

Examining Potential Frameworks for a Transition to Civilian Rule in Niger Republic: Stakeholders' Role

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Abstract

Niger Republic's return to democracy is not merely a political exercise; it is a collective reimagining of governance, identity, and justice. If each stakeholder fulfils their role with integrity and purpose, the next five years can lay the foundation for a durable, inclusive and peaceful democratic order. This paper explores potential frameworks for a successful transition to civilian rule in the Niger Republic following the 2023 military coup. The research was built within the framework of the regionalism theory. Data for the study were obtained from secondary sources, whose validity and veracity were established through content analysis. It was found that the Economic Community of West African States' influence on the political transition in Niger is limited. The Economic Community of West African States' decision to suspend the Niger Republic from its decision-making bodies demonstrated principles and deterred future unconstitutional seizures of power in the region. Furthermore, the lack of strong enforcement mechanisms has limited the effectiveness of these sanctions in achieving the desired outcome of restoring constitutional order in Niger. The findings revealed that the crisis in Niger has significant implications for regional stability, security, and development. The study found that monitoring governance, advocating for reforms, and mobilising grassroots participation are the roles of stakeholders in establishing potential frameworks for a transition to civilian rule in Niger. The study recommended implementing a more holistic strategy that prioritises dialogue, cooperation, and a firm commitment to peace, security, and democratic governance, which is imperative for addressing the Niger crisis comprehensively. This approach should involve engaging all relevant stakeholders and prioritising long-term stability over short-term gains.

Keywords: Potential, Frameworks, Transition, Civilian Rule, Stakeholders.

Introduction

Niger Republic's journey to democratic consolidation has been marked by periods of military intervention and authoritarian rule. Following the recent coup that ousted the democratically elected government, the country finds itself at a critical juncture. The transition to civilian rule is imperative for the Niger Republic's political stability, economic development and social progress. The 2023 Nigerien coup occurred on July 26, 2023, when the country's Presidential Guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum, and Its Commander, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, proclaimed himself the leader of a new military junta. This marked the fifth military coup in Niger's history since gaining independence from France in 1960 (Minjibir, 2023).

International reactions: ECOWAS imposed sanctions and threatened military intervention after several consultations if the junta did not restore Bazoum to power within a week. The United Nations, European Union, France and the United States condemned the coup, with some suspending aid and others calling for Bazoum's release (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Despite the military's justification of the coup as necessary to combat terrorism, attacks by armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have persisted, particularly in the Tillaneri and Diffa regions (Adeleye, 2024). Civilians have faced ongoing violence, and some reports indicate that extremist groups have exploited instability to expand their influence. There have also been reports of abuses by the military, including crackdowns on perceived dissenters and allegations of extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2025).

The transition to civilian rule in the Niger Republic is a critical juncture in the country's history, with significant implications for security, stability and economic development. The military's role in politics has been a recurring theme in Niger's history, and a successful transition requires careful management of the security sector. Security sector reform is essential to ensure that the military and other security forces are professional, accountable and responsive to civilian authority. A well-planned transition can promote stability, reduce the risk of conflict, and create an environment conducive to economic development and social progress.

Research Questions

The following research working questions shall guide the thesis;

- i. To what extent did the Economic Community of West African States' actions influence the political transition in Niger?
- ii. What are the roles of stakeholders in establishing potential frameworks for a transition to civilian rule in the Republic of Niger?

Conceptual Review

Political Transition

Political transition refers to the process through which a political regime changes from one system of governance to another, often involving significant alterations in political structures, leadership, and policies. This can occur through various means such as revolutions, reforms, or the collapse of authoritarian regimes, and is closely linked to broader concepts of democratisation and state-building. Political transitions can occur gradually through reforms or suddenly through revolutions, demonstrating a spectrum of change within political systems. Successful political transitions often require the establishment of strong institutions that can support democracy and prevent backsliding into authoritarianism. External factors, such as international pressure or economic crises, can significantly influence the process and outcomes of political transitions (Cartwright, 2019).

