



Covid-19 policies in Niger: top-down governance, bottom-up mistrust

In late March 2020, Niger's Government adopted an emergency programme to grapple with the impending arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. This research project aims at identifying the key factors (1) that shape the efficacy of this programme relative to its goals, i.e., stemming the expansion of the pandemic and achieving the proper support policies in view of expected negative socio-economic fallout of emergency measures; and (2) that shape the response of the public. In the first instance, the hypothesis is that programme efficacy is shaped by Niger's dual-structured economy; and in the second instance, that public response is largely determined by pervasive government mistrust in Niger. Regarding the first hypothesis, it is proposed that the types of measures taken by the Government, in terms both of combating the pandemic and of mitigating negative fallout are more effective in the small modern sector of the economy than in the large traditional (rural and informal) sector. Regarding the second hypothesis, we postulate that mistrust is stoked especially by the top-down nature of decision-making in Niger, a circumstance worsened by the emergency context. The research reviews the various government emergency measures and the top-heavy decision-making process; assesses the impacts of the measures, in particular among the more disadvantaged groups; and retraces public opinion responses. A peculiarity of the choices made by Niger's government is that it stayed as much as possible out of the informal sector but tried to police religious spaces to prevent large congregations of people. In this way, it avoided economic revolt, but fuelled religious (Islamic) blowback. Because of this, the research also includes a study of the religious response to the emergency measures. Another peculiarity - one in fact widely shared across Sub-Saharan Africa - is the (as yet) weak health impact of the pandemic in Niger. This created a story where the measures were enforced with vigour in March/April, when the impact was expected to be devastating, and were gradually relaxed, if not abandoned, starting in mid-May onwards, when they were revealed to be close to insignificant. The research seeks to incorporate this evolution in the collection and analysis of data.

Objectives

The research aims at reviewing and analysing Niger's Covid-19 emergency programme; examine its socio-economic impacts on the more vulnerable categories affected by it, in particular people active in certain sectors of urban informal economies (petty trade, border trade, public transportation, small restaurants); discuss the religious (Islamic) blowback triggered by some of the measures; and present a general assessment of policies marked by top-down approaches and mistrust of government.

Lead organisation

Think Tank Économie Politique et Gouvernance Autonome

Country

Niger (Niamey and Maradi)

Planned activities

Documentary research; semi-structured interviews; survey interviews; focus group interviews; social network and media analysis.