

THE 2023 MILITARY COUP IN NIGER: A BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the background of the military coup in Niger on July 26, 2023, which overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum. The fifth coup since the country's independence occurred amid a multidimensional crisis that had weakened the legitimacy of the civilian government. This research aims to explain the causal factors of the coup using Eric A. Nordlinger's analytical framework, which distinguishes between structural (long-term) factors and contextual (immediate trigger) factors. The method employed is qualitative descriptive, with data collected through library research. The findings reveal that the structural factors include Bazoum's delegitimization in the socio-political domain (legacy of Issoufou's patronage system and his minority Arab ethnic identity), the security domain (deteriorating terrorism threat in the Sahel and pro-Western foreign policy), and the economic domain (chronic poverty, inequality in natural resource management, and dependence on foreign aid). Meanwhile, the contextual factors consist of the accumulation of military dissatisfaction across these three domains, which was then directly triggered by the dismissal of General Salifou Modi from his position as Chief of Staff of the Army (April 1, 2023) and the planned dismissal of General Abdourahmane Tchiani from his position as Head of the Presidential Guard (July 24, 2023). This study concludes that the 2023 coup was the result of an interaction between long-term structural delegitimization and short-term contextual triggers, which together enabled military intervention.

Keywords: 2023 Niger coup; structural factors; contextual factors; Mohamed Bazoum; Abdourahmane Tchiani

INTRODUCTION

Niger, a landlocked country in the Sahel region of West Africa, has experienced recurring cycles of military coups since gaining independence from France on August 3, 1960. As of 2023, five successful coups have been recorded in 1974, 1996, 1999, 2010, and 2023 (Al Jazeera, 2023). In addition, several coup attempts have also occurred, particularly during the administration of Mahamadou Issoufou (2011-2021). This indicates that the military in Niger is not merely a state defense apparatus but also a political actor wielding significant influence over national power dynamics. Each coup has emerged when the civilian government experienced a multidimensional legitimacy

crisis, characterized by failures in managing the economy, maintaining political and security stability, and upholding constitutional governance.

The most recent coup, which took place on July 26, 2023, overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum, who had only been in office since April 2, 2021. This event surprised many observers because Niger had often been called “the last bastion of democracy in the Sahel region” and was a key strategic partner for Western countries, particularly France and the United States (US), in counterterrorism efforts (Demuyne & Böhm, 2023). During the 2011-2021 period, Issoufou successfully retained power despite four coup attempts (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). Yet within just two years of Bazoum’s presidency, the stability built over that decade collapsed. The fundamental research question guiding this study is: “What is the background of the 2023 military coup in Niger?”

Several previous studies have examined the 2023 Niger coup from various perspectives. Miles (2024) views the coup as part of a cycle of poverty and weak state institutions that render Niger vulnerable to military intervention. Bianchi & Sangaré (2023) analyze it as a clash between Bazoum’s civilian reformism and deeply rooted military conservatism. Meanwhile, Zambakari (2023) situates the event within the context of global geopolitics, the legacy of French colonialism, and the US War on Terror policy, which is seen as undermining Niger’s sovereignty. McCullough & Sandor (2023) highlight differences in counterinsurgency strategies between the civilian government and the military, including the junta’s exploitation of anti-French sentiment to gain political support and public legitimacy.

However, these studies tend to remain divided between those emphasizing long-term structural factors and those focusing on short-term contextual factors. This research fills that gap by integrating both approaches simultaneously to obtain a more complete picture of the root causes of the coup, thereby explaining how structural and contextual factors interact to create conditions that enable military intervention.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs the theoretical framework of Eric A. Nordlinger (1994) regarding the causes of military intervention in politics. A coup is defined as military action to seize power or an attempt to replace and take control of an incumbent regime with a new one. Nordlinger identifies four main factors that drive the military to carry out a coup.

First, civilian government failure refers to the inability of the government to perform the basic functions of the state, particularly maintaining political stability and national security, thereby creating a perception that the government is no longer capable of managing the state and increasing the likelihood of military intervention. In Niger, this condition was reflected in the Bazoum administration, which was perceived as failing to address security threats in the Sahel region. Since the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in Libya in 2011 and the Mali crisis in 2012, jihadist groups have expanded their influence into Niger. Meanwhile, since 2015, Niger has faced heightened security conflicts due to intensified attacks and the expansion of armed groups, especially in difficult-to-control border areas. The government’s failure to strengthen national defense led to increased dependence on foreign troops, which in turn generated a perception that

the government prioritized the interests of external partners over the protection of its own people, further weakening the legitimacy of the civilian government.

