



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

Burkina Faso

PARTLY FREE

56

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	23/40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	33/60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

60 /100 **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

Multiparty presidential and legislative elections held in late 2015 ushered in a new government and laid a foundation for the continued development of democratic institutions. Despite extreme poverty, terrorism, and government attempts to curtail press freedoms, civil society and organized labor remain strong forces for democracy and for the respect of civil liberties.

Key Developments in 2019

- Islamist militants launched violent attacks in northern and eastern Burkina Faso throughout the year, targeting Christian churches and individuals wearing Christian paraphernalia. Clashes with militants and reprisals by government forces forced 560,000 Burkinabè to flee their homes by year's end.
- In September, generals Gilbert Diendéré and Djibrill Bassolé, who were accused of plotting a 2015 coup attempt, were convicted by a military tribunal, receiving 20- and 10-year prison terms respectively.
- In June, the parliament adopted a revised penal code that criminalizes the dissemination of information related to terrorist attacks; the revised code also criminalizes speech that can “demoralize” the defense and security services.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

<p>Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?</p>	<p>2/4</p>
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The president is head of state and is directly elected to no more than two five-year terms. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress (MPP)

won the 2015 presidential election with approximately 53 percent of the vote. Observers described the election as the most competitive ever to be held in the country. However, a number of politicians who supported former president Blaise Compaoré's unsuccessful attempt to amend the constitution to allow himself a third presidential term were barred from contesting the election.

The prime minister is head of government and is appointed by the president with the approval of the National Assembly. The prime minister is then responsible for recommending a cabinet that is formally appointed by the president. In January 2019, President Kaboré appointed Christophe Dabiré to serve as prime minister following Paul Kaba Thieba's resignation earlier that month.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?	2/4
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The 127 members of the National Assembly are directly elected to five-year terms under a proportional representation system. The 2015 legislative elections were held concurrently with the presidential election and were viewed as generally credible, despite the exclusion of a number of candidates who had supported Compaoré's term-limit changes. The MPP won a plurality in the National Assembly, with 55 of the 127 seats.

Municipal elections held in 2016 reflected continuing erosion of support for the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), the former ruling party, and increasing support for the MPP. Election observers from local civil society groups and international missions noted only minor irregularities in the polls. However, election-related violence prevented polling in a number of districts, which, according to some observers, contributed to relatively low turnout. Makeup elections for several constituencies were held peacefully in 2017, though once again some candidates were reportedly excluded.

A3 0-4 pts

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Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

3/4

The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) is responsible for organizing elections, and the 2015 and 2016 polls were generally well administered.

The electoral code, adopted in 2018, was criticized by opposition parties for imposing new restrictions on voters living abroad. This code requires either the national identity card or a Burkinabè passport for those living abroad to register to vote, whereas a consular card was previously accepted. Opposition critics claimed that many Burkinabè abroad, particularly those in Côte d'Ivoire, would not possess these documents and therefore be disenfranchised.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

2/4

The constitution guarantees the right to form political parties, but their ability to participate in political life is sometimes restricted by the government. In August 2019, Ablassé Ouédraogo, leader of opposition party Le Faso Autrement (Faso Otherwise) claimed that the government prohibited his party from participating in a political dialogue. In November, the Patriotic Front for Renewal (FPR), another opposition party, was suspended for three months after calling for the government's resignation.

Major political parties, such as the MPP, CDP, and Union for Progress and Change (UPC), have extensive patronage networks and disproportionate access to media coverage, making it difficult for other political parties to build their support bases.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

3/4

The end of former president Compaoré's 27-year regime in 2014 has given way to a freer environment, in which opposition parties were able to consolidate popular support and gain power through recent elections. However, a history of rotation of power between parties has yet to be firmly established.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

2/4

Burkina Faso's military maintains a significant presence in the political sphere, and the history of military intervention poses a persistent threat to democratic stability. In 2015, the presidential guard, which was loyal to former president Compaoré, attempted to stage a coup d'état. The maneuver sparked widespread protests, and failed after the army's chief of staff moved to support the transitional government.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

3/4

The constitution enshrines full political rights and electoral opportunities for all segments of the population. However, a small educated elite, the military, and labor unions have historically dominated political life.

