

# WestAfrica

## INSIGHT



# POLLS IN PERIL?

West Africa's 2020 elections



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

# WestAfrica

## INSIGHT

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## EDITORIAL

# This Issue: Polls in Peril?

## West Africa's 2020 elections

In the last quarter of 2020, five of the 15 Economic Community of West African States member countries are facing important elections. In October, presidential elections will take place in Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire (October), with general elections to follow in Burkina Faso (November), Ghana and Niger (both December).

This edition of West Africa Insights starts with a regional overview of the state of democracy in West Africa by Idayat Hassan. She underscores the threats posed by constitutional and military coups and the need for renewed regional resolve to uphold democratic values and ensure that development and democracy go hand in hand. Four further pieces provide in-depth analysis on the upcoming elections in the region.

Jessica Moody unpacks the threats that could see violence be a key feature of Cote D'Ivoire's 31 October election, where President Ouattara is standing for a controversial third term. In Burkina Faso, violence is also threatening to impact on

the November poll, with voter registration having not taken place in parts of the country where insecurity is rife. Wendyam Lankoandé reflects on how a flawed electoral process could further erode trust in the country's political institutions.

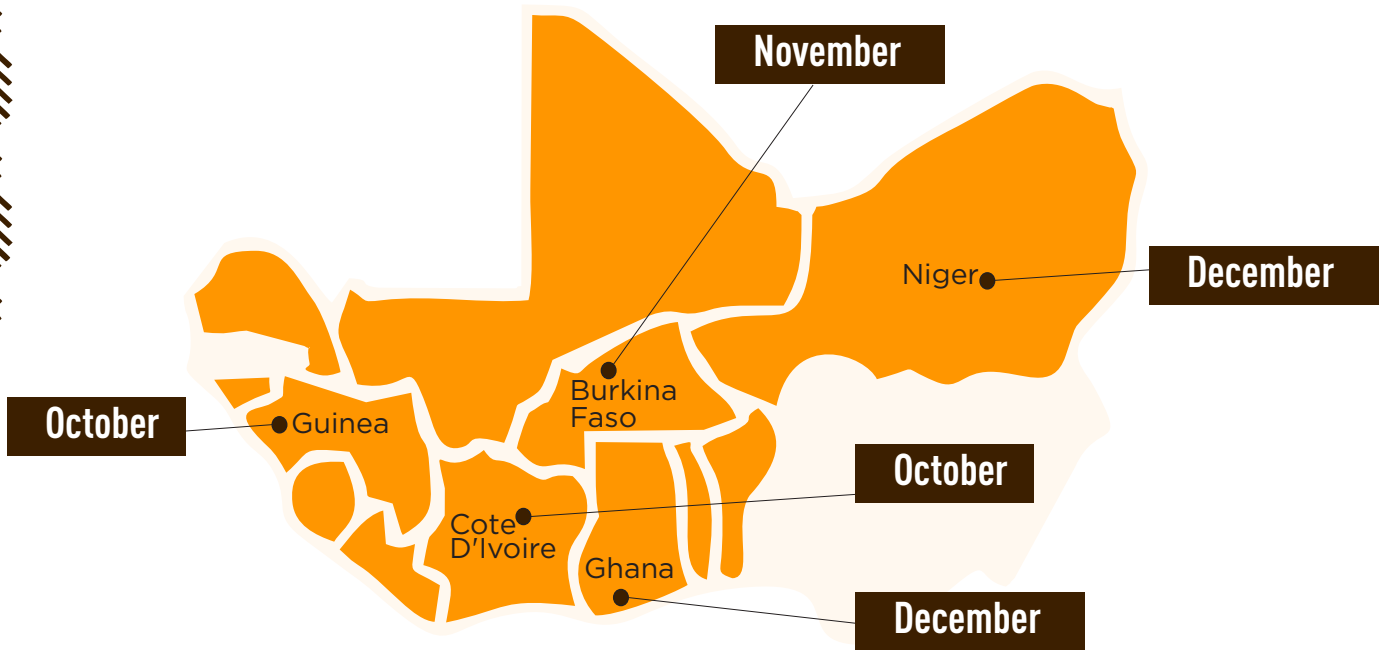
In Ghana, George-Bob Milliar discusses the importance of grassroot political party structures for political success and explains why both formal and informal mechanisms can be key to delivering desired electoral outcomes.

Finally in Niger, Hailmatou Hima analyses some of the key issues that will shape an election that will mark the first peaceful transfer of power in the country, as President Issoufou steps down having served his second, and final, term in office.

Idayat Hassan  
Director  
CDD West Africa

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## STAYING POWER: Democracy in West Africa

In the last quarter of 2020, five of the 15 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member countries are facing important elections. Presidential elections will take place in Guinea and Cote D'Ivoire (October), Burkina Faso (November), and Niger and Ghana (December). Periodic elections in the last decade have become a norm rather than an exception, in a region previously adjudged as the most coup-prone in the world. But with Alpha Condé and Alassane Ouattara seeking constitutionally debated third-terms in October, concerns about the ability of Burkina Faso to hold credible polls amidst insecurity and the recent coup d'état in Mali, there are concerns that West Africa's democratic progress is in danger of reversing.