Second, economic decline refers to the government's failure to maintain economic stability and improve public welfare, thereby triggering social dissatisfaction and political pressure on the civilian government. In Niger, this problem is structural and long-standing, characterized by high poverty rates, dependence on foreign aid, and a subsistence agricultural economy vulnerable to climate change. Protracted economic crisis has given rise to various issues such as unemployment, corruption, and social inequality. Meanwhile, the management of natural resources, particularly uranium, has created a perception that the economic benefits are enjoyed more by foreign actors than by local communities. These conditions amplify public dissatisfaction while reinforcing the view within the military that the civilian government has failed to manage the economy effectively.

Third, declining legitimacy of civilian government refers to the weakening level of public acceptance and trust in the government as a legitimate authority. Declining legitimacy is generally a consequence of the government's failure to address security, economic, and governance issues, thereby reducing political and social support and lowering the barriers to military intervention. In Niger, the growing threat from armed groups in the Sahel region prompted the Bazoum administration to strengthen security cooperation with Western countries, particularly France and the US. However, this policy generated resistance from some military elites and members of the public who viewed dependence on foreign powers as a weakening of national sovereignty. Amid rising anti-Western sentiment in the Sahel region, this condition further undermined the legitimacy of the Bazoum administration, reflected in the phenomenon of democratic fatigue and high public support for military intervention.

Fourth, unconstitutional action refers to violations of the basic rules of the state that are used as a normative basis to justify military intervention in politics. In practice, this factor does not always refer to an actual constitutional violation but can also be a perception or narrative constructed by political actors to strengthen the legitimacy of the coup. In Niger, the Bazoum administration was not proven to have formally committed constitutional violations. However, several of its policies were perceived by military circles as threatening the balance of power, particularly the dismissal of General Salifou Modi from his position as Chief of Staff of the Army (April 1, 2023), and the planned dismissal of General Abdourahmane Tchiani from his position as Head of the Presidential Guard (July 24, 2023). This perception was then used as a justification by the military to seize power, even though it was not based on an explicit constitutional violation.

Based on their temporal characteristics, this study classifies the four factors into two categories. Structural (long-term) factors include civilian government failure, economic decline, and declining legitimacy of civilian government. These structural factors manifest in the form of Bazoum's delegitimization across three domains: socio-political delegitimization (legacy of Issoufou's patronage system and his minority Arab ethnic identity), security delegitimization (deteriorating terrorism threat in the Sahel and pro-Western foreign policy), and economic delegitimization (chronic poverty, inequality in natural resource management, and dependence on foreign aid). Meanwhile, contextual (immediate trigger) factors include unconstitutional action, along with the

accumulation of military dissatisfaction across these three domains that developed during Bazoum's administration, as well as two controversial decisions that triggered a preemptive response: the dismissal of General Salifou Modi and the planned dismissal of General Abdourahmane Tchiani.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to provide an in-depth account of the factors behind the 2023 military coup in Niger. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the socio-political, security, and economic dynamics surrounding the coup, rather than on statistical measurement.

Data collection was conducted through library research utilizing secondary data sources obtained both online and in print. These sources consist of: (1) scholarly journal articles from various reputable publishers such as Brill, Cairn, University of California Press, Oxford University Press, Springer Nature, etc.; (2) academic books by Eric A. Nordlinger (*Soldiers in Politics*) and Samuel P. Huntington (*Political Order in Changing Societies*); (3) reports from international institutions and think tanks, including Global Terrorism Index from Institute for Economics and Peace, Brookings Institution, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, International Crisis Group, etc.; (4) news articles from credible media outlets, including Al Jazeera, Reuters, BBC News, Voice of America, etc.; (5) websites and statistical data portals such as Macrotrends (GDP growth and population data for Niger), the World Bank (ODA data), the U.S. Department of State (terrorism reports), etc.; and (6) official documents and public statements, including press releases from ORTN Télé Sahel (Niger's national television), statements from the military junta particularly General Abdourahmane Tchiani, statements from French President Emmanuel Macron, statements from Russian representative Dmitry Polyansky at the UN Security Council, and statements from academics regarding the dynamics of the Niger coup.