Historical examples of political transitions include the fall of the Soviet Union, leading to the emergence of post-communist states, and the Arab Spring protests that sought democratic reforms across several Middle Eastern countries. The concept of political transition is essential for understanding issues of governance, legitimacy, and power dynamics within both emerging democracies and repressive regimes. A political transition is the process by which a political system shifts from one form of rule or governance to another, involving changes in leadership, institutions, values, and structures, often triggered by crisis, elections, or collapse, moving towards different outcomes like democratisation, authoritarian consolidation, or hybrid systems, ranging from peaceful handovers to violent overthrows. It is a complex, nonlinear phase in which societies redefine their political rules, rights, and power dynamics. An interval between two regimes, characterised by fundamental changes in who governs, how they govern, and the underlying societal values. In essence, a political transition is a critical period of instability and opportunity where societies re-engineer their political foundations, whether

peacefully or violently, to establish new rules, institutions, and power balances (Decalo & Idrissa, 2012).

Different methods of political transition, such as revolution or reform, can yield different outcomes for new regimes. Revolutions often bring about sudden changes but may result in instability or violence if not carefully managed. In contrast, gradual reforms may allow for a more stable transition as existing institutions adapt to new demands. The success of a political transition ultimately depends on how well these methods address the needs and expectations of the populace while building inclusive governance. External influences play a critical role in shaping a country's political transition by providing support or pressure for democratic reforms. International organisations can promote best practices and offer incentives for transitioning states, while foreign governments may impose sanctions on authoritarian regimes. Additionally, global economic trends can force governments to adapt or risk social unrest. Thus, the interaction between internal desires for change and external expectations can significantly influence the trajectory and success of political transitions.

Methodology

The study used academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest to search for scholarly articles and publications related to the subject under investigation. Information was sourced from textbooks and government periodical reports on the roles of stakeholders in establishing potential frameworks for a transition to civilian rule in the Republic of Niger. The data were analysed using the qualitative description method. This method involved explaining and describing the data to establish the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In doing so, the mass of relevant data from official documents, fact-finding reports, books, and journals was sieved and analysed using content analysis.

Theoretical Framework: Regionalism Theory

Regionalism is a perspective in international relations that focuses on interactions among states within a specific region. This theory posits that states are more likely to cooperate and form alliances with neighbouring countries due to shared geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and common security concerns. Regionalism is often seen as a counterbalance to the traditional global-centric view of international relations, emphasising the importance of regional dynamics in shaping world politics (Hettne & Fredrik, 2003).

One of the key concepts in regionalism theory is regional integration, the process by which states voluntarily come together to form institutions and agreements that promote cooperation and collaboration within a specific region. This can take various forms, such as economic unions (e.g., the European Union), security alliances (e.g., NATO), or cultural organisations (e.g., ASEAN). Regionalism theory also highlights the role of power dynamics within regions. Power disparities among states in a region can influence the level of integration and cooperation, as stronger states may seek to dominate or control weaker neighbours. In comparison, weaker states may form alliances to counterbalance dominant powers. This can lead to competition, conflict, or cooperation depending on the distribution of power within the region (Acharya, 2013).

Furthermore, regionalism theory recognises the significance of non-state actors, such as regional organisations, civil society groups, and transnational corporations, in shaping regional dynamics. These actors can play a critical role in promoting regional cooperation, mediating conflicts, and advancing common interests that transcend national boundaries. In terms of original insights, scholars have increasingly focused on the impact of globalisation on

regionalism. Globalisation has both facilitated and challenged regional integration by increasing interconnectedness, trade flows, and cultural exchanges among states. This has led to debates about the relevance of regional boundaries in an increasingly interconnected world, as well as the role of regional organisations in managing the effects of globalisation on local economies and societies.