## Coups: Constitutional and military

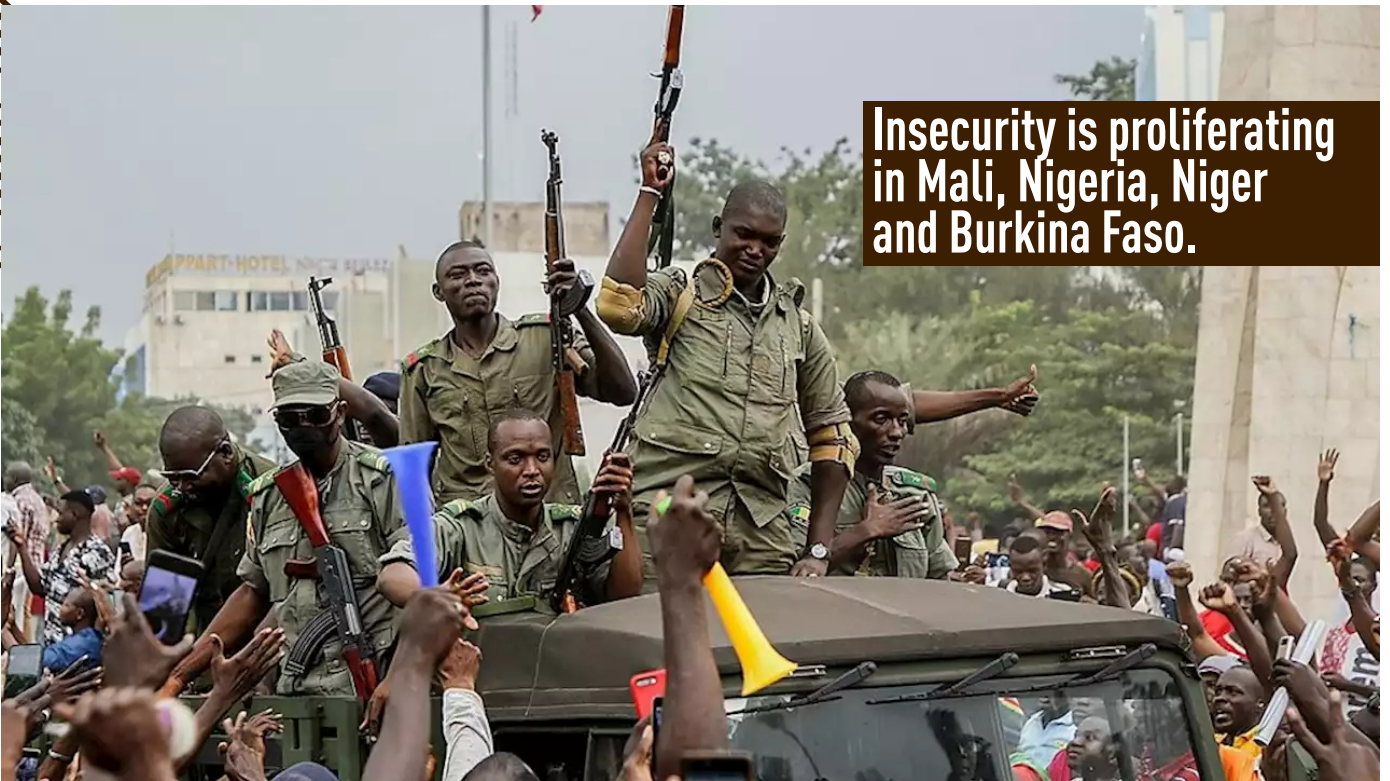
In September 2020, The Gambia's parliament voted to reject a new constitution - developed through extensive public participation - with the application of when a two-term limit should start a major point of disagreement. President Barrow believes that his first term, which expires next year, should not count. According to a survey by Afrobarometer, 87% of citizens wanted a new constitution that limited the president to two

five-year terms.

In the last five years several West African countries have initiated constitutional review processes that have discussed term-limits. Whilst the two-term limit has largely been upheld in the basic laws, incumbents have moved to ensure that new constitutions are accompanied by a resetting of the term-limit clock. This is how Faure Gnassingbe justified his 'third' term in Togo, and how both Ouattara and Condé continue to justify their candidacies in Cote D'Ivoire and Guinea. But it has not always worked. Efforts to amend term limits to allow President Compaoré to run again in Burkina Faso, sparked popular protests that brought his 27-year rule to an end in 2014.

Military coups are a less common occurrence in the region than they once were, but the army led takeover of government in Mali in August 2020, not the first in the last decade, was a stark reminder that they remain a threat to the region's nascent democracy. Popular support for the putschists on the streets on Bamako in the immediate aftermath of the removal of President Keita were a reminder that for some citizens, democracy has not brought the development gains they expected. Even though the military has promised an elongated transition back to democracy - a promise they delivered after Mali's last military coup in 2012 - and announced a new transition president, these democratic ruptures make the building of credible institutions more difficult.





## Threats to democracy

Corruption remains rife in the region. A 2019 Afrobarometer survey that asked citizens whether they have paid a bribe to access a basic service, found that across 16 West African countries, 31% of citizens had done so. Across the continent, the survey found that 55% of citizens believed that corruption had increased in the previous year. Instead of the rule of law being a constraint on the political behaviour of political office holders, the "rule by law" pervades with governments above the law or selectively implementing it, often based on political gain.

Insecurity is proliferating in Mali, Nigeria, Niger and Burkina Faso. In a bid to instil law and order, governments have resorted to heavy-handed tactics that increase the risk of ordinary citizens being caught up in the violence or the response. These spill over into election processes which are becoming more militarised. Non-state armed groups, like the Dozo and Koglweogo in Burkina Faso, along with the 'Azorka Boys' and 'Bolga Bull Dogs' in Ghana – local vigilante groups loyal to leading political parties – are an increasingly important part of election machinery.



Civic space is also constricting in the region. In 2019, at least 18 journalists were arrested according to the Commission for the Protection of Journalists in Nigeria. Protests have been violently dealt with in Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire and Niger in recent months. The wave of arbitrary arrests of political activists and journalists, and the crackdown on peaceful protests, has reached alarming levels.

Efforts to exclude political opponents by making elections even mostly costly endeavors are also reducing the space for new voices to emerge. In Cote D'Ivoire, electoral reforms now mean that candidates must canvass signatures from at least 1% of the electorate in 17 of the country's regions to stand. In 2018, Benin increased the fee to stand as a presidential candidate to CFA 250 million (\$450,000); a 1,500% increase. Contestants for the 2021 presidential election are likely to be few and far between as a result.



## Renewed regional resolve

ECOWAS must do more to ensure the maximum two terms mandate is fixed into her supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance. The protocol was previously thwarted by opposition from now-ousted long-time ruler of The Gambia, Yahya Jammeh and President Gnassingbe of Togo. In the interim it can still do more to enforce adherence to the principle even if it is not enshrined in protocol.

Efforts to ensure that the results of The Gambia's 2016 election were respected showed a potential role for the regional body, but its inaction in countries like Togo and Guinea, in the last year, have raised concerns that it is not applying the pressure needed to prevent regional backsliding on democracy. Its failed attempts to negotiate between opposing parties in Mali prior to the coup, was a further blow to its regional credibility.

Rather than having a regional body that is working to uphold key democratic values, ageing leaders appear to be learning from one and other about how they can prolong their time in office. This is a concern, and one that should be shared by good governance and democracy activists across the region. But, as ever, there are reasons for optimism.

In December, Niger is set to see a peaceful transfer of power for the first time, with President Issoufou giving way after serving his second term in office. What is clear is that the next few months will be key for democracy in the region and can shape the narrative about elections to come in 2021.

*Idayat Hassan is Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development*

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## Familiar faces and threats: Côte d'Ivoire's contentious October election

There is a sense of déjà vu to Ivoirian politics. The forthcoming 31 October presidential election will be a quasi-re-run of the 2010 election, which pitted then President Laurent Gbagbo of the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) against current President Alassane Ouattara of Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix, (RHDP) and Henri Konan Bédié of the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). Bédié and Ouattara will be the two main contenders in the 2020 vote, but Gbagbo, who had sought to stand, has been disallowed from doing so by the Constitutional Court. It declared on 14 September that his candidacy, along with 39 others, was not constitutionally viable on the basis that he has yet to serve a 20-year prison sentence for crimes he allegedly committed in Côte d'Ivoire.

