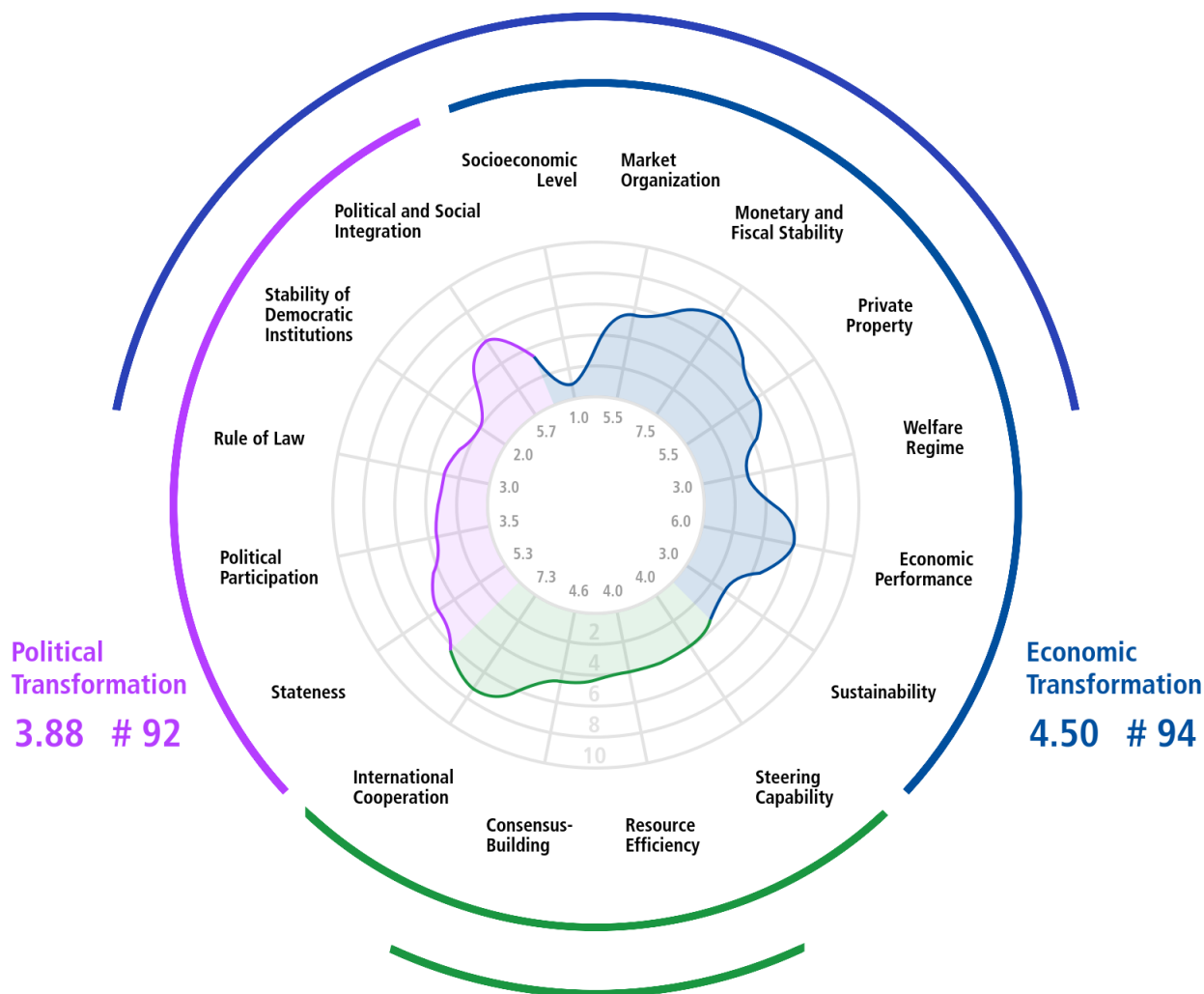


# Burkina Faso

## Status Index

**4.19 # 101**

on 1-10 scale out of 137



**Political Transformation**  
**3.88 # 92**

**Economic Transformation**  
**4.50 # 94**

## Governance Index

**4.76 # 66**

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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## Contact

Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 256  
33111 Gütersloh  
Germany

### **Sabine Donner**

Phone +49 5241 81 81501  
[sabine.donner@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:sabine.donner@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

### **Hauke Hartmann**

Phone +49 5241 81 81389  
[hauke.hartmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:hauke.hartmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

### **Sabine Steinkamp**

Phone +49 5241 81 81507  
[sabine.steinkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de](mailto:sabine.steinkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de)

**Key Indicators**

Population	M	<b>22.7</b>	HDI	<b>0.449</b>	GDP p.c., PPP \$	<b>2546</b>
Pop. growth <sup>1</sup>	% p.a.	<b>2.6</b>	HDI rank of 189	<b>184</b>	Gini Index	<b>43.0</b>
Life expectancy	years	<b>59.3</b>	UN Education Index	<b>0.324</b>	Poverty <sup>3</sup>	% <b>63.1</b>
Urban population	%	<b>31.9</b>	Gender inequality <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.621</b>	Aid per capita \$	<b>71.8</b>

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

## Executive Summary

During the period under review, Burkina Faso faced a deepening security and humanitarian crisis that was accompanied by a deterioration of overall governance. Approximately two million internally displaced persons have fled the growing Islamist threat and violent acts perpetrated by the country's security forces. A significant portion of the country, around 40%, is no longer under central government control, including many border provinces. Access to important towns has been cut off for extended periods and they can only be reached with heavy military escort or by air. The state is on the verge of territorial disintegration.