Regionalism Theory emphasises the importance of regional organisations in addressing everyday challenges and promoting cooperation among neighbouring states. In the case of the Economic Community of West African States and the Niger Republic Crisis, this theory can be used to analyse how regional cooperation and collective action can help resolve conflicts and promote peace and stability in West Africa. The insight highlighted in this analysis is the tension between national sovereignty and regional intervention. While the Economic Community of West African States has a mandate to promote peace and security in the region, its actions in response to the Niger Republic Crisis may raise questions about the limits of regional intervention in the internal affairs of member states. This tension between sovereignty and intervention can shed light on the challenges regional organisations face in addressing conflicts while respecting the autonomy of individual states.

Niger Political Instability

Historically, Niger has been plagued by political instability, with previous coups in 1974 and 2010 illustrating the fragility of its democratic institutions. The most recent coup, however, occurred against the backdrop of escalating tensions over governance, resource distribution, and security challenges, particularly those posed by militant groups in the Sahel region (*Jon, Mirjam, and Klaas, 2003*). The coup marked Niger's fifth since independence in 1960 and came after a period of relative democratic stability under Bazoum and his predecessor, Mahamadou Issoufou.

Post-Colonial (1960 – 1974): -For its first 14 years as an independent state, Niger was run by a single-party civilian regime under the Presidency of Hamani Diori (*Jon, Mirjam, and Klaas, 2003*).

First Military Regime (1974 – 1991). - The coup was masterminded by Col. Seyni Kountche and a military group known as the *Conseil Militaire Supreme*, with Kountche going on to rule the country until he died in 1987 (*Cartwright, 2019*).

National Conference and Third Republic (1991–1996):-The National Sovereign Conference of 1991 brought about multi-party democracy. From July 29 to November 3, 1991, a national conference was held that brought together all sectors of society to make recommendations on the country's future direction (*Walter, 1995*).

Second and third Military Regimes (1996– 1999): The governmental paralysis prompted the military to intervene; in January 1996, Col. Ibrahim Bare Mainassara led a coup that deposed President Ousmane and ended the Third Republic (*Decalo & Idrissa, 2012*).

Fourth Military Regime (2009– 2010).- In 2009, President Tandja Mamadou decided to organise a constitutional referendum seeking to extend his presidency, which was opposed by other political parties, and went against the decision of the Constitutional Court, which had ruled that the referendum would be unconstitutional (*Walter, 1995*).

Seventh Republic (2010– 2023):-Following the adoption of a constitution in 2010 and presidential elections a year later, Mahamadou Issoufou was elected as the first president of the Seventh Republic; he was then re-elected in 2016.

Fifth Military Regime (2023 to present): Late July 2023, a military coup overthrew President Bazoum, bringing an end to the Seventh Republic and the government of Prime Minister Ouhoumoudou Mahamadou (*BBC, 2023*). In July, General Abdourahamane Tchiani was proclaimed as the *de facto* head of state of the country. Former finance minister Ali Lamine Zeine was declared the new Prime Minister of Niger (*Lawal, 2023*).

Niger's National Committee Proposes a Return to Civilian Rule after Five Years

According to Mamane (2025). The plan to return Niger to civilian rule includes abolishing all the country's current political parties and drafting new rules that authorise no more than five parties. The current junta would remain in power for the next five years, and the junta leader, Brig. General Abdourahamane Tchiani would be allowed to stand as a candidate in the proposed elections. Tchiani welcomed the proposal and pledged to implement it.

The security situation in the Sahel region has worsened since the junta took power, analysts say, with a record number of attacks and civilians killed both by Islamic militants and government forces. The violence in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso has killed more than 3,470 people in the six months, while 2.6 million people are currently displaced, according to the United Nations refugee agency (Amusa, 2024). After coming into power, the juntas in the three countries left the Economic Community of West African States, the nearly 50-year-old regional bloc known as ECOWAS. They created their own security partnership, the Alliance of Sahel States (Amusa, 2024). Some analysts described it as an attempt to legitimise their military governments amid sanctions linked to coups and strained relations with neighbours.