The African Court of Human Rights has since ruled that he, as well as Guillaume Soro - another opposition candidate who has been excluded because of an outstanding prison sentence -

should be allowed to stand. However, Yamoussoukro insists these rulings are a violation of its sovereignty and they are unlikely to change the electoral landscape.

Gbagbo last contested in 2010 when, as the incumbent, he lost to Ouattara in a second-round run off. A result he refused to accept and a decision which triggered violence in the country that left 3,000 people dead and thousands more displaced. Peace was restored after UN and French troops, as well as Forces Nouvelles (FN) rebels, installed Ouattara in office. Gbagbo was later transferred to the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity. He was acquitted in 2019.

The security situation has improved considerably since 2010. Then, the vote was preceded by a nine-year civil war that divided the country in half between the north, which was ruled by the FN and the south, governed by Gbagbo. By contrast the 2020 election has been



preceded by determined, though not always successful, efforts at demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of combatants, as well as reconciliation drives, and, crucially, nine years of relative peace.

But just as the 2010 vote and subsequent violence took place against a backdrop of heightened political tensions and unease, so too will the 2020 poll occur amid elevated political and ethnic animosity. Indeed, many of the grievances that sparked the 2002-2011 conflict, which culminated in the post-electoral violence in 2010, including disagreements over land ownership and national identity, persist to this day.

## Entrenched divisions

Ouattara's presidency has seen sky-rocketing growth rates and huge infrastructure developments. It has received international plaudits for post-conflict peacebuilding efforts that have demobilised and disarmed nearly 70,000 ex-combatants. Yet many feel that much remains to be done. Ouattara's effort to provide justice for the crimes of the past has been woefully one-sided. Only those who fought for Gbagbo have been held to account, while many of those closest to him who are accused of war crimes have simply been promoted within the government and the armed forces. Equally, those who belong to the northern ethnic groups, in particular the Dioula, are seen as having been given well-paid permanent jobs in the government, while those who come from Guéré and Bédié ethnicities in the west of the country, where Gbagbo is from, have been marginalised.

The perception of "victor's justice" and political domination by the Dioula people within Cote d'Ivoire has been exacerbated by the increasing authoritarianism of the government, which has gradually become less and less liberal with respect to human rights and political freedoms. This situation has been epitomised by the increasing unexplained arrests of opposition



figures, particularly within Guillaume Soro's Generations et peuples solidaires (GPS) movement. Soro himself, the former leader of the FN and subsequently head of the national assembly, fled into exile after an arrest warrant was issued for him in December 2019 for allegedly plotting a coup against the government. The arrest of prominent civil society activists, such as Pulcheri Gbalet, who was detained in August after he called for demonstrations against Ouattara's third term, add to a sense of growing fracture within the country.



## Do as I say not as I do

President Ouattara declared in March 2020, after many ambiguous statements on the subject, that he would not stand for a third term, despite his belief that it would be legal for him to do so, and would instead pass power on to the younger generation. This declaration received considerable public acclaim from Ivoirians. The ruling RHDP subsequently announced its candidate would be then Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly. However, Ouattara's anointed successor died suddenly in July. With the support of the party and in what he has described as exceptional circumstances, Ouattara announced on 24 August that he would stand and that he was confident that the election would "take place in peace".

But Ouattara's decision to run for a constitutionally disputed third term is one of the things most likely to make the election violent. Ouattara and the RHDP claim that his candidacy is legitimate because a new constitution, which was introduced in 2016, effectively re-set the clock on term limits. Their interpretation is that Ouattara's current term in office is therefore his first, and standing in 2020, would not break Cote d'Ivoire's two-term limit. This tactic has been increasingly used by West African leaders despite popular opposition, in Guinea and nearby Togo, where constitutional changes were used to justify the reset of two-term limits.

Opposition parties in Cote d'Ivoire have called Ouattara's third term bid unconstitutional and have pledged to protest it. But Ouattara's candidacy is not just infuriating to the opposition because it is perceived to be a violation of the constitution, but also because it would pave the way for more years of what they see as encroaching authoritarianism that excludes their supporters from access to well paid jobs and development. The fear that he will remain in power for a further five years and perpetuate this politics of exclusion was behind clashes which broke out around Cote d'Ivoire in the wake of Ouattara's August announcement. Violence mostly centred in Abidjan, Gagnoa, Daukro, Divo and Bonoua left at least 15 people dead.



## Free and fair elections?

Ouattara's third term bid is just one area of contestation ahead of October's vote. Another relates to the transparency of the process. The institutions responsible for the oversight of the election are widely regarded as biased in favour of the ruling party. Despite extensive efforts to reform the electoral commission (CEI) and negotiations with the opposition to this end, the opposition continues to reject it on the grounds that it is comprised of too many representatives who are allied with the government. The African Court of Human Rights ruled in mid-July that the composition of the local electoral commissions, which collate and tally results that go to the national CEI, was almost entirely unfairly advantageous for the RHDP. The CEI has since said it plans to reform the local electoral commissions, though this seems unlikely to be effectively completed before the vote and may even foment more confusion.

There have also been complaints about the fact that Ivoirians must now pay for voter registration cards to be eligible to vote, and the difficulty some members of the opposition have had in acquiring these documents. Further, there are concerns that the head of the Constitutional Court, who will be particularly important if the result is contested, as in 2010, has been handpicked by Ouattara, and will therefore be malleable to his influence. These concerns were



brought into focus in September by the Court's decision to declare only four of the 44 presidential candidacies viable.

With so many problems associated with the electoral infrastructure, it is extremely probable that the opposition will contest the results of the vote, claiming that the poll has been rigged and potentially sparking violence, even if the election takes place in a relatively credible way. The propensity for the perceived absence of transparency to spark violence was indicated not only by the 2010-2011 vote, but during the 2018 local elections, in which the RHDP was widely accused of vote rigging and intimidation. Following those polls, violence broke out in Bondoukou, close to the border with Ghana, the seaside town of Grand-Bassam, the central town of Lakota and in several suburbs of Abidjan including Abobo and Port-Bouet. At least two people were reported to have died in this unrest.

## Talking up violence

Since those local elections in October 2018, political tensions have continued to mount, with increasingly inflammatory rhetoric used by politicians to stoke animosity between different ethnic groups. In late 2019, Bédié repeatedly conflated Malians and foreigners with members of the RHDP, reigniting debates over Ivorian citizenship which had flared in the 1990s and early 2000s. That rhetoric ultimately led to the policy of Ivoirité which dictated, among other things, that those with foreign-born parents were excluded from standing for the presidency.

That Bédié would choose to use such language in the lead up to the 2020 poll, is an indication that he intends, for political benefit, to fuel divisions between those Ivorians thought to be 'originally Ivorian' and those, typically from the north, who are often perceived as having foreign heritage. The PDCI has declared that Ouattara "cannot win" the 2020 election, while Bédié himself said in an interview with *Le Monde* in August that the election could result in a "civil war without precedent". Such statements are shared widely



by party activists across social media, making it almost certain that PDCI supporters will protest an outcome that does not see their candidate returned as the winner.