In contrast, the economy has shown surprising resilience. Growth has reportedly recovered to around 5%. The country's effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic, surpassing expectations in terms of containment, has contributed to this economic recovery. However, pervasive poverty and social exclusion persist, with Burkina Faso ranked at the bottom of the international human development pyramid (184th out of 191 countries).

Politically, the two years under review were markedly different. During 2021, following the December 2020 elections, governance appeared to be stable. However, 2022 began with a military coup d'état, which ousted the elected president and parliament, and ended with a second coup, which replaced one junta with another. Following the successive military takeovers in 2022, the regime can be considered fully autocratic, though civil society still has some room for policy influence and most media outlets, except certain international ones, enjoy freedom of expression.

Strategically, the ruling military has seemingly shifted its approach between the first and second juntas. The initial focus was on restoring peace and stability through dialogue and reconciliation, but the current approach emphasizes a more forceful response to combat the Islamist groups. This includes the deployment of paramilitary forces known as the *Volontaires pour la Defense de la Patrie* (VDP). Some observers express concerns that this approach may exacerbate existing ethnic tensions, while others argue that involving civilians in the fight against jihadism is necessary to

regain control of the state's territory and protect communities from terrorist attacks. Additionally, this strategy aims to avoid collaboration with the Wagner group.

As of January 2023, there appears to be a significant rupture in the military's relationship with France. However, the military junta has emphasized that it does not seek to sever diplomatic ties with France. Burkina Faso is clearly in a transitional period with an uncertain future direction.

## History and Characteristics of Transformation

Since gaining independence in 1960, Burkina Faso has experienced a turbulent history marked by military coups and periodic elections. Despite the dominance of the Mossi ethnic group, which comprises around 55% of the population, the country has managed to maintain internal peace and interethnic cohesion. Burkina Faso has primarily served as a labor force reservoir for Côte d'Ivoire's agriculture and as a supplier of raw cotton.

The most significant period in Burkina Faso's developmental trajectory was the "revolutionary" era under President Sankara from 1983 to 1987. Sankara implemented policies focused on self-centered development, tackling corruption, promoting gender equality and preserving the environment. The regime made substantial progress in social indicators, particularly in education and health care, including notable achievements in child vaccination rates.

Sankara's authoritarian rule and anti-imperialist stance created tensions with France, eventually leading to his overthrow and assassination in 1987 by his successor, Blaise Compaoré. Compaoré governed Burkina Faso for the next 27 years, repeatedly amending the constitution to extend his rule. In 1992, Burkina Faso held its first multiparty parliamentary elections, but opposition to Compaoré remained limited.

Compaoré's attempt to secure re-election in October 2014 resulted in his downfall and flight to Abidjan. Following a period of unrest, constitutional democracy was restored, with elections in 2015 and 2020. The transitional year of 2015 also witnessed a significant infiltration of Islamist terrorists into Burkina Faso. Subsequent governments led by President Roch Marc Kaboré, who had served under Compaoré, struggled to stabilize the country. The old political elite's ability to address the Islamist threat, social challenges and allegations of widespread corruption was increasingly questioned by civil society, the media and even within the military.

A terrorist attack on a gendarmerie detachment in Inata in the Soum province on November 14, 2021, resulted in the deaths of 57 individuals, including 53 gendarmes. The failure of both the military and civilian leadership to provide assistance to the besieged garrison intensified existing unrest, ultimately leading to a military insurrection.

On January 24, 2022, a junta overthrew the Kaboré government and Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba became the transitional president. However, the first junta was toppled on September 30 by rival military forces and Captain Ibrahima Traoré assumed the presidency. The constitution and its institutions were suspended, and a new government and transitional

National Assembly were established. The second coup may have been triggered by the first junta's close ties with France, while the second junta appears to have a more left-leaning orientation, possibly aligned with Sankara's ideals.

The cancellation of the military cooperation agreement with France on January 18, 2023, followed by the expulsion of the French ambassador, led to the withdrawal of the remaining 400 French soldiers, causing a historic low in relations between Burkina Faso and France. However, the new military government has expressed its intention to maintain diplomatic relations.

Media organizations face occasional harassment, such as the suspension of Radio France Internationale, but, in general, they have maintained their political independence. The current regime is entirely authoritarian, although it has reached an agreement with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on a schedule for the restoration of constitutional governance.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

## Transformation Status

### I. Political Transformation

#### 1 | Stateness

Since 2006, there has been a continuous decline in the ability of the state to maintain a monopoly on the use of force throughout Burkina Faso's national territory. This decline reached its lowest point during the period under review, with the state now on the verge of territorial disintegration. The primary cause of this deterioration is the significant increase in terrorist attacks since 2016. In fact, from 2019 onward, Burkina Faso has surpassed neighboring Mali and Niger in terms of the number of incidents and victims, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, indicating a shift in terrorist activity.