Data analysis was performed using qualitative descriptive techniques through the stages of data reduction (filtering relevant information), data display (organizing findings into categories of structural factors and contextual factors based on Nordlinger's framework), and conclusion drawing (explaining the relationships among the causal factors of the coup). The scope of the study covers the period 2021-2023, starting from the inauguration of President Mohamed Bazoum on April 2, 2021, until the coup on July 26, 2023.

DISCUSSION

The Position of the Military in Nigerien Politics during the Mohamed Bazoum Era

Throughout its history since independence in 1960, Niger has experienced recurring cycles between fragile civilian governments and direct military intervention. During periods of civilian rule, the military formally remains under the authority of the president as commander-in-chief (Global Security, 2021). In practice, however, the military has always maintained its position as a determining actor that can intervene at any time when the interests of the military institution are perceived as threatened or when prolonged political deadlock occurs. This phenomenon is known in the political literature as praetorianism. According to Samuel P. Huntington (1968), praetorian

societies are characterized by weak political institutions and the absence of a civilian authority capable of legitimately mediating conflicts. He also emphasizes that military intervention is caused more by the weakness of civilian political institutions than by the internal character of the military itself.

In Huntington's (1968) typology, Niger under Bazoum can be categorized as a radical praetorian society, a condition in which political participation, including from the military and intellectuals, expands without being balanced by strong political institutions. As a result, political demands are more often channeled through direct action and military intervention, thereby creating political instability. This condition was evident during the Bazoum era, as the government faced threats from jihadist groups, structural poverty, and tense civil-military relations. Bazoum's efforts to strengthen civilian control through military restructuring and cooperation with the West actually generated distrust within the military, which felt its institutional interests were threatened. This tension eventually culminated in a coup led by Abdourahmane Tchiani, overthrowing Bazoum. Huntington (1968) refers to this type of intervention as a veto coup, that is, a military coup against a government perceived as threatening the interests of the military corps.

Structural Factors: Delegitimization of Mohamed Bazoum

Socio-Political Delegitimization

Bazoum's socio-political legitimacy was fragile from the outset due to two main factors: the legacy of Issoufou's patronage system and his ethnic identity as an Arab minority. Issoufou built a deeply entrenched patronage system within the military and bureaucracy, in which the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS) monopolized access to state resources (Bianchi & Sangaré, 2023). One of the main instruments in this mechanism was the Presidential Guard under the command of General Abdourahmane Tchiani. This elite unit was developed with advanced weaponry and strong personal loyalty to Issoufou, rather than to the state or the sitting president (Africa Defense Forum, 2023). Consequently, when Bazoum assumed power in April 2021, he inherited a security apparatus more loyal to Issoufou and Tchiani than to himself (Felbab-Brown, 2023).

Furthermore, Bazoum's ethnic identity as the first president from the minority Arab Ouled Slimane group (approximately 0.4% of the total population) became a source of veiled delegitimization within the military, which is dominated by the Hausa (53.1%) and Zarma (21.2%) ethnic groups (Adebowale, 2023; Minority Rights Group, n.d.). This background created a perception of "alienation" among both society and the military elite. This vulnerability had actually been evident even before Bazoum officially took office. On March 31, 2021, just two days before his inauguration, a coup attempt occurred that was successfully foiled by Tchiani and the presidential guard (Africa Defense Forum, 2023). That coup attempt reflected the discomfort of some officers with Bazoum's leadership.

Olayinka Ajala, an academic at Leeds Beckett University, stated that ethnic divisions are a major issue within Niger's military structure (Africa Defense Forum, 2023). In line with this view, Edgar Githua, an academic at the United States International University-Africa, stated that a president from a minority group in their constituency "feels as if they are being besieged", because other ethnic groups controlling

the government question the legitimacy of their leadership (Africa Defense Forum, 2023). One informant in the study by Bianchi & Sangaré (2023) stated, “Bazoum's identity made it difficult for him to be president and also facilitated his fall; if he had come from the Hausa or Zarma ethnic group, Tchiani would have found it harder to unite the military and mobilize the masses in Niamey”.