Supporters of Gbagbo's FPI also appear likely to resort to violence if the election does not unfurl as it hopes. Videos on social media created and propagated by FPI supporters, though not condoned by the party, call for Bété & Guéré communities to annihilate every living Dioula from Cote d'Ivoire. These video clips, which constitute hate speech, are an important reminder of the divisive backdrop, against which these elections will take place.

Violent repression is also part of the ruling RHDP's approach to politics. It was condemned by Amnesty International for shipping armed militia into anti-government protest sites to aggressively quell demonstrations in Yopougon, Abidjan, on 13 August. In the aftermath of Ouattara's declaration that he would stand for a third term, there were several reports in Abidjan that mini-buses full of pro-government youths armed with machetes were being used to put down protests. The use of these militias, which were a tactic used by the government in power during the 2002-2011 violence, has elevated anger and fear among the opposition.



## Who will win?

The 2020 poll is set to be the most unpredictable and contentious in recent Ivoirian history. Although Ouattara won the 2015 election with 84% of the vote, that election was uniquely straightforward for the president. Bedie, at the time a close ally of Ouattara, agreed to support him and called on his party to do the same. The opposition FPI, which split into two wings after Gbagbo fell from power, was weak and the more radical, much larger wing of the FPI boycotted the vote. In 2020, Ouattara can no longer call on the support of Bédié, whilst a revitalised FPI will present a much bigger test.

The biggest unknown is how solid the opposition alliance – which consists of Bédié, Soro, Gbagbo and several smaller parties – is. The Constitutional Court's September declaration means that neither Soro or Gbagbo are eligible to stand in the October vote. As a result, the opposition has largely coalesced around one of the few major candidates to be allowed to stand, Bédié.

So far, this alliance appears to be moderately cohesive, and even those like Pascal Affi N'Guessan, the leader of the more moderate wing of the FPI, and renowned for "playing nice" with President Ouattara, have pledged their support for the coalition. It has called for the dissolution of the electoral commission, the Constitutional Court and the withdrawal of Ouattara's candidacy. Bédié has stated that Ivoirians should launch a campaign of civil disobedience until these demands are met.

The strength of this alliance is in what it stands against. Many Ivoirians are fed up with the encroaching authoritarianism of Ouattara and are looking for a change of administration. However, its first public rally on 26 September was notable for the extremely low turnout, suggesting that voters might be less enthusiastic about the coalition than the politicians organising it.

On 15 October, Bédié & N'Guessan, publicly declared their intention to boycott the election despite the lacklustre results this had when used as a strategy by the radical wing of the FPI in 2015.

But even if an electoral alliance, comprising Ivoirians from the north, centre and west of the country, comes together it will still struggle to defeat Ouattara. When the president agreed to calls from his party to stand for a third term, after his plan to retire and leave the reigns to Gon Coulibaly fell through, he took great care to consider his chances of winning the election. It is unlikely he would have agreed to stand had he not thought the possibility of retaining power to be great. Not only does he have the electoral advantages of being the incumbent, including access to significant financial resources, but his party also remains the largest in parliament with 167 of 255 seats. He is a household name, having ruled the country for the past decade, and has a good reputation, particularly among wealthier Ivoirians, for the relative stability and economic growth that has accompanied his tenure.

Finally, if all else fails, Ouattara can utilise the electoral institutions that he has carefully cultivated in his favour. Although it seems unlikely that considerable electoral fraud will take place, not least because Ouattara is eager to keep France and other Western powers on side, there is certainly room for some manoeuvre on this front to ensure that he edges over the line. France, which praised Ouattara's plans to stand down from politics in March, has been silent on his decision to stand for a third term. But Paris is strongly in favour of continuity in Abidjan and a stable government it can do business with, something Ouattara epitomises. This is not least because Cote d'Ivoire is an extremely important ally in the fight against the proliferation of jihadist groups in the Sahel.



## A contested outcome

Should Ouattara win, as expected, opposition supporters will likely take to the streets in protest. Localised clashes would follow a pattern of political violence that has been a feature of the landscape since Ouattara's candidacy was confirmed in August. These may become more sustained in the immediate aftermath of the results being announced. But with the security balance entirely in favour of the government, these are unlikely to pose a serious threat to the status quo.

The military, after several mutinies in 2014 and 2017, have become more reliably in favour of the president. This has been particularly noticeable since Soro, who had previously commanded considerable power over the reintegrated FN in

the military, posing a salient threat to Ouattara's authority, went into exile at the end of 2019. Many of the former FN warlords who seemed to be more loyal to Soro have shifted incrementally in favour of Ouattara's government.

Opposition parties will likely make a legal challenge to the results of the poll, calling on the Constitutional Court to adjudicate. However, given the strong support Ouattara has within that institution it is highly unlikely that such a challenge would alter the results announced. With the president's grip on power much tighter now than it was even in the 2018 local elections, he looks set to remain at the helm as he enters his 80's.

*Jessica Moody is a PhD candidate at King's College London, focusing on post-conflict peacebuilding in Cote d'Ivoire.*

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## Burkina Faso set to test the limits of its democracy amid insecurity

On 22 November 2020, Burkina Faso will hold general elections. A date that has been reaffirmed several times by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), despite the serious, and ongoing, threat posed by insecurity. Six out of Burkina Faso's thirteen regions are still under a state of emergency with at least 22 of the 351 municipalities labelled as no-go zones.

There are serious concerns that the current security predicament will impact on the credibility and the transparency of the November vote. A segment of the political opposition, known as the Opposition non Affiliée (ONA), has argued that any voting which is not national in scope would violate the constitution. CENI was unable to undertake voter registration in the 22 no-go municipalities. In July 2020, the National Assembly proposed the cancellation of the legislative elections on the grounds of insecurity in the northern and eastern regions of the country.

But the ruling party, the Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès (MPP) maintains that the November vote will go ahead, not only to avoid an institutional vacuum but to provide the winner with the legitimacy to tackle the country's pressing security, development and governance challenges. However, Burkina Faso's current security predicament risks a flawed electoral process that could further erode trust in the country's political institutions.





## The slide to insecurity

When Roch Kaboré was elected in November 2015, Burkinabé hoped for tangible socio-economic dividends and the sound management of public affairs. This was captured in the saying 'rien ne sera plus comme avant' (nothing will be as it was before). However, just a few weeks after his swearing-in, President Kaboré was confronted with what has become one of the defining challenges of his tenure; terrorism. In January 2016, jihadi fighters loyal to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Mahgreb targeted the capital city, Ouagadougou, in a high-profile attack that saw at least 30 people killed. But worse was to come.