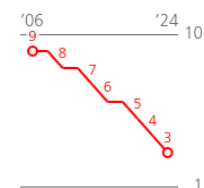
As a result, the fragility of state institutions has dramatically increased. In 2020, all border provinces were classified as "red," indicating they are no-go areas. Previously, such a situation had only existed in the Nord and Est regions. Entire areas, including important cities such as Djibo, Falagountou, Solenzo and Titao, have been cut off from central government control. This pervasive insecurity and the constant terrorist attacks have also spread from Burkina Faso to coastal states. Main roads and bridges on the Plateau-Central, such as those between Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, have repeatedly been temporarily cut off.

In response to these challenges, the government has relinquished part of its monopoly on the use of force, allowing jihadist groups affiliated with ISGM or al-Qaeda to operate in certain areas. Approximately 40% of the country is no longer under the control of the state. In these areas, self-defense groups and traditional hunting groups of various origins, such as the Koglweogo and Dozo, as well as the Volontaires pour la Defense de la Patrie (VDP), the national militia, play a role in maintaining social order. However, unlike the jihadist groups in the region, these nonstate groups do not seek to replace the state.

Question  
Score

Monopoly on the  
use of force

3



While originally a construct of the French colonial administration, the state of Burkina Faso enjoyed unanimous acceptance as a nation-state until recently. The numerical and political dominance of one ethnic group, the Mossi, did not significantly affect this situation. On the contrary, the country was well-known for customary modes of friendly interaction between various ethnic groups. This started to change with the emergence of several internal armed groups, especially jihadist groups, and other criminal gangs acting under their name. Repeated terror attacks have contributed to the stigmatization of particular ethnic groups. Widespread propaganda on social media now openly accuses the Fulbe (Peulh) ethnic group of colluding with foreigners and of being the mainstay of terrorism. This has led to them being targeted by state armed forces and self-defense groups. Ethnic stigmatization threatens the cohesion of Burkina Faso as a nation-state, but society has shown resilience in countering attempts to undermine social cohesion.

Unlike neighboring Mali and other countries in West Africa, Burkina Faso is firmly established as a secular state and is not contested as such by any established political actor. One main explanation is the traditional plurality of religious beliefs in the country and the high degree of religious tolerance.

According to Afrobarometer data, as of 2019, 37.5% of the adult population supports Christian beliefs, 58.1% supports Muslim beliefs and 4.4% supports “other,” which arguably corresponds to animist beliefs. Other sources provide a slightly lower estimate for the Christian population and higher estimates for the other two main religious groups. Historically, religious authorities from animist, Christian or Muslim backgrounds have played a crucial role in local conflict resolution, although certain studies suggest that their influence has waned due to a reduction in available resources (e.g., land) and the recent escalation of conflicts.

Indeed, there is one strong group of actors that fundamentally undermine the traditional religious tolerance in Burkina Faso – armed Islamist groups that call into question the entire state and society. For the most part, these groups are affiliated with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which falls under the broader umbrella of the Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP) or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

In the regions under their control, they have started to establish elements of a proto-state, mainly in the Liptako-Gourma triangle. This includes an idiosyncratic Islamic economic, tax and judicial system. Consequently, the extensive spread of Islamists in 2021/2022 has led to a significant lowering of the BTI score in this dimension. They are a vector of various internal and external origins.

As both AQIM, originating from Algeria, and ISGS, originating from the Menaka region in Mali, are Salafist international outfits that gained prominence after the downfall of Colonel Ghaddafi, it would seem that Islamist terrorism in Burkina Faso is primarily an external threat. However, this perception is somewhat misleading. In

#### State identity

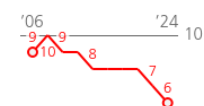
8



1

#### No interference of religious dogmas

6



1

fact, the first significant internal group of violent Islamists to emerge since 2010 was Ansaroul Islam, led by Ibrahim Malam Dicko, in Djibo and parts of Soum province. Although formally associated with JNIM (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, or Support Group for Islam and Muslims) and thus with al-Qa'ida, it would be incorrect to disregard it as a locally grown religious organization, given what is known about the group's history.

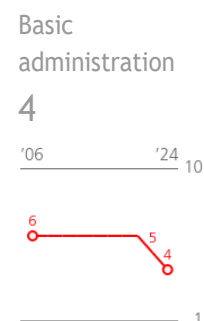
Under Malam Dicko, it emerged as a sect criticizing vividly the traditional Muslim Confréries in the area, preaching a more frugal and radical version of Islam. Dicko was influenced and taught by Amadou Koufa, founder of the Katiba Matina in neighboring Mali. Ansaroul Islam is the most prominent case of internally grown Islamist violence. Initially, Ansaroul Islam targeted uniformed local state representatives, before turning against state agents at large and then against non-cooperative parts of the wider population.

Although groups like Ansaroul Islam have not yet managed to firmly establish their own administration on Burkinabè soil, they have de facto led to the emergence of a hybrid political system— in part secular, in part under Salafist rule.