Security Delegitimization

Bazoum's security legitimacy was fragile from the outset due to two main factors: the legacy of a protracted security crisis in the Sahel region, which actually worsened during his administration, and a foreign policy perceived as overly aligned with Western interests. Ziso & Hamandishe (2024) and Ponomarev & Ulanova (2023) affirm that the security crisis in Niger resulted from an accumulation of structural factors that had been developing since the early 2010s. The collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011 triggered a proliferation of weapons into the Sahel region. Transnational jihadist groups such as AQIM, JNIM, and ISGS exploited the power vacuum and weak state control in border areas to expand their influence. The political and security crisis in Mali in 2012 was another important turning point, creating a power vacuum that was subsequently exploited by various armed groups (European Parliament, 2012). Since 2015, Niger has faced heightened security conflicts due to intensified attacks and the expansion of armed groups (West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism, 2023).

During Bazoum's administration, Niger's security situation showed a worsening trend. Table 1 presents the development in the number of attacks and fatalities due to terrorism during the 2021-2023 period.

Table 1. Data on Terrorism Attacks and Fatalities in Niger, 2021-2023

Year	Number of Attacks	Number of Fatalities	Niger's Rank
2021	74	588	8 th
2022	54	198	10 th
2023	61	468	10 th

Institute for Economics and Peace (2022, 2023, 2024)

Table 1 shows that Niger faced a significant terrorism threat during the 2021-2023 period. The impact of terrorism reached unprecedented levels during Bazoum's administration. Compared to the previous period (2015-2020), Niger's rank was relatively lower, at 19th, 19th, 18th, 19th, 14th, and 12th respectively (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2025). Similar findings are also evident in data released by the U.S. Department of State (n.d.), although differences in recorded incident numbers exist. That data shows that the number of terrorist attacks in Niger increased significantly during the same period, from 74 attacks in 2021 to 180 attacks in 2022, then surged sharply to 299 attacks in 2023.

In addition to the worsening security threat, Bazoum's foreign policy, perceived as overly aligned with Western interests, further reinforced the perception that he favored foreign interests over national sovereignty. From the beginning of his administration, Bazoum was known as a close ally of France and the US (Miles, 2024; Zambakari, 2023). His government facilitated the operation of two U.S. military bases in Niamey and Agadez, and authorized the redeployment of approximately 1,500 French military personnel to Niger in 2022 to continue counterterrorism operations following

the withdrawal of French forces from Mali (McCullough & Sandor, 2023). This policy was adopted amid rising anti-French sentiment in the Sahel region, fueled by the failure of French military operations to address the jihadist threat for over a decade, as well as the legacy of colonial history that still leaves deep wounds among local populations (Ponomarev & Ulanova, 2023; Sowale, 2024).

Historically, pro-Western policy was not a new phenomenon in Niger. Bazoum's predecessor, Issoufou, also maintained close ties with the West. However, Issoufou was able to leverage this cooperation to ease the burden of the state's security budget without losing control over his political image at home (Drechsel, 2023). Resistance to pro-Western policy increased sharply during the Bazoum era, as the wave of anti-French sentiment reached its peak following the withdrawal of French forces from Mali (2022) and Burkina Faso (2023) (Gain, 2023). Amid regional pressure, Bazoum authorized the redeployment of French troops expelled from neighboring countries. This action was seen as swimming against the tide and reinforced the perception that he was a foreign "puppet" (Mbulle-Nziege & Cheeseman, 2023). This perception was further strengthened when French President Emmanuel Macron stated that he communicated with Bazoum every day after the coup (Reuters, 2023). Although this statement was intended as a show of support, it actually reinforced Bazoum's image as a leader overly dependent on foreign direction.

Economic Delegitimization

Bazoum's economic legitimacy was also fragile due to three main factors: chronic structural poverty, inequality in natural resource management accompanied by corruption and patronage practices, and high dependence on foreign aid that fueled anti-Western sentiment. Niger ranks as the 5th poorest country in the world, with approximately 45.3% of its population living below the poverty line (Concern Worldwide US, 2025). As a landlocked country in the Sahel region, more than 80% of its territory is Sahara Desert, and only about 12% of the land is considered arable (Tinguiri, 1992). Reliance on subsistence agriculture makes the economy highly vulnerable to climate change. Niger's economic growth during the 1961-2023 period averaged only 2.98% per year (Macrotrends, n.d.), while population growth averaged 3.18% per year (Macrotrends, n.d.). This comparison shows that the rate of economic expansion has been unable to keep pace with population growth, resulting in stagnant per capita income and increasing pressure on employment and public services.

