

Niger | Freedom House



[Freedom in the World 2017](#)

Profile



Freedom in the World Scores

(1=Most Free, 7=Least Free)

Aggregate Score: 49/100 (0=Least Free, 100=Most Free)

Ratings Change:

Niger's political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the repressive conditions surrounding the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, including harassment of the opposition, as well as alleged irregularities in the balloting itself.

Overview:

The current regime in Niger was democratically elected in 2011, and reelected in 2016 in a polling process reportedly plagued by serious irregularities. The struggle to meet the security challenges that surround Niger has served as an alibi for the government to restrict freedoms and civil liberties. Security, transparency, economic prosperity, and gender equality are limited.

Key Developments:

- In February and March, Niger held legislative and presidential elections in an environment in which the primary opponent of the incumbent president was held in jail. Widespread electoral irregularities were reported.
- Authorities in October announced the formation of a unity government, after one of the major opposition parties joined the ruling coalition.
- In June, the government banned an international correspondent from the country in connection with her coverage of Boko Haram violence. A few days later, a local civil society activist was sentenced to six months in jail for criticizing the government in a Facebook comment.
- In December, more than 30 Boko Haram fighters turned themselves in to the

government, in what appeared to be the first abandonment of the jihadist insurgent movement by Nigerien recruits.

Executive Summary:

President Mahamadou Issoufou was reelected for a second five-year term in March. The elections happened in a context of political tension, as opposition leader Hama Amadou, Issoufou's most significant challenger for the presidency, was jailed during the entire electoral process, accused of involvement in a baby-trafficking scandal. The opposition boycotted the second round of the presidential poll, which Issoufou won with 92 percent of the vote. In legislative polls held in February, Issoufou's Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) won 75 seats in the 171-seat legislature, while Amadou's Nigerien Democratic Movement for an African Federation (MODEN/FA) won 25 seats, and former prime minister Seini Oumarou's National Movement for a Developing Society (MNSD) took 20 seats. Thirteen smaller parties divided the remaining seats. The elections were reportedly plagued with irregularities such as vote buying, underage voting, and rigging of election results, and combined with pressure by the government on the opposition, effectively resulted in the installation of a government that was not freely and fairly elected. The local elections, initially scheduled to take place in July 2016, were postponed. Amadou was bailed in March, after the presidential election was completed.

Although no major outbreaks of violence occurred during the electoral process, tension between government and opposition supporters was high, and often took on an ethno-regionalist character. In October 2016, authorities announced the formation of a government of national unity after the opposition MNSD joined the ruling majority. A new cabinet with 42 ministers was subsequently announced, prompting criticism for being excessively large at a time when the country was experiencing an economic downturn, and the government was struggling to provide basic services.

These political tensions mounted against a backdrop of a deteriorating security situation, as Islamic insurgent groups active in neighboring countries threatened to encroach on Niger. Although Niger has so far managed to maintain a precarious stability, it has undermined civil liberties in the process. The fight against the militant group Boko Haram has led the government to declare states of emergency in the Diffa region near the border with Nigeria, allowing the army to engage in mass arrests and detain those suspected of links with terrorist organizations. Journalists, demonstrators, and civil society activists have faced harassment and obstruction by officials who cite security grounds to justify their actions.

In December 2016, more than 30 Boko Haram fighters surrendered their weapons and turned themselves in to the government, in what appeared to be the first abandonment of the jihadist insurgent movement by Nigerien recruits. They will reportedly receive amnesty and participate in deradicalization and reintegration programs.

[Political Rights](#)

Political Rights 21 / 40 (-3)

A. Electoral Process 6 / 12 (-2)

- A1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?
- A2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
- A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

B. Political Pluralism and Participation 9 / 16

- B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
- B2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
- B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
- B4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

C. Functioning of Government 6 / 12 (-1)

- C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?
- C2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?
- C3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief 11 / 16

- D1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?
- D2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?
- D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?
- D4. Is there open and free private discussion?

E. Associational and Organizational Rights 6 / 12

- E1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?
- E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?
- E3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

F. Rule of Law 5 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary?

F2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?

F3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights 6 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?

G2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

G3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?

G4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Niger, see *Freedom in the World 2016*.