After several rounds of decentralization since the 1990s, Burkina Faso has been subdivided into 13 regions, each headed by an appointed governor. These regions have been further divided into 45 provinces, which are run by appointed high commissioners. One level below the provinces are the 351 departments, which are administered by prefects. These prefectures are identical to urban and rural municipalities, known as communes, that were created by the decentralization laws. Since the municipal elections of 2006, democratically elected structures with mayors and municipal councilors have existed throughout the entire country.

Decentralization experts have convincingly argued that the three-level decentralized structure comprises one administrative level too many for a country with scarce fiscal means and that the three-pronged hierarchy of government-appointed administrators was intended by the Compaoré regime to stifle the devolution of power. In any case, the devolution of social services (e.g., education, health care, electricity and water) was deficient even before a number of provinces were completely deserted by public agents due to the deterioration in the security situation.

World Bank data does not include a score for safely managed access to basic public infrastructure. According to World Bank data from 2020, Burkina Faso had achieved at least basic access to water for nearly half of its population, and for approximately one-fifth of its population in terms of sanitation and electricity. In the Afrobarometer 2019 survey, it was reported that in Burkina Faso, 81% of the population had no access to electricity, while 5% had intermittent access – the lowest recorded percentage among the 13 African countries included in the survey.





Two main observations are in order. First, basic access in these areas is not provided solely by public authorities. Second, the trend is declining. It can be safely assumed that coverage deteriorated further during the period under review. Together with the extremely low level of public infrastructure by global standards, with similar figures for other services, this explains the disenchantment of large parts of the population with the state as it presently is.

## 2 | Political Participation

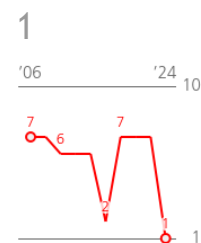
General elections for the parliament and president were last held in Burkina Faso on November 22, 2020. On that day, incumbent President Roch Marc Kaboré was re-elected, but his Mouvement pour le peuple et le progrès did not secure a majority. The elections were considered “general” only in accessible areas of the national territory. Furthermore, inaccessible areas of the country have a higher concentration of marginalized population groups, who were excluded from the electoral process. However, in places where ballots could be counted, there were no widespread complaints regarding fairness or freedom.

A key political problem is the fundamental meaning of “free and fair” elections in Burkina Faso, as with other countries in the Central Sahel. Election rounds in Burkina Faso merely provide formal legitimacy to the same elite groups that were in power under President Compaoré and, even prior to that, during the interrupted four years under President Sankara. Since these enduring elite groups do not offer any real political alternatives in terms of addressing persistent poverty, corruption and, ultimately, terrorist threats, this system can be accurately described as a “facade democracy” according to the literature, serious voices within civil society and the media.

This problem is of significant importance for the international community when considering a way out of what occurred in 2022. The two military coups on 24 January and 30 September 2022 were not tainted by much bloodshed. Although they saw the ousting of the president, government and parliament, the military juntas describe themselves as transitional governments. However, the question is transition to what? Ibrahim Traoré, the current president of Burkina Faso, has agreed with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on a transition timetable running through 2024. The Western international community, led by ECOWAS, the African Union, European Union and the United States, has unanimously asked for a “return” to democracy by fair and free elections. Yet, given facade democracy was the main feature of the earlier system, a simple demand for a “return” would obviously fall short of the essential requirements for a democratic system overhaul.

The status of democracy in Burkina Faso, as measured by scores for political participation, will thus have to focus in the coming years on new ways of local and national participation introduced during the transition period. Additionally, it should

Free and fair elections



focus on a politically meaningful reconfiguration of the political party landscape, which has thus far been largely devoid of meaningful political manifestos. Furthermore, priority should be given to the re-integration of the “lost” territories into a joint political process through local consultations – rather than relying primarily on rapid formal elections, which are anyway restricted to the Central Plateau and some surrounding areas.

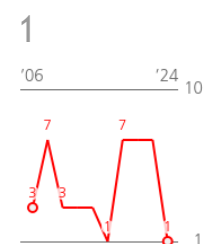
During the periods of civilian rule, democratically elected representatives were able to rule effectively. The powerful trade unions from the small formal sector, traditional ethnic rulers (in particular the Mossi king) and the military wielded considerable power but did not constitute veto powers. This relatively orderly pattern was repeatedly pushed aside when the military seized power. Following the formally free but not inclusive elections at the end of 2020, a new democratic, albeit ineffective, government was formed in 2021. However, the two military coups of 2022 have changed the situation fundamentally. How effectively the second transitional government appointed by the army will govern remains uncertain.

During the period under the review, the mixed long-term trend in Burkina Faso has continued. The right to form a political party or civil society group is guaranteed and is reflected in the country’s rich organizational landscape. Associations and/or popular assemblies, which are formally guaranteed by the constitution, are in general not prohibited and have exercised decisive power at key points in the country’s political history – most recently, in 2014 and 2015. Representatives of civil society, however, have been repeatedly harassed, intimidated or arrested, especially under the Compaoré regime.

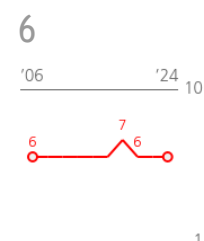
The period under review was no exception to this empirical rule. The two successive coups d’état in 2022 placed association and assembly rights in jeopardy, although so far drastic restrictions have not occurred. On the contrary, popular assemblies in the capital city have repeatedly expressed support for the military juntas. Assembly rights for ethnic minorities such as the Fulani are not guaranteed, especially in peripheral regions.