2019 was a horribus annum for Burkina Faso in the realm of security. The country suffered more jihadi attacks than any of its Sahelian neighbours. According to the London-based Armed Conflict Location Event Database at least 1,295 individuals perished in non-state armed attacks in 2019, a more than sixfold increase compared with the 173 deaths recorded in 2018. What started as sporadic attacks in early 2016 has shifted to chronic insecurity. Initially confined to Burkina Faso's Sahel region, the geography of violence now encompasses the Est, Centre-Nord and the Boucle du Mouhoun regions. Most of the municipalities in these localities are under the purview of malevolent non-state armed groups. This, in turn, has triggered a displacement crisis. As of 8 August, the National Council for Emergency Relief reported more than one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country; most of them being in Sanmantenga (Centre-Nord) and the Gourma (Est) provinces. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has risen from 2.2 million at the start of the year to 2.9 million in September.

To tackle the spectrum of instability, the Kaboré regime launched a patchwork of initiatives combining a securitised response with development promises. In 2017, it initiated the

Emergency Programme for the Burkinabe Sahel. With a budget of West African CFA 455bn (US\$810m), this programme was designed to boost socio-economic development in Burkina Faso's Sahelian regions with the goal of denying a foothold to radical militants. But the programme has failed to deliver the envisaged outcomes. The central government has also attempted to beef up its security response by launching counterterrorism operations against violent groups. Though these operations initially pushed jihadi groups back, recent militant group attempts to besiege Djibo, the regional capital of Soum province, reveal the limits of state-initiated counterterrorism efforts.

With state efforts proving ineffective Burkina Faso has seen a re-emergence and proliferation of vigilante groups. The koglwéogo, the dozogs, the rougas and the newly established Volunteers for the Defence of the Homelands are all engaged in violence production. Among the cohort of self-defence groups, the koglwéogo has polarised the Burkinabé public. A major concern is that the koglwéogo are not inclusive in terms of recruitment and security provision. In fact, their operations are often based on a narrow ethnic basis, which has led to accusations of ethnically motivated violence in places such as Yirgou, Barga and Arbinda. For proponents of human rights their existence is antithetical to the rule of law, but for others the group's ability to deliver tangible outcomes in terms of improved security, supersedes all other concerns.

This latent pluralisation of the security sector, where cohorts of non-state armed groups dispute the states monopoly over legitimate violence, has not only raised questions about the territorial integrity of the Burkinabé state but also revealed its limited ability to project power in all parts of the country. Opposition parties are confident that the forthcoming election will serve as a referendum on Kaboré's handling of the insecurity, and that this will give them the advantage.

## Fractured parties, forging partnerships

Of Burkina Faso's 143 political parties, only a few – the MPP, the Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CDP) and Union pour le Progrès et le Change (UPC) – have a strong organisational capacity that extends nationwide. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, 14 political parties managed to win seats in the National Assembly. Although, the constitutional court is yet to release the official list of presidential candidates – 12 are expected so far – the three declared frontrunners are President Roch Kaboré (MPP), Zéphirin Diabré (UPC) and Eddie Comboigo (CDP). Contrary to past electoral processes, where the Compaoré regime used to choose its opponents, this year the Kaboré administration will have to deal with a more coherent opposition. On 18 August, 22 opposition political parties, including UPC and CDP, signed an agreement to support whichever of their candidates made it through to a prospective run-off with Kaboré. At this stage, Diabré appears to be his most likely opponent.

A run-off is a scenario the MPP and its allies are keen to avoid and the ruling party's chances of winning the November vote will be aided by the access to media and state resources. It won 55 of the 127 National Assembly seats in the 2015 legislative elections and polled 59% of the vote in municipal elections the following year. Moreover, it can count on allies like the Parti pour la Renaissance Nationale, the Nouveau Temps pour la démocratie and Union pour la Renaissance/Parti Sankariste who collectively won ten seats in the 2015 general election.

But unlike in 2015 when Roch Kaboré largely benefited from his image of a 'new' man fit to rule over post-transitional Burkina Faso, this year, he will have to minimise the mixed results of his troubled five-year tenure. Last June, the Center for Democratic Governance, a local NGO, released an opinion poll that revealed popular disillusion with the Kaboré regime. 80% scored his administration poorly for their efforts at

addressing insecurity, whilst 69% were critical of its performance fighting fraud and corruption.

Moreover, the MPP had built its electoral strategy on a triumvirate made up of Roch Kaboré, Simon Compaoré and Salifou Diallo. But the death of Diallo in August 2017, who had contributed to the quick territorial outreach of the MPP in Burkina Faso's Centre-Nord region, will have consequences for the MPP's performance in November's vote. Furthermore, the MPP largely benefited from a controversial piece of legislation banning politicians from standing for office if they had supported the ruling coalition attempt to remove the two-term limit in October 2014. Consequently, serious challengers from political parties like the CDP, the Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally and the New Alliance of Faso were banned from competing. They are eligible to contest this time around.

## A code for electoral conduct

Considering the prevailing volatile security context, the National Assembly recently amended the electoral code so that the November presidential and legislative elections will be deemed valid even if citizens are unable to cast their ballots in unstable municipalities. A move described as an 'attack on democracy' by one MP. It poses further obstacles to equal and effective participation and political representation and will impact significantly on the 2021 local elections where districts are delineated by municipalities, 22 of which were not part of the voter enrolment process.

IDP voting remains another challenge for the government to overcome. Provisions are in place to ensure these individuals can cast their ballot but there has been no serious debate about how the displacement crisis could play into the voter turnout. A reduction in turnout, particularly in rural areas, could exacerbate the crisis of rural governance in the country, further aggravating Burkina Faso's socio-political fracture, on which

jihadi groups have capitalised to consolidate their roots. Furthermore, according to the newly amended electoral code, the more than one million IDPs will be enrolled where they are displaced, and their vote will be counted in the constituency they currently occupy, not where they have previously lived. The potential impact of this is that under threat constituencies will have elected officials charged with trying to address multiple challenges, who may have been elected with a very small popular mandate.

Lastly, vigilantism remains a factor to monitor in the forthcoming vote. Burkina Faso's vigilante groups have always claimed their impartiality and independence vis-à-vis the political class. However, vigilantism and politics are two sides of the same coin. The loyalty of vigilante groups towards the political class fluctuates but leaders of these groups have often allied themselves with strong men in central government. Under Compaoré's rule, the *dozos* were part of a (informal) network on which government relied to neutralise rivals and maintain peace and cohesion in the hinterlands. Until October 2014, most vigilante leaders had supported the CDP. With the collapse of Compaoré's administration, the majority switched their allegiance to the MPP. Communal self-defence groups like the *koglwéogo* are tied to powerful chieftaincy institutions. In some localities, the leaders of *koglwéogo* are also traditional rulers, who wield enormous influence in the country's political landscape.