A return to civilian rule in Niger would be significant for restoring democratic governance after a 2023 military coup, which led to political instability and international isolation. It could signal renewed stability and alignment with regional ECOWAS norms, potentially easing economic sanctions (Amusa, 2024).

Consequently, Niger's National Committee has proposed a plan to return the country to civilian rule within five years under new guidelines that would limit political parties. The plan, presented by a National Conference composed of 700 community leaders, including diaspora members, was submitted to the junta that seized power in 2023.

According to Punchng (2025), the proposal suggested that all current political parties be abolished and replaced with new rules that would permit no more than five parties. During the five years, the junta would remain in control, with junta leader Brig. General Abdourahamane Tchiani was allowed to run as a candidate in the proposed election.

Niger, along with neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, has faced a worsening security situation due to a decade-long insurgency by jihadi groups affiliated with al-Qaida and the Islamic State. The Military juntas in these countries have expended efforts to expel French forces and instead turned to Russia's mercenary units for security assistance. The violence in the region has resulted in over 3470 deaths and displaced 2.6 million people in the past six months, according to the United Nations. (Punchng, 2025).

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in Returning Niger to Civilian Rule

In the process of returning Niger to civilian rule, diverse stakeholders, including:

- i. The military
- ii. Judiciary

- iii. Election Management Bodies
- iv. Political parties
- v. Media,
- vi. Civil Society Organisation (CSOs)
- vii. Citizens
- viii. International Partners

The military: The military's responsibility is to facilitate a controlled transition; it holds significant power but must relinquish control and support a credible transition programme that allows the participation of all political groups. Also, the military plays a crucial role in transitioning a country to democracy, particularly in contexts where military intervention has previously disrupted democratic processes. In the Republic of Niger, the military's role in returning to democracy can be seen in two primary aspects:

Stabilisation and security: A stable security environment is essential for democratic processes to flourish. The military can contribute to this by maintaining law and order, thereby creating a conducive environment for elections and civic engagement. For instance, after periods of instability, the military in the Niger could play a role in securing polling stations and protecting citizens' rights to participate in electoral processes (Bruch & Borry, 2017).

Support for Democratic Institutions: In some cases, the military might need to support democratic institutions, especially during transitions. This could involve recognising the authority of civilian governments and refraining from interfering in political affairs. The military's support for democratic governance can significantly influence the success of democratic transitions (Huntington, 1991).

The Judiciary: adjudicates electoral disputes. Plays a critical role by adjudicating election disputes and ensuring the legal framework for the transition is respected, ensuring actions align with constitutional provisions (e.g. Niger's Constitution of 2010), safeguarding citizens' rights, such as freedom of speech, limiting executive overreach, ensuring accountability, and upholding the rule of law and good governance.

Electoral Management Body:- The Electoral Management Body in the Republic of Niger plays a vital role in restoring democratic rule. Organise and monitor elections, responsible for the credible conduct and management of elections, ensuring they are free, fair, and transparent, ensuring accurate registration of eligible voters and maintaining electoral rolls; managing candidate registration and ensuring compliance with electoral laws; and providing mechanisms for resolving electoral disputes and educating citizens on electoral processes and voting procedures (Niger's Electoral Law (Law N. 2018-01)).

Political Parties and Candidates:- In restoring democratic rule to the Niger Republic, parties and candidates present options to the public. Act as the main avenues for public choice, presenting their platforms and contesting elections under established rules. Also, in the Republic of Niger, political parties and candidates play crucial roles in restoring democratic rule. These are: parties should uphold democratic principles, such as free and fair elections, human rights, and the rule of law (Diamond, 2003). Parties should articulate and aggregate the interests of various segments of society, ensuring that citizens' voices are heard. Parties should offer distinct policy options, enabling citizens to make informed choices. Parties should promote national cohesion and inclusivity, transcending ethnic, regional, or religious divides (Basedau & Stroh, 2008).