One of the deepest sources of economic disappointment is the gap between Niger's natural resource wealth and the welfare of its people. Since 1971, the French nuclear company Orano (formerly Areva) has been mining uranium in the Arlit region of the Sahara. Nigerien uranium supplies approximately 20% of the fuel for France's nuclear power plants, which generate about 70% of the country's electricity needs, yet the economic benefits received by the people of Niger are very small (Miles, 2024). Criticism over several decades has continuously questioned the extent to which this wealth truly benefits the people of Niger, and this sentiment has become a source of anger toward the French presence in Niger. Zambakari (2023) adds that the exploitation of resources by French companies continued through various post-independence agreements and partnerships, thus forming an asymmetrical relationship pattern between Niger and France.

Economic conditions during the Bazoum era were also influenced by deeply entrenched corruption and patronage practices within the governance system. In the oil sector, the state-owned company SONIDEP became a major source of political funding for the ruling party, financing a cross-party patronage network. A representative of a civil society organization called it an “open secret” that SONIDEP has always been a source of funding for all political parties (Cessac, 2023). Bianchi & Sangaré (2023) also noted that corruption extended into the military, with embezzlement of approximately 18.5 million euros by senior military officials and those close to power through problematic contracts, the delivery of defective weapons, and overbilling in arms procurement between 2017 and 2019. Meanwhile, in northern Niger, several military officers loyal to Issoufou also derived significant profits from smuggling activities, including human smuggling (McCullough & Sandor, 2023).

Niger's high dependence on foreign aid also constituted a structural economic problem that weakened the position of the Bazoum administration while fueling anti-Western sentiment that was later exploited by coup leaders. Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Niger reached 1.85 billion US dollars in 2021 and increased to 2.16 billion US dollars in 2022 (World Bank, n.d.). This dependence is also reflected in the country's fiscal structure, where foreign aid accounts for approximately 25% of total state expenditure (Sowale, 2024). The European Union allocated 503 million euros (approximately 554 million US dollars) for the 2021-2024 period, while France, as a major bilateral donor, contributed around 120 million euros (approximately 130 million US dollars) in 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2023). On the other hand, about half of Niger's population still lives below the poverty line with an income of less than 2.15 US dollars per day (VOA, 2023). Consequently, public dissatisfaction with economic dependence on the West grew stronger, especially as the people's economic reality failed to improve.

The West's suspension of aid and cooperation immediately after the coup demonstrates that foreign aid is inseparable from political dimensions. In a UN Security Council session, Russian Deputy Representative Dmitry Polyansky stated that “aid from Western countries is not selfless and is always accompanied by political prerequisites”. He added that several African countries have direct experience with conditional aid from the West, where “they lost their sovereignty and political independence as a result of receiving it” (Sputnik Africa, 2023). In line with this, Châtelot (2026) stated that foreign aid is used as an instrument to impose democratic standards and human rights through a mechanism known as “democratic conditionality”.

Contextual Factors: Immediate Triggers

Military Dissatisfaction

During his two years in office (2021-2023), Bazoum adopted a number of policies that actually provoked dissatisfaction within the military across three domains.

In the socio-political domain, Bazoum's efforts to combat corruption and reform governance threatened the patronage network that had been built during the Issoufou era. He detained approximately 30 senior officials on suspicion of embezzlement, including Communications Minister Mahamadou Zada, who was accused of causing the state losses of three billion CFA francs (approximately 4.8 million US dollars) (Al Jazeera, 2022). An investigation in the defense sector uncovered an arms procurement scandal involving losses of up to 76 billion CFA francs (approximately 137 million US

dollars), including alleged price inflation of weapons contracts from Russia, Ukraine, and China (Anderson et al., 2020). Furthermore, Bazoum's policy of integrating community militias was also seen as unbalanced, as the Tuareg militia in Tillia was integrated earlier and in larger numbers (600 people) compared to the Zarma militia in Banibangou (only 105 people) (McCullough & Sandor, 2023).

In the security domain, differing visions between Bazoum and the military regarding counterinsurgency strategy became a source of dissatisfaction. Bazoum's approach, which emphasized dialogue with jihadist groups and prisoner releases, contradicted the experiences and values of most frontline officers (McCullough & Sandor, 2023). This reconciliation strategy combined limited security operations, negotiations, and an "extended hand" offer to armed group members willing to lay down their weapons (Al Arabiya, 2023; RFI, 2023). A junior army officer rejected Bazoum's dialogue strategy, stating, "the terrorists are killing our people and the local population; talking to them cannot happen" (McCullough & Sandor, 2023). Tchiani explicitly stated that "the security approach applied so far has not succeeded in guaranteeing the security of our country; we can no longer continue with the same approach that has been proposed so far" (Times News, 2023).