Although there has been no announcement that vigilante groups will play any role in providing security for the elections, these groups are already critical local governance actors, which means that will play a role in the vote, even if it is an unofficial one. For example, by taking on the mantle of foot

soldiers for political parties, community-self-defence groups may get involved in voter suppression and intimidation in the localities where they operate.

## Guaranteeing security for voters

Excluding unsafe localities from the November vote is a placebo that will not cure Burkina Faso's chronic insecurity but only delay its consequences on the country's democratic institutions. The municipalities that are set to be excluded from the vote are the same which have been witnessing a series of deadly conflicts around resources. Burkina Faso's emergent democracy will not prosper if socio-economic challenges and insecurity are not addressed in rural areas.

While strong security measures could be intimidating in some contexts, insecurity constitutes a threat to a fair and transparent vote. Given the current volatile security context, the government must take strong measures to ensure a minimum standard of electoral integrity and safety. It should allocate close protection to all presidential candidates to allow them to canvass for votes across the country. It must also seek assistance from security coalitions that already operate in the Sahel – the G5-Sahel joint forces and the French Barkhane mission – to ensure the security of electoral agents, polling stations and other critical infrastructure. For whoever wins in November, tackling insecurity must be the priority, if Burkinabé democracy is to have the space to thrive.

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## Party Structures: Election winning machines in Ghana

Ghana's Fourth Republic is unique in several respects. Apart from being the longest period of post-independence civilian rule (1993-present), it has also succeeded in institutionalising strong party structures across the country. When Ghana returned to multiparty politics in the early 1990s, only the incumbent party could boast of a political organisation akin to a party structure. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) inherited the organisational structures of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), a quasi-military administration, to build its electoral machine and won elections in 1992 and 1996. It took the New Patriotic Party (NPP) eight years to build an effective organisational structure that could compete and that enabled it to win the December 2000 election.

Ghana is now a dominant two-party political system in which the primary goal of the major parties is to win elections and form the government. In the current legislature the NPP (166) and NDC (109) are the only two parties to hold seats. The forthcoming December 2020 elections will be no different with the party with the most robust grassroots organisational architecture and clear campaign messages most likely to win.



## Election vehicles

It has been argued that political parties in Africa are, compared to other regions of the world, relatively weak in organisational and programmatic terms. That African parties resist being superimposed on the classical Western left-right continuum of political ideologies, in part because an informal organisational structure underpins much of their operation. This does not mean, however, that they do not develop a distinct identity and party narrative. In Ghana, for example, the NDC and the NPP are boosted by longstanding political traditions that are coupled with regional strongholds, key programmatic positions, references to historical leaders, as well as links to a specific cultural heritage expressed in party symbols. The NDC relies on voter strongholds in the northern savannah belt, northern part of Brong region and the Volta region. While the NPP base is in the Ashanti and Eastern regions. These narratives allow voters with local knowledge to choose from the political menu.

But like political parties across the globe, their aim is to capture the governing apparatus or to have a representation in the governance of state affairs by winning elective office. If elections are the political market, then political parties are market-based organisations which aim at putting essential structures in place for success in the electoral market. These structures include fielding competitive candidates, building grassroots networks and mobilising funds to support the campaign machine. The institutionalisation of parties' structures determines their success in the electoral market.

Parties as organisational or structural units' function on both formal and informal fronts. The party machinery will include grassroots committees, national and international level committees; units that are manned by party loyalists committed to attaining the goal of the party. This accords significance to the roles party structures play in achieving their goals. Political parties are also viewed as systemic institutions to capture political power and control the affairs of a state.

Therefore, they create structures or branches at the national and local levels which function together for the attainment of this goal.

## Formal party structures

Political parties, as institutions within the broader political system, are shaped by the structural, economic, social, and political environment in which they operate. In Ghana, the 1992 Constitution and the Party Law (Act 574) contains guidelines on how political parties should be formed and undertake their activities. It mandates them to have a national profile. To qualify for a certificate of registration, a party must demonstrate that it has branches across all the administrative regions as well as in all the districts of the country. Regional, sectional, religious, and ethnic-based parties are proscribed in Ghana. Nevertheless, the mere establishment of party structures in all administrative regions is not enough to win a party power. Parties must go beyond the physical structures and undertake aggressive membership recruitment drives. It is the size of the party membership at the grassroots that gives meaning to the physical structures, with both NDC and NPP claiming unverified membership of between 2.5-3 million members.

These formal and informal party structures are significant in delivering electoral outcomes. In contemporary Ghana, political parties are, according to Kwasi Prempeh of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, "vote getting machines that politicians can mobilise into action at election time". This means that parties with a strong nationwide organisational presence at the grassroots often win more votes at the presidential level and more seats at the parliamentary level.

Youth and women's wings reduce the burden of the national organiser in aspects of party mobilisation activities. Women's wings prioritise engagement with female voters, interacting with them in markets, and making promises about what their party will do to help them when elected. On election day, they play a key role in mobilising



female voters to go and cast their votes. As do youth wings. The run-up to the 2016 elections saw the NDC's Tertiary Education Institution Network and the NPP's Tertiary Students Confederacy shuttling people from the different campuses to votes in their constituencies. Youth wings also play vital roles in educating the populace on the party policies and in the canvassing of votes during elections through campaign activities. Increasingly they are very active voices on social media, where mobilisation for rallies and even voting is becoming more prevalent.

Political party branches extend all the way to the polling station level in much of Ghana. Given the historically close margins of victory, elections can be won, and lost, at this level. The party executives and activists' roles at the polling stations includes monitoring and policing the electoral activities during the campaign, educating voters on policies and electoral related process and compiling lists of citizens during the national compilation of the voters register by the Electoral Commission that can be used to encourage voter turnout. With the compilation of the new voters' register in 2020, the relevance of the activity was brought into sharp focus. The diligent work of party polling station executives and branch members can lay the foundations for the political party's national success. But when things appear not to be going their way on election day, these cadres can resort to causing chaos and questioning the integrity of the voting process.

## Presidential tickets

On top of those structures, the presidential candidate and running mate are crucial components for every political party. An attractive and legitimate flagbearer and vice are essential for the capture of the highest political office in any democracy. But the way they are selected is also important. One of the reasons that accounted for the NDC defeat in the December 2000 election was the undemocratic method that it used in selecting its presidential candidate. Factions emerged within the party,



that weakened its grassroots structures and ability to mobilise its support voter base. Both the NPP and NDC now select their flagbearers through competitive internal elections.