Beyond its vocal civil society, Burkina Faso enjoys an extremely rich landscape of written and broadcast press organizations, along with a series of internet platforms, including respected outlets such as Fasonet and Burkina24. This abundance of media is in stark contrast to Burkina’s status as a very low-income country. Freedom of expression is largely guaranteed, as freedom of the press and the right to information are enshrined in the 1991 constitution. However, violations of these rights have occurred, as evidenced by the prominent murder of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998. According to Reporters Without Borders, Burkina Faso is ranked 41st in the world, one place above the United States, in terms of press freedom. While it has slipped in the rankings compared to previous years, this still represents a relatively high score. In Africa, only Seychelles, Namibia, South Africa and Côte d’Ivoire rank higher.

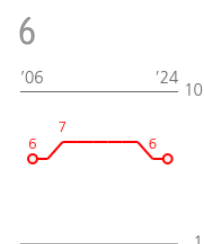
Effective power to govern



Association / assembly rights



Freedom of expression



The position of respectability is at risk. Even prior to the military coups of 2022, the security situation was deteriorating, leading the authorities to restrict freedom of expression. This was done through a change in the criminal code in 2019, which criminalized the dissemination of information on military operations in order to “not undermine troop morale.” This change allows for prison sentences of up to 10 years as well as heavy fines. During the period under review, foreign journalists were targeted, access to the internet was temporarily suspended and Radio France Internationale was banned within the country. The trajectory of these events remains uncertain.

### 3 | Rule of Law

The political system in Burkina Faso formally relies on an established separation of powers. However, neither parliament – the National Assembly – nor the judiciary have held the executive in check, especially not executives appointed by the military. In fact, the 2015 and 2020 elections were the first in Burkinabè history that were free in the sense that they were not carried out under military influence.

Following the two military coups in 2022, the separation of powers was formally maintained, with a transitional government, a transitional assembly and the judiciary still in place. This notwithstanding, the whole system is now under the exclusive control of the military executive.

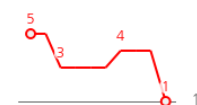
Burkina Faso inherited a judiciary built on the French model and Napoleonic law. In practice, the judiciary is only partially independent, with interference from the executive a historical constant. Corruption is rife, according to the sources cited in this report, and corrupt officials from the civilian and military executive have rarely been put on trial. Lengthy procedures add to the difficulty of enforcing one’s rights.

Given the absence of sources of income, other than trade, which would allow citizens to achieve an income level on par with that of the outgoing colonialists, employment in public service was seen as an option to be exploited for illicit gains. The renaming of the country in 1984 to Burkina Faso, the “country of honest people,” was not a coincidence, as it carried connotations of anti-colonialism and anti-corruption. However, success in combating corruption has remained very limited, especially after the downfall of President Sankara’s regime in 1987.

Public officials can be sued for the abuse of power or for other inappropriate actions. Leading figures in the government, however, are rarely subject to such measures. In general, lawsuits against public officials are only conducted in cases of disloyalty, or

Separation of powers  
1

'06 '24 10



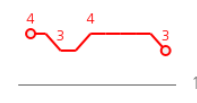
Independent judiciary  
4

'06 '24 10



Prosecution of office abuse  
3

'06 '24 10



if public pressure requires the government to offer up a political scapegoat. Most politicians enjoy de facto immunity from prosecution.

Fighting rampant political and bureaucratic corruption, including the criminal prosecution of corrupt officeholders, has been one of the public's main demands for many years and that demand continued during the period under review. Isolated cases of corruption are prosecuted, but often without consequence. Corruption is widespread in all sectors of the economy and on all government levels. Officeholders in the municipalities are regularly associated with bribery and favoritism.

In 2015, the government passed new anti-corruption legislation. However, enforcement is weak, due to poor access to information, impunity, clientelist relationships and ill-equipped institutions. Furthermore, people who witness corruption are afraid to report it. They worry about losing their jobs and being socially excluded, but also more serious consequences.

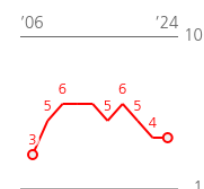
Thanks to the well-established national anti-corruption network, Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption, there is a considerable amount of information available about the abuse of office and corruption in Burkina Faso, or at least about the public's perception of it.

In its report on December 7, 2022, on the state of public corruption in Burkina Faso during 2021, Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption delivered a damning assessment. Based on a sample of 3,000 Burkinabè interviewed in 2021, 85.23% consider corruption frequent or very frequent, against 81.95% in 2020 and 75.7% in 2019. More than a third have personally been exposed to acts of corruption or have witnessed. A synthetic index of both indicators puts corruption levels in Burkina Faso at an all-time high of 71% in 2021. The three most corrupt public agencies over the last three years were consistently the municipal police, the customs services and the national police (the second of three police bodies in the country). That the customs authority features second on the list has a bearing on the realities of "free" cross-border trade, too.