In the economic domain, Bazoum's anti-corruption program deepened dissatisfaction among senior officers because it threatened their access to state resources. Officers who had long enjoyed profits from problematic arms procurement contracts and smuggling activities in the northern region began to lose their illicit sources of income. Bazoum also removed SONIDEP's Director General, Alio Touné, who was close to Issoufou, in November 2021, and planned the establishment of a new company, PetroNiger, scheduled for approval on July 27, 2023, the day after the coup (Maliweb, 2023). These measures further increased resistance from military circles. In his speech, Tchiani explicitly mentioned "poor economic and social governance" as one of the reasons for the takeover, alongside the security crisis (Times News, 2023). The junta's promise to "free Niger from foreign domination" easily gained public support, especially from communities that had long experienced economic dependence without meaningful improvement in welfare (Sowale, 2024; Miles, 2024). Amid this dissatisfaction, the military framed the coup as resistance to economic and political "neocolonialism" (McCullough & Sandor, 2023).

Dismissal of General Salifou Modi

One of the triggers that worsened tensions between Bazoum and the military was the dismissal of General Salifou Modi from his position as Chief of Staff of the Army, who was subsequently replaced by General Abdou Sidikou Issa on April 1, 2023 (Jeune Afrique, 2023). Previously, in March 2023, Bazoum had also reshuffled the highest ranks of state institutions by replacing the Chief of General Staff and the Gendarmerie, and signed a decree dismissing six generals (International Crisis Group, 2023). Modi was a senior military officer who had served as Niger's military attaché in Germany (Al Jazeera, 2020) before being appointed as Niger's Chief of Staff of the Army on January 13, 2020, by President Issoufou (Reuters, 2020). He was known as an Issoufou loyalist respected within military circles.

General Salifou Modi's visit to Mali on March 9, 2023, marked the beginning of the chain of events that led to his dismissal. During a meeting with the leader of the Malian junta, General Assimi Goïta, he discussed cross-border cooperation in combating

jihadist groups. However, the visit was viewed with suspicion by Bazoum, especially because Modi subsequently made harsh public statements against the French military presence in the Sahel. He asserted that “Africans must solve their own problems” (Nchanji, 2023). This statement triggered tensions with Bazoum’s pro-Western foreign policy orientation and raised concerns among diplomatic circles, including the French government. In response, France sent its military general to dialogue with Bazoum, which ultimately led to Modi’s dismissal (Nchanji, 2023).

The dismissal was viewed by many senior officers as a public humiliation of the military’s diplomatic efforts and a threat to the established balance of power (McCullough & Sandor, 2023). The act of removing a high-ranking, active, and influential officer such as the Chief of Staff of the Army was seen as reckless and increased military dissatisfaction with the Bazoum administration (Adebajo, 2023). This situation then prompted Modi to join the coup movement that overthrew Bazoum on July 26, 2023 (Nchanji, 2023). Immediately after the coup, he was appointed Vice President of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP), making him the second-in-command under General Abdourahmane Tchiani (Bonny, 2023). On August 10, 2023, he was also appointed Minister of Defense (Ige, 2023).

Planned Dismissal of General Abdourahmane Tchiani

The peak of the conflict escalation occurred when Bazoum planned to remove General Abdourahmane Tchiani from his position as Head of the Presidential Guard. Tchiani had led Niger’s Presidential Guard since 2011 under President Issoufou. He was a close ally of Issoufou and was promoted to general in 2018 (Zuber, 2025). Tchiani had extensive international experience, including assignments in international peacekeeping missions in Côte d’Ivoire, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He had also served in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) established by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria to combat terrorist organizations (Zuber, 2025).

Tensions between Bazoum and Tchiani had been rooted since the beginning of Bazoum’s administration. Although Bazoum initially retained Tchiani in his position, relations between the two were never harmonious (Felbab-Brown, 2023). On July 24, 2023, two days before the coup, Bazoum planned to remove Tchiani from his post during a cabinet meeting (VOA, 2023), while also cutting the budget of the presidential guard unit that Tchiani led (Felbab-Brown, 2023). Abdourahmane Idrissa, an academic and political scientist at The Africa Institute, assessed that Bazoum’s attempt to remove Tchiani was the main trigger of the crisis (Thurston, 2023). In line with this, Olayinka Ajala, an academic at Leeds Beckett University, explained that Tchiani took preemptive action and overthrew the president before the change could occur (Cartey, 2023). Meanwhile, Adekeye Adebajo, an academic and researcher at the University of Pretoria, assessed that Tchiani exploited the dissatisfaction that had accumulated within the military, including the dismissal of General Salifou Modi, and mobilized support by highlighting grievances over the surge in jihadist attacks on the Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso border and the rising cost of living (Adebajo, 2023).

