

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Burkina Faso					
Score:	2009	2010	Change		
Polity:	0	0	0		
Democ:	2	2	0		
Autoc:	2	2	0		
Durable:		9			
Tentative:		No			
SCODE	BFO	CCODE	439	Date of Report	1 June 2011
Polity IV Component Variables					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP
2	0	0	3	3	4
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)					
End Date	15 October 2000		Begin Date	19 September 2001	
Polity Fragmentation: No					
Constitution	1991				
Executive(s)	President Blaise Compaoré (CDP); first seized power in 1987; first elected in 1991; most recently reelected 21 November 2010, 80.2%				
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (111 seats: proportionally elected; most recent elections, 6 May 2007) Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP): 73 Alliance for Democracy/Democratic Rally (ADF/RDA): 14 Union for the Republic (UPR): 5 Union for Rebirth/Sankarist Movement (UNIR/MS): 4 Other parties: 15				
Judiciary	Supreme Court				

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

Burkina Faso has a long history of political instability, coups and counter-coups, and autocratic rule. Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) achieved independence from France in 1960 and quickly established a one-party dictatorship under the leadership of Maurice Yameogo. President Yameogo was overthrown by Colonel Sangoule Lamizana in a 1969 military coup. President Lamizana ruled Upper Volta in an autocratic manner until he ushered in a brief period of political liberalization starting in the mid-1970s. Despite efforts to liberalize the political system (Lamizana was elected to the office of president in 1978), democratic politics were to be short-lived in this country. In 1980 Colonel Zerbo staged a bloodless coup

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

and established a Government of National Recovery. However, by 1982 Zerbo was himself ousted in a coup led by junior military officers. Major Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo emerged as the leader of the new military regime, with Captain Thomas Sankara as his prime minister. In 1983 Sankara staged a coup against Ouedraogo and assumed power. Sankara ruled until 1987 when he was killed in a coup led by Captain Blaise Compaore.

Under increasing international and domestic pressure to reform the political system in Burkina Faso, a new multiparty constitution was ratified in 1991. Amid widespread claims of fraud and an opposition boycott, Compaore was elected president in November 1991. President Compaore was reelected to a second seven-year term in 1998. While major opposition candidates boycotted this election, citing government intimidation and a number of systematic weaknesses in the electoral code, Compaore defeated two minor party candidates in an election described as substantially free and fair by international observers. Confronted by spiraling political hostilities in 1999, President Compaore announced that he was establishing a consultative committee to further democratize the electoral process in Burkina Faso. The political committee revised the electoral code and rules and established an independent electoral commission, improved access of opposition forces to the state media, and sponsored a constitutional amendment limiting the president to two five-year terms in office.

In October 2005 the Constitutional Council ruled that this term limit did not apply to Compaore, as it was enacted during his second term in office. Facing a divided opposition, Compaore won the subsequent election on November 13, 2005, with over 80% of the vote; he was again re-elected on November 21, 2010, collecting just over 80% of the vote.

Executive Constraints: Slight to Moderate Limitations (3)

Despite paying greater attention to establishing democratic practices and institutions in Burkina Faso during the 1990s, there is relatively little horizontal accountability within this political system. The 1991 constitution established a strong presidency, made even stronger by President Compaore's dominance over the legislative and judicial branches of government. Although Burkina Faso has a prime minister, this post has little independent power and is appointed by the president. Since the return of multiparty politics to the country in the early 1990s, the legislature has been dominated by President Compaore's Congress for Democracy and Progress Party (CDP). Throughout the 1990s the CDP effectively shut down opposition voices in the National Assembly and made it little more than a rubber-stamp body. Initially, the subservience of this body to executive control was ensured by fraud and corruption. The 1997 National Assembly elections, in which the CDP won 104 of 111 seats, were plagued by credible reports of electoral malpractice. However, in recent years evidence of this type of systemic fraud by the President's party has decreased.

Efforts to reform the electoral system in 2002 have enhanced to presence of opposition parties within the legislature in recent years. After the imposition of these reforms, the opposition presence within the National Assembly increased to 54 seats, a very significant shift. Nevertheless, in April 2004 the parliament voted to change the electoral code once again. These reforms, which changed the electoral unit from 15 regions to 45 provinces, were widely seen as an effort for President Compaore and his political supporters to secure their hold on power. In effect, these changes represented a return to the electoral system that existed prior to the reforms of 2002. Not surprisingly, the opposition suffered significant losses in the 15 May 2007 general election, the first since the 2004 reforms. The CDP won seventy-three seats, dramatically reducing the presence of the opposition in the National Assembly and apparently returning to its pre-2002 dominance. While the legislature is nominally independent from executive control, the President continues to exert his considerable influence over this body.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Persistent Overt Coercion (8)

After more than fifteen years of electoral politics in Burkina Faso, the ability of its citizens to peacefully change their government through the ballot box has yet to be fully tested. President Compaore and his supporters in the CDP continue to dominate the political arena in this country. While opposition parties are allowed to operate in Burkina Faso, those that represent a significant challenge to the political hegemony of Compaore and his associates have traditionally been subjected to political harassment. Numerous members of the armed forces and the opposition Social Forces Front (FFS) party were arrested in October 2003 over ties to an alleged coup attempt.

While Compaore's domination of the political process has been bolstered by acts of repression, fraud and co-optation, nevertheless, the President retains widespread support among the citizens of Burkina

Faso and the opposition remains hopelessly divided. Moreover, despite the restricted nature of political competition in this country, recent efforts by Compaore to increase the transparency of the electoral process have led to the establishment of a more open democratic process in Burkina Faso. In September 2001 a representative of civil society was appointed president of Burkina Faso's independent National Electoral Commission (a 15-member body evenly divided between Compaore supporters, opposition parties and members of civil society). The job of the Commission was to oversee the spring 2002 legislative elections.

In these elections, held in May 2002, the ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress party saw its share of seats in the 111-member parliament shrink from 91% to 52%. International observers described these elections as fair despite the occurrence of minor irregularities. These elections were seen as a critical test for the future of democracy in this country. After boycotting the presidential and municipal polls in 1998 and 2000, the opposition decided to take part in these elections following the implementation of new electoral reforms by the National Electoral Commission. The 2002 election marked the first time three consecutive parliamentary elections have been held without the country being disrupted by a military coup. Unfortunately, whereas the 2002 elections gave cause for hope for a more competitive democracy, reforms in 2004 returned the CDP to its pre-2002 dominance. In the 2007 general election the CDP won seventy-three seats in the National Assembly. While thirteen parties won seats in these elections, only two parties, the CDP and the ADF-RDA, reached the 5% vote threshold required to garner campaign financing. In an effort to increase party competition in the future, in 2009 the threshold for campaign financing was reduced to 3%. In December 2010 Burkina Faso's Constitutional Council rejected an attempt by four opposition candidates to have the 21 November 2010 elections annulled for "serious irregularities." In these elections, which African electoral monitors declared to be "peaceful, free, credible and transparent," President Compaore was reelected with over 80% of the national vote. While some irregularities were present in the electoral process, international observers have argued that they did not significantly alter the outcome of the election. President Compaore remains highly popular and the opposition continues to lack the organizational ability to challenge his rule. The President's party, the CDP, has argued that it will attempt to build on Compaore's popularity and use its legislative dominance to abolish the two-term limit on presidential tenure enacted in 2002.