Civil rights are guaranteed by the constitution and law. Since the re-establishment of formal democratic rules in 2015, basic civil rights have been respected in principle, although ethnic discrimination and violence started to rapidly increase around this same juncture. During the period under review, the state of security in Burkina Faso has deteriorated and the country's political system has begun to disintegrate. During this period, the political situation has been marked by two distinct periods. The Freedom in the World 2022 Report defined Burkina Faso in 2021 as "partly free" with a score of 53 out of 100 points, with the country ranking among the middle tier globally. However, few observers would assign a similar ranking to Burkina Faso in 2022, as the country is now considered to be "unfree."

#### Civil rights

4



The analytically interesting question concerns the actual meaning of “partly free” or “unfree.” For example, civil and human rights organizations Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l’Homme et des Peuples and the Collectif contre l’Impunité et la Stigmatisation des Communautés continue to openly denounce acts of violence by security forces against civilians into the year 2023 with detailed and thus far unhampered reporting. The situation remains ambiguous.

#### 4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

International observers, including Freedom House, accredited the 2015 and 2020 elections with having laid the foundations for the continued development of democratic institutions. This occurred during a period in which the decentralized institutions, established after several rounds of tedious decentralization, had already progressively weakened.

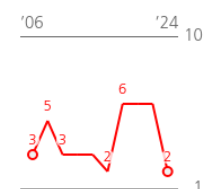
During the period under review, the foundations of the central state institutions crumbled. Most analyses concurred that these institutions, at all levels, had been largely inefficient and could not be considered democratic in substance. In late 2022, the Assemblée Législative de Transition with members hand-picked by the military rulers was appointed, along with a number of parliamentary commissions. The assembly apparently enjoys some political leeway. Most constitutional regional and local organs have been dissolved, while the central judiciary and administration remain in place. Although the military rulers have promised a return to constitutional order, the development of substantial democracy in Burkina Faso, distinct from the now defunct “facade democracy,” will, if at all, return in a very different and thus far largely unknown institutional format.

Two observations have to be carefully distinguished in order to understand the state of democracy in Burkina Faso. On the one hand, most people strongly agree with democracy and multiparty rule as the preferred mode of governance. Acceptance of democratic institutions ranks high, especially after the semi-authoritarian rule of President Compaoré had been pushed aside in 2014/15. On the other hand, the de facto legitimacy of democratic institutions has crumbled as the government’s ability to contain insecurity and to maintain basic public service delivery in all 13 regions has declined.

The absence of the state at various levels has fundamentally undermined its legitimacy. How far this will continue to translate into tacit public support for the junta as a transitional form of governance is largely dependent on its capacity to address the aforementioned challenges as well as new ones (e.g., a food crisis and rising inflation).

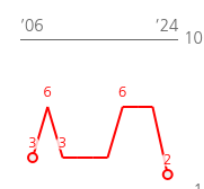
Performance of democratic institutions

2



Commitment to democratic institutions

2



## 5 | Political and Social Integration

Since the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, Burkina Faso has had a multiparty system. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of political parties rose from 90 to 156. However, during this period, the system was largely dominated by Compaoré's presidency and the ruling Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès. In 2014, a split within the ruling party led to the departure of a significant chunk of the old elite to the Mouvement pour le peuple et le progrès, under the direction of Roch Marc Kaboré, which became the largest party until the suspension of the constitution in 2022.

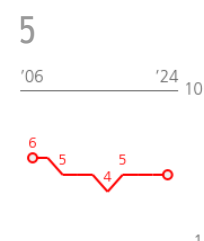
It is virtually impossible to distinguish the political parties along ideological lines or programmatic differences. Essentially, political parties are vehicles of political patronage, not organizers of political discourse.

Despite the dismal performance of the Burkinabè parties, the majority of the population firmly adheres to a multiparty system. Afrobarometer, which covers 39 countries and 75% of Africa's population, found in its survey of 2019 that a large majority (79%) of Burkinabè reject one-party rule. By contrast, less than half of respondents (42.7%) strongly oppose military rule (i.e., disagree that the army should intervene in ruling the country) – a significant decrease compared to 74% in the previous survey. This is probably explained by the worsening security situation in the years up to 2019 and would arguably come out even stronger if the survey had been conducted in the period under review.

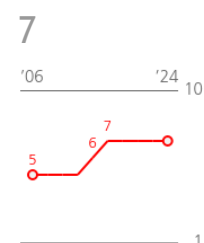
Burkina Faso continues to be characterized by a wide range of organized interest groups, which are not very confrontational and possess limited financial resources. Since 2014, the influence of self-defense groups such as the Koglweogo has grown, with these groups emerging as local protection groups against theft, highway robbery and inefficient local justice. These groups have grown into widely accepted but informal institutions that flank the state. As far as is known, they only operate where communities accept them.

In the past, groups such as the Koglweogo have polarized widespread herder-farmer conflicts. However, since armed Islamist groups have established themselves in several rural regions of the country, the self-defense groups are often, together with the VDP state militia, the only source of protection against terrorist attacks. Armed Islamist groups and the intercommunal conflicts they fuel are polarizing the once relatively (though not thoroughly) peaceful landscape of rural interest groups.