Responsibilities of Candidates; candidates should respect electoral laws and procedures, ensuring the credibility of the electoral process (Goodwin-Gill, 2006), candidates should

participate in public debates, articulating their policy positions and engaging with citizens (Norris, 2004) and Candidates should be transparent about their intentions, actions, and funding sources, ensuring accountability to citizens (Kolstad & Wiig, 2009). Candidates should commit to protecting and promoting human rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association (Donnelly, 2003).

To restore democratic rule in Niger Republic, political parties and candidates has to ensure the independence of electoral commissions and respect the outcome of elections, promote representation and participation of marginalised groups, including women, youth, and minorities (Tripp, 2015) and commit to transparency and accountability, tackling corruption and ensuring effective use of public resources in addition to support the independence of institutions, such as the Judiciary, media and civil society,, ensuring checks and balances.

The Media: media disseminate information, raise public awareness about the electoral process and democratic principles, and hold stakeholders accountable. In the Republic of Niger, the media plays a vital role in restoring democratic rule. The media ought to provide accurate, unbiased information, enabling citizens to make informed decisions (McQuail, 2005). The media should therefore scrutinise government actions, policies, and officials, promoting transparency and accountability (Voltmer, 2013). The media should offer a platform for various segments of society, including marginalised groups, to express their views and opinions, and uphold democratic principles, such as free speech, human rights, and the rule of law.

Objective reporting: the media ought to report accurately, fairly, and without bias, avoiding hate speech and incitement to violence (Hachten, 2005). The media should conduct investigative reporting to uncover corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations (Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Furthermore, the media should cover elections fairly, providing voters with accurate information about candidates, policies, and electoral processes. They should facilitate public discussion, enabling citizens to engage with one another and with policymakers (Habermas, 1989). To restore democracy rule in Niger Republic, the media ought to; provide balanced coverage of electoral campaigns, highlighting candidates' policies and track records, investigate and report on corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations, promoting accountability, provide a platform for marginalised groups, including women, youth and minorities to express their concerns and opinions (Tripp, 2015) and scrutinise government actions, policies, and officials ensuring transparency and accountability (Voltmer, 2013).

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):- advocate for democratic principles. Act as watchdogs, advocate for democratic reforms, monitor the process, and mobilise citizens to participate in their civic duties. In the Republic of Niger, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in restoring democratic rule. The important responsibilities are: CSOs can mobilise citizens, promote voter registration, and encourage participation in electoral processes (Putnam, 2000). CSOs can scrutinise government actions, policies and officials, promoting transparency and accountability (Ackerman, 2005). CSOs can promote and protect human rights, ensuring that citizens' rights are respected and protected. Civil Society Organisations can facilitate public discussions, enabling citizens to engage with each other and with policymakers. Civil Society Organisations can build trust with citizens by ensuring their activities are transparent and accountable (Edwards, 2004). CSOs ought to empower marginalised groups, including women, youth and minorities, ensuring their voices are heard (Tripp, 2015), CSOs ought to provide policy alternatives, enabling citizens to make informed choices (Howell & Pearce, 2001), and CSOs ought to monitor electoral processes, ensuring that elections are free, fair and transparent.

To restore democratic rule in Niger Republic, Civil Society Organizations ought to support independent institutions, such as the Judiciary, electoral commissions, and media (Linz & Stepan, 1996) and CSOs should promote civic education, ensuring that citizens understand their rights and responsibilities and CSOs should build coalitions with other stakeholders, including political parties, government officials, and international partner and CSOs should demand good governance, transparency and accountability from government officials (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2005).

Citizens:- Citizens exercise their right to vote and hold leaders accountable. Citizens are the ultimate stakeholders, responsible for participating in the electoral process, holding their elected officials accountable, and ensuring the ongoing health of democracy. In the Republic of Niger, citizens play a vital role in restoring democratic rule. These include exercising their right to vote, ensuring their voices are heard and represented, and citizens should scrutinise government actions, policies, and officials, demanding transparency and accountability (Ackerman, 2005). Citizens ought to participate in public discussions, sharing their opinions and perspectives on national issues. Citizen sought to uphold democratic principles, such as free speech, human rights, and the rule of law. Citizens ought to seek accurate information about national issues, policies, and government actions (McQuail, 2005). Citizens should exercise their rights, including the rights of freedom of speech, assembly, and association (Donnelly, 2003). Furthermore, it is the right of citizens to demand transparency and accountability from government officials and institutions while promoting cohesion that transcends ethnic, regional, or religious divides (Basedau & Stroch, 2008). Citizens should resist the attempts to undermine democratic principles and institutions.