Women are underrepresented in political leadership positions and hold 13.4 percent of seats in the parliament. Within parties, women are frequently relegated to women's secretariats that have little influence. Burkina Faso has a gender quota law

mandating that women must represent 30 percent of candidate lists, but its application is limited. A revised gender quota law was drafted by civil society groups in March 2019, but has failed to gain any traction.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?	2/4
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Laws are promulgated and debated by the National Assembly. While democratic institutions continue to develop, they are not yet strong enough to withstand the influence of the military and other elite groups. Attacks by Islamic militants, which have increased in frequency in recent years, severely impede the government's ability to implement its policies in the insecure north and east.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	2/4
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Corruption is widespread, particularly among customs officials and municipal police. Anticorruption laws and bodies are generally ineffective, though local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide some accountability by publicizing official corruption and its effects.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	2/4
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The successful 2015 elections and installation of a civilian government signified a marked improvement in government accountability and transparency. However,

government procurement processes are opaque, and procedures meant to increase transparency are often not followed. Government officials are required to make financial disclosures, but the information is rarely made public, and penalties for noncompliance do not appear to be enforced.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	2/4
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The environment for media has improved since the end of Compaoré's rule. Since then, defamation has been decriminalized, reporters at the public broadcaster have experienced less political interference, and private media operates with relative freedom.

However, a revision of the penal code, adopted by the parliament in June 2019, made disseminating information about terrorist attacks and security force activity, along with the "demoralization" of defense and security forces, criminal offenses punishable by prison terms of up to 10 years. These revisions were subsequently declared constitutional by the Constitutional Council in July. Media outlets have since become more reluctant to report on terrorist incidents, with journalists either delaying their reporting or deferring to official government releases.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because the National Assembly passed a revised penal code that imposed penalties on journalists who report information that "demoralizes the defense and security forces," which has caused media outlets to delay their reporting and limit the scope of their coverage.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

3/4

Burkina Faso is a secular state, and freedom of religion is generally respected. The population is predominately Muslim with a large Christian minority. Followers of both religions often engage in syncretic practices.

Recent actions by Islamic militant groups, which have attacked and intimidated civilians in the north and east, contributed to increased tensions between Muslims and Christians. Christian churches were targeted in several deadly attacks during 2019; at least four attacks were recorded in April and May, resulting in the deaths of 20 people. In August, another three people died in attacks on Protestant and Catholic churches in the east.

Christians who wore paraphernalia were also targeted in 2019. Assailants who attacked a church in April targeted individuals wearing crosses. A May procession of Christians the north was attacked, leaving four people dead. In June, gunmen killed 4 people in the village of Béni for wearing crucifixes.

Muslims have also been attacked while expressing their faith in public; in October, assailants entered a mosque in the northern village of Salmossi, killing least 15 worshippers.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because Islamist militants operating in the north and east carried out direct attacks on religious leaders, worshippers, and ceremonies as well as on individuals wearing Christian paraphernalia.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

3/4

Academic freedom is unrestricted, though due to the former regime's repressive tactics against student-led protests, a legacy of tension between the government and academic organizations persists. Islamic militant groups in the north have threatened teachers in an effort to force them to adopt Islamic teachings, resulting in the closure of schools.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	3/4
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Private discussion is unrestricted in much of the country. However, attacks and intimidation by militant Islamic groups in the north and east, an increased security presence in response to their activities, and the June 2019 penal code revisions have dissuaded people from speaking about local news, politics, and other sensitive topics.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	3/4
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The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, which is sometimes upheld in practice. Under the new government, space for demonstrations and protests has opened. However, some demonstrations were banned by government authorities who cited security concerns or were forcibly dispersed in 2019. In late August, trade unions organized nationwide rallies to criticize the country's economic and security troubles; however, their mid-September rally in Ouagadougou was interrupted by police, which used tear gas to disperse 2,000 protesters. In October, the Ouagadougou City Council banned a march planned by the Burkinabé Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights (MBDHP), a local NGO.

In July 2019, the parliament extended a state of emergency that was originally declared in 14 provinces in 2018. The state of emergency, which will expire in 2020, allows the government to restrict the freedom of assembly.

E2 0-4 pts

<p>Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?</p>	<p>2/4</p>
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While many NGOs operate openly and freely, human rights groups have reported abuses by security forces in the past. NGOs still face harassment in carrying out their work, and NGO leaders argue that some legal provisions, including vaguely worded terrorism laws, are vulnerable to being misused to silence human rights defenders. In December 2019, police detained Kémi Séba, president of NGO Pan-African Emergencies, after he criticized President Kaboré and other African heads of state. Séba was convicted of “contempt of the head of state” and given a suspended prison sentence.

NGO members and activists also risk punishment under the June 2019 penal code revisions. In November 2019, activist Naïm Touré was arrested for “attempted demoralization” of the defense and security forces, but was ultimately released without charge.

Burkina Faso’s insecurity has impacted the ability of NGOs to work freely, with aid workers losing access to large parts of the country due to pervasive violence. NGO workers themselves are at risk of violence; in May 2019, two Democratic Youth Organization (ODJ) activists were killed while traveling to meet a government official in the northern province of Yagha. The ODJ claimed that the government refused to autopsy the victims in November.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because increasing insecurity has prevented NGOs from operating in conflict-affected areas.