On the morning of July 26, 2023, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, along with approximately 350 members of his forces, took President Mohamed Bazoum hostage at the presidential palace in Niamey (McCullough & Sandor, 2023). That evening, senior officers from the army, special forces, air force, military engineers, police, and the fire and rescue service appeared on national television to announce the coup and the

formation of the CNSP. At 11:30 PM local time, Major Amadou Abdramane, the CNSP spokesperson, announced via the state television channel ORTN Télé Sahel that the group had overthrown Bazoum and ended the democratically elected government (Davis, 2023). In his statement, he also announced the suspension of the constitution, the closure of Niger's air and land borders, and the imposition of a curfew from 11:00 PM to 5:00 AM local time.

The Causal Link between Structural and Contextual Factors as Coup Triggers

The structural and contextual factors do not stand alone as causes of the coup; rather, they are interconnected in a causal chain. Bazoum's delegitimization in the socio-political, security, and economic domains created conditions of vulnerability and latent dissatisfaction within the military and society for many years. Without these structural vulnerabilities, the dismissal of Modi and the planned dismissal of Tchiani might not have triggered a coup. Conversely, without the contextual triggers, structural dissatisfaction might have remained latent without ever erupting into overt action. However, their interaction created the momentum for the coup: long-term vulnerabilities were activated by short-term events perceived as a direct threat to the interests of the officer corps.

Specifically, socio-political delegitimization (Issoufou's patronage and minority ethnicity) had created dual loyalties within the military. Dissatisfaction with this patronage system deepened further when Bazoum distanced himself from Issoufou and launched reformist policies. The dismissal of Modi, a respected Issoufou loyalist, served as a trigger that activated the long-simmering socio-political dissatisfaction and transformed it into solidarity of resistance among marginalized officers. Similarly, security delegitimization (worsening terrorism and pro-Western policy) created a rift between the government and the military. The planned dismissal of Tchiani, Head of the Presidential Guard and symbol of the regime's last line of defense, was perceived as a direct threat, prompting Tchiani to exploit security dissatisfaction to build a coalition of support. Meanwhile, economic delegitimization (poverty, inequality, and dependence) generated widespread anti-Western sentiment. The threat to officers' illicit income caused by Bazoum's anti-corruption program was then linked by the junta to the narrative of "liberation from French neocolonialism", thereby granting the coup additional legitimacy from a populace long accustomed to economic inequality.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the 2023 military coup in Niger resulted from the interaction between long-term structural factors and contextual factors as immediate triggers. The structural factors, namely Bazoum's delegitimization across three dimensions, are socio-political (legacy of Mahamadou Issoufou's patronage system and minority Arab ethnic identity), security (deteriorating terrorism in the Sahel and pro-Western policy), and economic (chronic poverty, resource inequality, and dependence on foreign aid). These created systemic vulnerabilities that weakened the legitimacy of the civilian government. The contextual factors include the accumulation of military dissatisfaction across these three domains as well as two immediate triggers: the dismissal of General Salifou Modi on April 1, 2023, and the planned dismissal of General

Abdourahmane Tchiani on July 24, 2023. Tchiani then responded with a preemptive action on July 26, 2023, overthrowing Bazoum.

This study affirms that the coup cannot be explained by any single factor alone. Structural delegitimization created vulnerabilities, while contextual triggers, especially the threat to the interests of the officer corps, acted as a catalyst that transformed dissatisfaction into overt action. The implication is that procedural democratic transition is insufficient without meaningful civil-military relations reform. Suggestions for future research include the following: (1) a study on post-coup junta consolidation and the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES); (2) research on the effectiveness of ECOWAS sanctions and Niger's shifting alliance toward Russia; (3) comparative studies with other Sahel countries to identify factors of coup resistance; and (4) an analysis of the role of non-state actors in the dynamics of support for or opposition to coups. Without fundamental reform, Niger and the Sahel region risk remaining trapped in a recurring cycle of political instability.

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