Party system



Interest groups



In general terms, 70% of Burkina Faso's citizens prefer democracy over any other form of government. The experience of the 27-year semi-autocratic regime under President Compaoré and the tumultuous years of 2014 and 2015 – in which the country saw a return to formal democratic rule, but without a significant improvement in overall governance – makes this preference for democratic norms all the more remarkable. This explains why the two consecutive juntas in 2022 had to present themselves as transitional governments, albeit with a contested timeline for the return to constitutional order. According to local sources, it appears that the majority of Burkinabè reject a specific type of formal democracy, particularly at decentralized levels of the state. However, they do not reject democracy as a whole.

Given dissociation as a pervasive pattern of Burkinabè society over recent years, it is extremely important to have up-to-date information on the level of trust among social strata of all kinds. The 2019 Afrobarometer survey remains the most recent survey on the matter. Unfortunately, the survey does not fully cover the latest rise in terrorist incidents and increasing interethnic cleavages. What is more, the 2019 results were already fairly contradictory, as evidenced by public approval for democracy compared to military rule. In general terms, 87.1% of Burkinabè feel that one has to be distrustful vis-à-vis others. Yet, the majority of respondents trust public actors and institutions, above all traditional leaders. Political parties in power and opposition are the one clear exception with respondents split in half between those having full or partial trust in political parties and those who do not.

The most salient answer relates to neighborhood. When asked whether they would like to have somebody from a different ethnic group as a neighbor, 72.6% answered in the affirmative and 23.7% considered this to be of no importance. Answers are conspicuously the same for rural and urban respondents. This reflects Burkina Faso's reputation of being a country of good social relations, despite the political upheavals.

The rise of armed local protection groups, and inter- and intra-communal clashes between 2018 and 2020 convey a different narrative. Furthermore, Islamist groups strategically try to foster mistrust within and between communities. It is fair to predict that retroactive data for the period under review will show a fall in overall trust within Burkina Faso society, especially in regions under the constant threat of terror. At the same time, the persistent activities of – often multiethnic and multi-religious – civil society organizations and associations also reflect an active resistance to these trends.

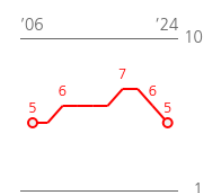
Approval of  
democracy

n/a



Social capital

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## II. Economic Transformation

### 6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Burkina Faso has remained one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. The situation is likely to worsen further with terrorist incursions soaring and the internal displacement of people skyrocketing.

According to World Bank estimates, GDP per capita (at 2015 constant U.S. dollars) stood at \$740 in 2021, well below the upper threshold for a low-income country, although the figure doubles or triples when expressed in purchasing power terms. In terms of absolute poverty, as measured by the upward-adjusted poverty line of \$3.65 (2017 PPP) income per day, an alarming three-fifths (59.8%) of the population were considered poor in 2018. Measured against the older poverty line of \$1.90 per day, which is used as the national poverty line, two-fifths (41.4%) were considered extremely poor – although this modest line is no longer appropriate for Burkina Faso and other countries.

Poverty and social exclusion are extensive and ingrained both in terms of quantity and quality. According to the UNDP's 2022 Human Development Report, Burkina Faso scores 0.449 in the HDI, placing it 184th out of 191 countries. While this ranking is slightly higher than that of neighboring Sahelian countries – Mali, Central African Republic, Niger, Chad and South Sudan – Burkina Faso's HDI score declined by 30% over the decade to 2021, when adjustments were made to account for inequality in the score's dimensions. Additionally, the country ranks at the bottom of the World Bank's Human Capital Index, which assesses factors such as skills, health, knowledge and resilience as components of social capital. Specifically, Burkina Faso ranks 144th out of 157 countries in this index. On a positive note, life expectancy in the country has increased to 69 years, indicating some improvements in public health.

The country's Gini coefficient stood at 47.3 in 2018 (most recent figure), indicating a worsening, albeit not dramatic, level of inequality. In the context of extreme poverty and pervasive inequalities, social exclusion is severe and structurally reinforced, particularly in rural areas and for women. The Gender Inequality Index value was low at 0.621 in 2021.

This reflects social facts such as the significant differential in education. Burkina Faso has not achieved universal primary education, even nominally. While gross rates of schooling reached a relatively high 87% in 2019/20, the literacy rate for women aged 15 or over was only 24.7%, compared to a still low rate of 35.4% for men (with an overall rate of 29.7%) in 2019. These and other gender disparities are likely to have

Question  
Score

Socioeconomic  
barriers

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further worsened with the recent closure of 4,000 schools and other public facilities in all peripheral regions of the country following the crisis in 2019.

Similarly, it must be expected that any measure of social exclusion on ethnic, racial and religious grounds would show a worsening trend, with the alarming growth in discrimination against Fulbe (Peulh) and Salafist Islamic beliefs.