E3 0-4 pts

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Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

3/4

The constitution guarantees the right to strike. Unions frequently and freely engage in strikes and collective bargaining, and coordinate with civil society to organize demonstrations on social issues. However, the government has used legal means to suppress union activity, including the denial of permits for planned demonstrations.

In June 2019, the National Police Alliance (APN) denounced the government's refusal to extend legal recognition in spite of a court order.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2/4

The judiciary is formally independent but has historically been subject to executive influence and corruption. In 2018, a highly anticipated military trial of 84 people accused of involvement in the 2015 coup commenced. Some analysts have questioned whether the accused could receive a fair trial, since the members of the military tribunal ruling on the case are appointed by the Defense Ministry and the president.

Despite these concerns, at least 10 people were convicted by the tribunal in September 2019. Generals Gilbert Diendéré and Djibrill Bassolé, the coup plotters, received 20-year and 10-year prison terms respectively. Fatoumata Diendéré, Gilbert Diendéré's wife, received a 30-year sentence in absentia for her involvement in the plot. A group of soldiers who participated by arresting government officials during the coup were also convicted, receiving 15- to 19-year sentences.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

2/4

Constitutional guarantees of due process are undermined by corruption and inefficacy of the judiciary and police force. In April and May 2019, lawyers organized protests against judicial inefficiency and the denial of legal rights for detainees.

The military has been accused of arbitrarily detaining large groups of men in the vicinity of attacks by Islamic militants. While most detainees are released in a matter of days, some are held for months or are summarily executed. In March 2019, the MBDHP reported that at least 60 people were executed by soldiers carrying out a counterterrorism operation in February.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

0/4

The security environment has declined in recent years due to activity by Islamic militant groups, bandits, and militias. Traditional leaders, government officials, lawmakers, and civilians are regularly targeted for assassination by Islamic militants. In November 2019, militants attacked a mining convoy, killing at least 37 people and wounding another 60; the attack prompted President Kaboré to announce plans to recruit volunteers to collaborate with security services. In some areas, armed operate with sufficient strength to attack military outposts. In late December, two armed groups attacked a military detachment and civilians living in the northern town of Arbinda; while the military repelled the attack, at least 7 soldiers and 35 civilians were killed.

Islamist militants have made multiple incursions into rural towns during 2019, often issuing ultimatums for their residents to leave; this prompted large movements of civilians to urban centers in the north. More than 560,000 Burkinabè were internally displaced at year's end.

The January 2019 killing of the village chief of Yirgou sparked communal clashes between members of the Fulani and Mossi ethnic communities. A series of reprisal attacks, partly organized by the Koglwéogo militia group, against Fulani left approximately 50 people dead by April according to the government; local civil society groups reported that as many as 200 were killed. In August, two Koglwéogo chiefs and five other individuals were arrested for their role in the violence.

In some cases, security forces have engaged in extrajudicial killings and torture, particularly against Fulani. In August 2019, the defense and security services reportedly executed 17 Fulani civilians, collaborating with the Koglwéogo to identify targets. Victims and civil society complain that authorities have failed to investigate human rights abuses perpetrated by security forces.

Allegations of torture and abuse of suspects in custody by the police are common, and prison conditions are poor.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 due to acute and widespread violence perpetrated by Islamist militants, as well as continued extrajudicial responses by the government.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?	2/4
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Discrimination against ethnic minorities occurs, but is not widespread. LGBT+ people, as well as those living with HIV, routinely experience discrimination. While illegal, gender discrimination remains common in employment and education.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

2/4

Due to insecurity, the government has established a number of heavily guarded checkpoints on roads, and has instituted curfews and states of emergency in some provinces. Schools are a common target of armed groups, with Islamist militants targeting schools that operate in French instead of Arabic.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2/4

In recent years, the government has implemented reforms to reduce the amount of capital necessary to start a business, facilitating the ability to obtain credit information, and improving the insolvency resolution process. However, the business environment is hampered by corruption.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2/4

Women face discrimination in cases involving family rights and inheritance. Early marriage remains an issue, especially in the north. The practice of female genital mutilation is less common than in the past, but still occurs. Domestic violence remains a problem despite government efforts to combat it.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

Burkina Faso is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. Child labor is present in the agricultural and mining sectors. Women from neighboring countries are recruited by traffickers and transported to Burkina Faso, where they are forced into prostitution.

According to the US Department of State's 2019 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Burkina Faso has worked to combat human trafficking through expanded efforts to convict perpetrators and protect victims of trafficking. However, the country fell short in key areas, including comprehensive data reporting and the identification and referral of adult victims.



On Burkina Faso

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

56/100 Partly Free

Other Years

2019

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