

Niger's road to stability?

Mohamed Bazoum has just been sworn in as the President of the Republic of Niger after winning the presidential election run-off. He won his mandate on the platform of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS-Tarayya). Not unexpectedly, his road to the country's presidency was arduous: he had to deal with stiff opposition from contenders who felt he would be a stooge of the former President Mahamadou Issoufou.

The opposition's fear is not unfounded. Bazoum was backed by Issoufou, which caused many to suspect that he had handpicked Bazoum as a way of covering his own tracks of corruption. Before contesting the presidency, Bazoum had served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1995 to 1996 and again from 2011 to 2015. He later became Minister of State at the Presidency from 2015 to 2016. He was also Minister of State for the Interior between 2016 and the summer of 2020. It was from this ministry that he resigned to concentrate on running for the presidency.

Bazoum is the first Diffa Arab to be President of Niger Republic.

[According to Niger's Independent National Electoral Commission \(more popularly known by its French title: Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante or CENI\)](#)

Voter turnout was put at 62.91%, representing a total of 7.4 million voters. Out of this, Bazoum received 2,501,459 votes against Ousmane's 1,985,736 votes.

It is significant that the former president has been making the rounds with his successor. For instance, he has introduced the new president to President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, who is perceived as the closest ally of the former president. , while Buhari had in turn named one of the longest roads in Abuja (Nigeria's capital city) after him. It is not lost on

many observers that Bazoum's first official visit outside his country after his inauguration was to Nigeria to visit President Buhari. President Bazoum was accompanied on the visit by the governors of Sokoto, Borno, Yobe, Kebbi and Zamfara States of Nigeria.

The tasks ahead

The focus is now on Bazoum. Niger is reeling from a myriad of challenges which he needs to solve or show the necessary leadership to assure Nigeriens that he is up to the task.

One of the most critical challenges he needs to confront squarely and urgently is security. The security crisis in the Sahel region of Libya and the Lake Chad Basin posed by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter group from Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamist rebels, is real and complex. He therefore needs to roll up his sleeves and show he can stand up to the challenge.

The dreaded Islamist rebels have made the efforts of the government seem insignificant, especially along the Malian and Burkina Faso borders, where over a hundred people were killed in January 2021 during an attack on the two villages of Tchoma Bangou and Zaroumadareye.

It is believed that Niger, which is part of the G5 Sahel Force – a coalition made up of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad established in 2017 to respond to the expansion of violent and armed extremist groups in the region – spends between 15% and 20% of its budget on the defence sector.

Part of the task before Bazoum, therefore, is to ensure that he continues to pay attention to the issue of security because there are indications that France, which is one of the country's major foreign backers, may cut down its defence spending and support to Niger.

There is also the challenge of education. In the last few

years, education in Niger has been on the downward trend, buffeted by corruption and poor funding. For instance, a school recently caught fire in broad daylight while pupils were still in school. In the inferno, many of the pupils, some as young as three years, were burnt alive. Education has been neglected in this poor country for too long, and so for a school to witness an inferno leading to the death of children is a serious setback against the campaign for educational development.

In 2018, Niger joined the league of countries on the continent to discover oil and gas in commercial quantity. This was discovered by a junior British independent exploration and production company known as Savannah Petroleum. [This was in the R3 and R4 Production Sharing Contract areas in the Agadem Rift Basin \(ARB\), in the Southeast of the country.](#)

However, going by the fate of countries like Angola and Nigeria that are [resource-cursed](#), the discovery of oil in Niger did not excite many observers who believe that this might pose more problems than solutions to the avalanche of problems facing the desert country. The country is already constructing an oil pipeline (2,000km to Benin) that is expected to enable the country to increase production from 20,000 to 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day by 2030.

This project might be a long shot as many Nigeriens expect the new president to hit the ground running. Like many other African countries, the country also faces the problem of power supply which is crippling the little efforts to industrialise the country. In addressing this anomaly, the government has prioritised the construction of the Kandadji hydroelectric power plant (130 MW). It also has stepped up efforts in the areas of the agricultural sector that accounts for more than 40% of their GDP and employs nearly 80% of the labour force. Nevertheless, the agricultural sector remains vulnerable to the challenges of climate change.

But in all this, the new president has his job clearly cut out for him as a former minister of interior; it is expected that he has amassed a great deal of experience which would make him know what to do and how to secure his country and rally the opposition to work for the success of his administration. But is this that easy? The answers will themselves for evaluation in the years ahead.