverished Tuaregs have received little of the economic aid they were promised, which is not surprising given Niger's political instability and desperate poverty. Under pressure, Niger criminalized slavery in 2003, but about 43,000 people are still thought to be held as slaves. In March 2005, a public ceremony freeing 7,000 slaves was planned, but at the last minute the government reversed itself, denying that slavery existed in the country. Niger found itself a pawn in the war against Iraq when both the U.S. and Britain claimed that Iraq sought to buy uranium from Niger, citing this as evidence that Saddam Hussein was reconstituting his country's nuclear weapons program. While the U.S. evidence for the Iraq-Niger uranium connection was exposed as a forgery, Britain's Butler report, released in July 2004, concluded the claim was "credible," based on separate evidence. But the final report of the Iraqi Survey Group in Sept. 2004—the U.S. report assessing evidence of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—concluded that the "ISG has not found evidence to show that Iraq sought uranium from abroad after 1991."

In 2005, Niger faced its worst locust infestation in 15 years as well as a severe drought. The UN reported that 3.6 million citizens were suffering from malnutrition. President Tandja, however, claimed the food crisis was propaganda invented by the country's political opposition.

Prime Minister Hama Amadou resigned in June 2007, after a no-confidence vote against his government passed in parliament. Members of his government are under investigation for allegedly embezzling funds from the education ministry. Former trade minister Seyni Oumarou was appointed to succeed Amadou. In June 2008, Amadou was arrested on charges of embezzling state funds. In an effort to abolish term limits and broaden his powers, President Tandja in May and into June 2009 suspended the Constitution and implemented emergency rule, dismissed a Constitutional Court ruling that he said cannot use a referendum to seek a third term in office, and dissolved Parliament. Nevertheless, the referendum was put to a vote in August, and voters endorsed Tandja's plan for a new Constitution, which allowed Tandja to remain in office for three more years with additional powers. The opposition boycotted the referendum, as well as the parliamentary election in October, which the candidates supported by Tandja won handily.

The government was widely criticized for not postponing the elections. In February 2010, the military of Niger staged a coup and overthrew the government of President Mamadou Tandja, replacing him with a leader of their own choosing, Salou Djibo. A new government, deemed the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, was also formed. Djibo promised the people of his country a return to civilian rule and elections to choose a new leader, but he has not said when that event will occur. The overthrow of Tandja, a former military man himself, is evidence that many in Niger were deeply unhappy with his recent abolishment of presidential term limits, seeing it as a threat to the country's young democracy.

Tandja had been in office for over 10 years.

**Climate:**

Niger, one of the hottest countries in the world, has three basic climatic zones: the Saharan desert in the north, the Sahel to the south of the desert, and the Sudan in the southwest corner. The intense heat of the Saharan zone often causes the scant rainfall to evaporate before it hits the ground; at Bilma, in the east, annual rainfall is only 2 cm (0.79 in). On the average, rainfall in the Aïr Massif is limited to a maximum of 25 cm (10 in) annually, and most of it comes during a single two-month period. At Agadez, in the northern Sahel, annual rainfall averages 16.5 cm (6.5 in), but yearly totals often vary greatly. In the south, rainfall is higher. It averages 56 cm (22 in) at Niamey, in the southern Sahel, and 87 cm (34 in) at Gaya, in the Sudanese zone. The rainy season is from May through October, with most rain in July and August. At Niamey, the average maximum daily temperature fluctuates from 31° C (88° F ) in August to 41° C (106° F ) in April. Nights are cool (below 20° C /68° F ) from November to February.