The 2020 election will see the same two presidential candidate's face-off as in 2016, only that their positions are now reversed. John Mahama has gone from being the incumbent to the leading opponent, whilst Nana Akufo-Addo will be seeking a second term at the helm. For whoever wins it will be their second and final term in office. Both parties have continued a tradition of employing geographical balance in their ticket – if the president is from the northern region then the vice-president will be from the south, or vice-versa – though the NDC has also introduced gender balance on its presidential ticket for the first time by announcing Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang as Mahama's running mate. This was more a strategic move by the party than a clear commitment to a pro-women agenda. In part it was to match the 'intellectualism' of the NPP running mate, and current vice-president, Mahamudu Bawumia, but it was also forced by issues with several leading male vice-presidential candidates who were likely to be attacked by the NPP for previous misdemeanours.



## Radios and sheds

Informal party structures also influence electoral outcomes in Ghana. Party controlled private media, and party-branded shed politics are key parts of any political campaign. Sheds are informal structures built by party members for relaxation and socialising in communities. They serve as bases for political mobilisation. Individual members from the two major parties have sponsored the constructions of sheds for the use of party members. The exact number of the structures is not known as the lifespan of sheds depends on their sponsor. But they give visibility to the party and provide a platform for mobilising votes, with youths attached to these sheds engaged in door-to-door campaigning on behalf of the party or candidate.

Private media houses, owned by party members or businessmen affiliated to the two dominant entities, also amplify party messages. For example, the Kumasi based Wontumi radio (FM 101.3) and the Accra based Oman radio (FM 107.1) are owned by the NPP regional Chair and the Member of Parliament for Assin Central, respectively. Whilst the Accra based Starr radio station (FM 103.5) is owned by an NDC member. These offer platforms for the parties to reach voters with information that can be used to highlight the changes they are promising to deliver or to attack their opponents.



## The 2020 poll

The NPP won the 2016 presidential elections with 53.7% of the vote. The incumbent NDC blamed its loss on weak party structures and has restructured from the grassroots to the national level to be more competitive in 2020.

The Economist Intelligence Unit has predicted the NPP has an advantage over the NDC because of its superior management of the economy. But the advantage of incumbency also remains a formidable obstacle for the NDC to overcome, with the NPP able to oil its party structures in readiness for the December poll. Since 1993, all party governments have served two consecutive terms, it seems as though 2020 will be a continuation of that tradition.

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## Niger's 2020 election: Consolidating democratic gains

As Nigeriens prepare for general elections in December 2020, there are reasons for optimism. Since its independence in 1960, Niger has not seen a single democratic transition. In that time, it has experienced four military coups d'état. The first, in 1974 which saw General Kountché take power, was in part fuelled by claims of widespread corruption, but also due to the inability of the government to respond to social needs in a context where Niger and other Sahelian countries were experiencing one of the harshest recorded droughts. Famine affected countless lives and decimated rural livelihoods from 1968-1974. Kountché's military coup, far from being an isolated incident, was part of a larger geopolitical trend in West African countries at the time, which saw the independence leaders toppled by military coups.

Niger also experienced military takeovers in 1996, 1999, and 2010. The later in response to President Tandja Mamadou's efforts to dissolve the parliament and the constitutional court and holding of a contested national referendum to

abolish term limits, that would have allowed him a third term, popularly known as Tazarché or continuity.

But 2020 promises to be different. President Mahamadou Issoufou who was elected in 2011 after nearly two decades as a leading opposition figure, has vowed to stand down having served his constitutionally mandated two five-year terms. At the UN Security Council in September this year Issoufou reaffirmed this commitment to ensuring the country's first democratic transfer of power. The president's party, the Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme (PNDS) has already designated its presidential candidate for the December poll. Mohamed Bazoum, a former interior minister and a founding member of the party. Any attempts, albeit unlikely, to violate the 2010 constitution would have been met by strong opposition from civil society and opposition parties as well as, potentially, by the military who remain a powerful watchdog and important political actor, even though they have remained out of



official state affairs since the 2010 transition.

Lastly, and perhaps akin to how the rest of the world is asking how African countries have so far escaped the foreshadowed tragedy of the coronavirus pandemic, why should we not expect a peaceful transition? Regional trends show that, 60 years since independence from colonialism, coup d'états have become an anomaly rather than the norm, and when they occur, regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have shown that they can exert significant pressure for a rapid return to civilian rule – the sanctions and negotiations with the Mali putschists are a case in point. Just as Niger turned the page on authoritarian one-party rule in the 1990s, the upcoming elections could be a turning point for the multiparty democracy of this mineral rich nation nested in the heart of a region with multiple crises, development issues and security challenges.

## A major regional player

Niger, under President Issoufou, has emerged as a major regional and continental actor. He was a leading force behind the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), with the operational phase launched on 7 July 2019 in Niamey. The AfCFTA is set to be one of the most consequential agreements signed this decade. When fully operational, it will enable the continent to access a single market of 1.2 billion people with a cumulative GDP of \$3 trillion. It will support economic growth, particularly through the expansion of a customer-base for small medium enterprises most of which are run by women in the informal sector.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa argues that this would attract new investors and accelerate job creation for Africa's growing youth population; 10 to 12 million of whom enter the workforce every year. In a continent rife with commercial barriers, some



inherited from colonial times, and where intra African exports were only 16.6% of total exports in 2017, the AfCFTA could increase the share of intra-African trade by as much as 50%.

Niger also currently holds one of the three non-permanent African seats on the UN Security Council and plays a major role in efforts to address insecurity and fight terror across the Sahel, a situation which many West African leaders blame on the destabilisation of neighbouring Libya. With Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania, Niger is part of the G5-Sahel, which is an important regional effort born out of the desire to tackle together the growing terrorist threat and security issues. It is also part of new International Coalition for the Sahel which was formally launched in Pau in January 2020 with the aiming of adopting “a more collective response to the challenges in the Sahel by bringing together the actions carried out by the G5 Sahel States and their international partners”. Niger presently serves as a base for US military drone operations against terrorist organisations in the region.



“ 39 women and girls in the village of Nguelewa, in the region of Diffa. They have not been heard from since. There are over 102,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country and 128,000 refugees ”

## Guaranteeing security

Niger faces security threats on multiple fronts from instability in neighbouring countries: from Boko Haram on its south-eastern border with Nigeria and from terrorist groups and other criminal organisations active in Mali, Burkina Faso and Libya. Although Niger itself has remained relatively peaceful, the fragile security context in the country is a growing concern. Attacks on its soil against civilians and military personnel have intensified. Between December 2019 and January 2020, terrorist attacks killed 174 Nigerien soldiers - 89 in Chinagoder, 71 in Inates, and 14 in Sanam - in the region of Tillabéri, which borders Mali. The insecurity situation has had a heavy toll on citizens as well. In July 2017, Boko Haram abducted 39 women and girls in the village of Nguelewa, in the region of Diffa. They have not been heard from since. There are over 102,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country and 128,000 refugees in the south-eastern region of Diffa, where nearly 15% of the region's inhabitants are IDPs.