International Partners:- Organisations such as the Commonwealth, ECOWAS, Human Rights Watch, and other donor agencies play roles in monitoring, sanctioning, and providing technical support to encourage a legitimate and timely return to civilian rule. International partners can provide financial assistance to support democratic transitions, such as funding for electoral processes and institutional development (Carothers, 2009). International partners can offer technical expertise to strengthen democratic institutions, such as electoral commissions, parliaments and judiciaries. International partners can promote good governance practices, such as transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption efforts. They can also support civil society organisations, enabling them to play a more effective role in promoting democracy and human rights (Howell & Pearce, 2001).

To restore democratic rule in the Niger Republic, international partners should provide technical and financial assistance to support free and fair elections and ensure the integrity of the electoral process (Goodwin-Gill, 2006). They ought to support the development of democratic institutions, such as parliaments, judiciaries and electoral commissions, ensuring they are independent and effective. While supporting human rights initiatives, ensuring that Nigerien institutions and stakeholders are empowered to protect and promote human rights, and supporting inclusive, sustainable economic development, safeguarding economic growth contributes to democratic stability (World Bank, 2017).

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicate that the Economic Community of West African States' influence on the political transition in Niger is limited. The Economic Community of West African States' decision to suspend the Niger Republic from its decision-making bodies demonstrated principles and deterred future unconstitutional seizures of power in the region. Moreover, the lack of strong enforcement mechanisms has limited the effectiveness of these sanctions in achieving the desired outcome of restoring constitutional order in Niger.

The findings revealed that the crisis in Niger has significant implications for regional stability, security, and development. The study found that monitoring governance, advocating for reforms, and mobilising grassroots participation are the roles of stakeholders in establishing potential frameworks for a transition to civilian rule in the Republic of Niger.

Conclusion

The transition to civilian rule in the Republic of Niger marks a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic journey. As the country navigates the aftermath of the 2023 coup and embarks on a five-year roadmap to restore constitutional governance, the success of this transition hinges on the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, each bearing distinct responsibility in shaping a resilient, inclusive and accountable democracy. The military ought to evolve from a power holder to a guarantor of national security and constitutional order. Military commitment to a time-bound transition, non-interference in political processes, and respect for human rights will be the cornerstone of legitimacy and trust. The Judiciary plays a vital role in upholding the rule of law. Election management bodies must be empowered to conduct free, fair and credible elections. The media must serve as watchdogs and educators; the media can help bridge the gap between citizens and institutions, especially in rural and marginalised communities.

The role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in monitoring governance, advocating for reforms, and mobilising grassroots participation shall be critical to ensuring the transition is accountable and inclusive. Citizens should be at the heart of the transition; civic education, youth engagement, and community dialogue ought to be prioritised to foster a lasting democratic system. International partners like ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and bilateral allies in the Niger Republic should avoid legitimising repression while respecting Nigerien sovereignty.

Recommendations

In view of the conclusion of this thesis, the following recommendations are propounded;

- i. Implementing a more holistic strategy that prioritises dialogue, cooperation, and a firm commitment to peace, security, and democratic governance is imperative to address the Niger crisis comprehensively. This approach should involve engaging all relevant stakeholders and prioritising long-term stability over short-term gains.
- ii. Undertaking a thorough recalibration of the Economic Community of West African States' intervention strategies in Niger is necessary to overcome the current limitations and promote lasting stability in West Africa. This process should involve learning from past experiences, incorporating feedback from key stakeholders, and adapting approaches to meet the evolving challenges facing the region.

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