



Freedom in the World - Burkina Faso (2011)

Capital:
Ouagadougou

Population:
15,757,000

Political Rights Score: 5 *

Civil Liberties Score: 3 *

Status: Partly Free

Overview

President Blaise Compaoré was elected to his fourth term in the November 2010 elections with 80 percent of the vote. Although members of opposition parties challenged the results, citing irregularities at the polls, the country's Constitutional Council ruled in favor of Compaoré. Meanwhile, in April, Burkina Faso's government adopted a new law on the protection and promotion of the rights of the disabled.

Burkina Faso experienced a series of military coups after gaining independence from France in 1960. In 1987, Thomas Sankara, a populist president who had risen to power through a coup in 1983, was ousted by army captain Blaise Compaoré; Sankara and several of his supporters were killed during the takeover. In 1991, a democratic constitution was approved in a referendum, and Compaoré easily won that year's presidential election due to an opposition boycott. Compaoré secured another seven-year term in the 1998 election.

The government undertook a series of political reforms after 1998, including the introduction of an independent electoral commission, a single-ballot voting system, public campaign financing, and a third vice presidential position in the legislature for the opposition leader.

The 2002 National Assembly elections were the first conducted without a significant opposition boycott. Compaoré's Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) party won only 57 of 111 seats, compared with 101 in 1997.

Two-term presidential limits were reintroduced in 2000. However, prior to the 2005 elections, the Constitutional Council had ruled that the law was not retroactive, leading to Compaoré's reelection to a third term in 2005. The 2010 election was the last in which he was eligible to run.

The country's first municipal elections were held in 2006, with the CDP capturing nearly two-thirds of the local council seats. The CDP won 73 seats in the 2007 National Assembly elections, while the largest opposition party, the Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally (ADF-RDA), captured only 14.

In July 2010, the CDP announced the nomination of Compaoré as its candidate for the November presidential elections. Six opposition candidates ran against Compaoré, who won with just over 80 percent of the vote. His closest challenger, Hama Arba Diallo, captured less than 10 percent of the vote. Only 55 percent of 3,234,555 registered voters came out to the polls; the Burkina-based think tank, Center for Democratic Governance, estimates that an additional 3,700,000 eligible voters remain unregistered. Although four opposition candidates challenged Compaoré's victory and called for a new election, the Constitutional Council upheld the election results. Meanwhile, the CDP stated its intention to revise Article 37 of the constitution, which would allow Compaoré to run for reelection in 2015, though the revision did not occur by year's end.

An increase in direct foreign investment and revenue from the cotton, mining, and agricultural sectors fueled growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) between 2009 and 2010.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Burkina Faso is not an electoral democracy. International monitors have judged the most recent presidential, municipal, and legislative elections to be generally free but not entirely fair, due to the ruling CDP's privileged access to state resources and the media. Monitors from civil society groups observed problems with the 2010 presidential elections, including traditional leaders mobilizing voters for the incumbent, inadequate numbers of voting cards and ballots at the polls, incorrect electoral lists, and the utilization of state resources for President Blaise Compaoré's campaign. The 111-seat National Assembly is unicameral, and members serve five-year terms. The legislature is independent, but subject to executive influence.

The constitution guarantees the right to form political parties, and 13 parties are currently represented in the legislature. Opposition members have argued that the 2004 revisions to the electoral code, which tripled the number of electoral districts, gave an undue advantage to larger parties, particularly the CDP. Electoral reforms in 2009 extended the right to vote in presidential elections and referendums to Burkinabe living abroad, but not until the 2015 presidential election. Reforms also included an injunction against the practice of switching parties after elections. In January 2010, the National Assembly passed a law requiring that all voters show picture identification when arriving to the polls, though there were problems with delayed distribution of the cards. Opposition parties remain weak; in the 2007 legislative elections, only two parties, the CDP and ADF-RDA, reached the 5 percent voting threshold.

Corruption remains widespread, despite a number of public and private anticorruption initiatives. The courts have been unwilling or unable to adequately prosecute many senior officials charged with corruption. Burkina Faso was ranked 98 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Although freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected, many media outlets practice self-censorship. Journalists occasionally face criminal libel prosecutions, death threats, and other forms of harassment and intimidation. There are over 50 private radio stations, a private television station, and several independent newspapers. The government does not restrict internet access.

Burkina Faso is a secular state, and freedom of religion is respected. Academic freedom is also unrestricted.

The constitution provides for the right to assemble, though demonstrations are sometimes suppressed or banned. While many nongovernmental organizations operate openly and freely, human rights groups have reported abuses by security forces. The constitution guarantees the right to strike, and unions are able to engage freely in strikes and collective bargaining, although only a minority of the workforce is unionized.

The judicial system is formally independent, but it is subject to executive influence and corruption. The courts are further weakened by a lack of resources and citizens' poor knowledge of their rights.

Human rights advocates in Burkina Faso have repeatedly criticized the military and police for committing abuses with impunity. Police often use excessive force and disregard pretrial detention limits.

Discrimination against various ethnic minorities occurs but is not widespread. However, the homosexuals and those infected with HIV routinely experience discrimination. In an effort to address discrimination against the disabled, Burkina Faso ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 and adopted a new law on the protection and promotion of the rights of the disabled in April 2010. Civil society actors also noted increased government efforts in 2010 to provide access to healthcare and a decrease in costs for maternal health services.

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, although security checks on travelers are common. Equality of opportunity is hampered in part by the advantages conferred on

CDP members, who receive preferential treatment in securing public contracts. Although the right to own property is legally guaranteed, the inadequate judicial system and the frequent recourse to traditional courts in rural areas limit this right in practice.

While illegal, gender discrimination remains common in employment, education, property, and family rights, particularly in rural areas. Reforms in 2009 established a 20 percent quota for women on all party candidate lists in municipal and legislative elections, but implementation has been slow. An October 2010 report on Burkina Faso by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) revealed that women make up only 6 percent of all mayors, 36 percent of locally elected officials, and 15 percent of the National Assembly. In the north, early marriage contributes to lower female school enrollment and a heightened incidence of obstetric fistula. Human rights groups have recorded a significant drop in the prevalence of female genital mutilation since its criminalization in 1996.

Unpaid child labor is illegal but common. Burkina Faso is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in women and children, who are subject to forced labor and sexual exploitation. According to the U.S. State Department's 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report, Burkina Faso does not comply with the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking. However, the report also noted the government's efforts to reform, including 2008 legislation which criminalizes all forms of human trafficking and assigns more stringent penalties to those convicted. In 2009, Burkinabe authorities intercepted 788 children from traffickers intending to send them as laborers to neighboring countries.

**Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*