Repeated attacks, in conflict affected areas, have severely affected livelihoods and access to basic public services such as health centres and schools. With terrorist groups in the region specifically targeting schools to make statements about their ideology which sustains that formal (western style) education is haram. Their ability to recruit new members is not just by force, however. Faced with high levels of poverty, many young men are choosing to join such groups who promise to pay them a regular income, even if many do not share their ideological viewpoints. Without security, there can be no development, and without sustained development, we can expect the worse.

## Pressing development challenges

Securing Niger's territorial integrity - it is the sixth largest country in Africa - comes at a cost. The country allocates, as much as 20% of its national budget to security expenditures, a significant proportion, putting extra fiscal pressures in a context characterised by growing needs for social services, rapid demographic growth, and a fall in fiscal revenues owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

Niger's population is expected to increase from 24 million in 2020 to nearly 35 million in 2030. If current trends persist, by 2050, Niger's population will reach 65 million, which would make it the second largest country in West Africa. Recent economic analysis has argued that, with sound policies, Niger could begin to reap the benefit of its demographic dividend - currently almost half of the population is under 15 years of age. But despite GDP per capita having risen steadily during the last decade, human development indicators remain low.

The precarious security situation in parts of Niger exacerbates the multiple marginalisations that populations face. Ensuring access to quality education remain a major challenge. The expected years of schooling are 6.5 in Niger compared to 7.6 in Mali and 8.9 in Burkina Faso. The enrolment rate at primary level is 62% for girls and 71% for boys. Even with improved access, the quality remains low: subregional studies found that 92.4% of Nigerien students in the last grade of primary school do not meet the minimum required competencies in mathematics for example. The worsening security situation, in parts of the country, further jeopardises access to, and the continuation of schooling, particularly for girls who face acute vulnerabilities including high risks of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Currently the share of youth not in education, employment or training is 77% for young women.

Nearly 84% of Niger's population lives in rural areas. The vast majority are engaged in subsistence agriculture which is being negatively affected by climate change. Adding to the regular droughts of

the past decades, the region now faces recurrent floods which in 2020 have destroyed more than 43,000 homes and affected 550,000 persons in Niger alone. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 16,000 hectares of croplands have been destroyed by flooding and more than 19,000 ruminants killed, since the start of the year. Accounting for climate related risks and unpredictable weather patterns is no longer a luxury but a necessity in both urban planning and rural development.

While discourse on climate change is not embedded in debates, there is a clear, and growing, understanding of its effects on people's lives. Young Nigerien geographers are responding by using technologies to map flood risks through modelling, drones and open source participative mapping. Tackling many of the issues facing Niger demands a coherent national, and even integrated regional, approach. Nigeriens, including in rural areas, are increasingly asking those standing for election for answers. Unlike many previous presidential elections, mostly run, on appeal, affinity and alliance, there are signs that in 2020 people want to also hear how the likely challengers plan to address issues that matter most to them. Pre-campaigns activities of the main candidates have seen discussions about security, food security and access to health services, even in rural areas.

## A preview of the polls

The latest update from the Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) confirmed 139 registered parties, many newly created in the run up to general elections with the hope of being part of a winning alliance and securing nominative positions afterwards. But the main challengers to the ruling PNDS are the Mouvement National pour la Société du Développement, which was in power at the time of the 2010 coup; the Convention Démocratique et Sociale, which was in power at the time of the 1996 coup; the Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africain party of Hama Amadou who was the main challenger during the 2016 elections; the Mouvement Patriotique Nigérien, a relatively new political party whose leader is a former member of the PNDS and who placed fifth in the 2016 poll; and

the Paix-Justice-Progrès party of General Salou Djibo who was the leader of the 2010 military coup that ousted Tandja and who decided to retire from the army to run as a civilian. The participation of a former army general as a civilian candidate is significant and points to the growing maturity of Niger's political institutions. There are other smaller political forces which, through alliances, could influence during a likely second round in the upcoming presidential elections. In preparation for a possible run-off, 18 opposition parties have already formed the Coalition for a Political Alternance whose main objective is to rally behind the main challenger, whoever he may be, in an attempt to beat the incumbent's party.

In the tradition of his predecessor, President Issoufou, Mohamed Bazoum has undertaken extensive pre-campaign visits to raise his profile among the "Niger profond" – those far from the capital – the majority of whom live in rural areas. He is expected to be a continuity candidate that would build on the current regime's major accomplishments. This includes ensuring Niger remains relatively secure in a turbulent region, building an extensive network of inter and intraregional roads, expanding access to health services, and improving food security through the '3N' initiative – Nigeriens nourishing Nigeriens.

A critical, yet unresolved, issue is the candidacy of the 2016 main challenger Hama Amadou whose political survival hangs on a decision that the country's Constitutional Court is expected to make by 1 December. In 2017, Amadou was sentenced to a year in prison for his role in the trafficking of babies, bought from Nigeria and sold to wealthy families in Niger. These charges, which he has continued to refute as false and a politically motivated smear, forced Amadou to campaign in the second round of the 2016 elections from a prison cell. While the Nigerien constitution stipulates that Nigeriens "enjoying their civil and political rights" are eligible for presidency, Article 8 of the Electoral Code states that citizens sentenced to a prison term of one year or more cannot be candidates. Even though Amadou is also facing a potentially damaging dissent from a wing of his own political party he would likely be the main challenger to Bazoum and the PNDS, should he be declared eligible to contend.

## Transferring power

In September, the biometric electoral register, audited by experts from the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) and ECOWAS, was officially handed over to CENI. It will be the first time in its history that such a system will be used for elections in Niger. While election experts laud its viability and credibility, some members of the opposition remain cautious pointing to the exclusion of Nigeriens in the diaspora and claiming it could be manipulated, fears that the director of the CENI has dismissed.

All candidates will be trying to win the support of the nearly 7.5 million registered Nigerien voters, 55% of whom are women. Women remain largely underrepresented in decision-making and public policy, but new quota laws promise to change these trends. In October 2019, Niger increased the quota for women in elected positions from 15% to 25% and appointments for senior positions within the state from 25% to 30%. Nigerien women have traditionally been a strong voice within civil society and played a critical role in ushering in multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. It should be expected that they will hold the newly elected president, whoever that might be, accountable when it comes to implementing these commitments to create a space where the other half of the population more meaningfully



participate in public affairs.

Despite recurrent terrorist attacks, in some regions that have raised concerns about security during the polls, voter turnout is likely to remain high; 67% of Nigeriens voted in the first round of the 2016 presidential elections. Should the expected peaceful transition of power occur, those who cast their ballots will have voted in a historic election. Given the regional context – third term bids by incumbents are dominating election conversations in both Guinea and Côte D'Ivoire – a successful and credible democratic transition would not just be significant for Niger, but for West African democracy more generally.

*The views expressed here are the authors personal opinions and in no way represent the opinions of Niger's permanent mission to the UN*

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