As social indicators remain weak, Burkina Faso is unlikely to achieve any of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	16178.2	17933.6	19737.6	<b>18884.6</b>
GDP growth	%	5.7	1.9	6.9	<b>1.5</b>
Inflation (CPI)	%	-3.2	1.9	3.7	<b>14.3</b>
Unemployment	%	4.7	5.1	5.2	<b>5.2</b>
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	1.0	-0.6	-0.4	<b>0.6</b>
Export growth	%	-1.9	-	-	-
Import growth	%	8.6	-	-	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-523.8	743.2	77.3	-
Public debt	% of GDP	41.5	43.3	55.4	<b>58.3</b>
External debt	\$ M	9156.8	9757.1	10296.8	-
Total debt service	\$ M	2314.8	2166.8	496.0	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-2.9	-5.2	-6.2	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	15.5	13.3	15.9	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	20.2	-	-	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	5.4	5.2	5.2	<b>5.3</b>
Public health spending	% of GDP	2.3	2.9	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	0.2	0.2	0.3	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	2.2	2.2	2.4	<b>3.1</b>

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

## 7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Imperfect markets are a general characteristic of least-developed countries, irrespective of market regulation. Market competition in Burkina Faso mainly suffers from the very small size of the domestic economy, although Burkina Faso is party to the wider markets of ECOWAS and Francophone Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA). The size of the domestic market is below the minimum efficient scale for modern enterprises in many industrial branches. Both the (revised) ECOWAS and UEMOA treaties foresee the creation of an integrated economic space, allowing persons to move, settle and establish businesses freely, and for the free movement of capital. Various protocols have enshrined important steps in that direction, but full cross-border mobility remains hampered by irregular practices and national rulebooks. In Burkina Faso, foreign investment is regulated by the Investment Code of 2018, which determines investor obligations as well as incentives for the covered sectors (essentially wider industry). In contrast, the full currency convertibility of the CFA franc is one of the big advantages of the UEMOA regime.

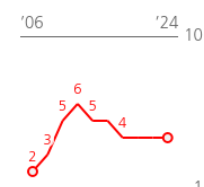
Informal employment is pervasive in Burkina Faso, as in most comparative countries. According to the latest International Labour Organization (ILO) figure from 2018, informality stands at 95.7%.

The Heritage Foundation scores the degree of economic freedom in Burkina Faso an improved 58.3 out of 100 in 2022, ranking Burkina Faso 13th among 47 sub-Saharan countries. However, this assessment cannot be considered realistic by any standard. The informal rules that have governed agriculture and livestock production, and the wider market are breaking down. Additionally, Burkina Faso lacks a modern industrial sector, and the country's important artisanal and industrial gold mining sectors are undermined by insecurity. Many gold mines are located in areas threatened by Islamist groups and do not provide the necessary infrastructure to guarantee the safety of miners. Furthermore, the international mining industry reaps significant profits while offering little to no compensation to the local communities.

Since 1987, governments have remained committed to a market economy and competition. The law governing competition has been in effect since April 27, 2017, and is still in place. However, we are not aware of any instances of efforts to establish a cartel being prosecuted or hindered by the authorities. The country is not a member of the International Competition Network. After the sweeping privatizations in the 1990s, the government retained the authority to control prices for essential products and maintained monopolies through key state-owned enterprises. These enterprises include the agencies for electricity and water provision, the state oil importing company SONABHY, and SOFITEX. The remaining state monopolies primarily exist to subsidize prices. SONABHY, for example, reduced fuel prices during the period under review, which resulted in a significant debt burden for both the company and the government treasury.

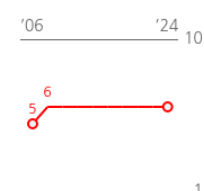
Market organization

4



Competition policy

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In the crucial cotton sector, SOFITEX – the central economic center of the cotton value chain – has remained state-owned, while ginneries and other commercial actors in the chain have been privatized. During the review period, the government continued to assist cotton producers by subsidizing prices for fertilizers and seeds, supported by the international certification program Cotton Made in Africa. Ongoing subsidies must be understood partly in relation to subsidies for cotton producers in other African countries, but especially in light of the large-scale subsidies paid to U.S. cotton farmers under the U.S. Farm Act.

Monopolistic structures arise primarily from a limited number of market actors in modern production sectors and from long-standing import monopolies maintained by French companies, with France being the former colonial power.

Burkina Faso, like most other African countries, is no longer a protected economy. This is due to regional economic integration, liberalization under structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s, and additional bi-regional or bilateral trade agreements.

According to the latest WTO country profile, the average MFN applied tariff rate for imports stood at 12.1% in 2021, dropping below 10% when trade-weighted. Overall, this trade regime must be considered liberal.

Starting with the formal external trade tariff schedule, the government has only limited sovereignty, as Burkina Faso is a member of two important regional economic communities in West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). Membership in the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which is formally recognized by the African Union, does not have any traceable economic importance. ECOWAS is officially designated as a customs union, while UEMOA operates as both a customs and monetary union. Both regional communities have now harmonized their external tariffs, which allows member countries some limited policy flexibility to protect infant industries but overall leans toward a liberal trade regime.

According to the latest edition of the Africa Regional Integration Index, Burkina Faso is ranked second in ECOWAS for its integration efforts, with Côte d'Ivoire ranking first. It can be assumed that the actual tariff rates largely follow the ECOWAS-UEMOA common external tariff. However, in daily customs practice, most if not all African countries rely on a wide range of non-tariff measures, some of which function as trade barriers at borders and behind them. A World Bank study conducted in the early 2000s identified about 35 roadblocks manned by different agencies that trucks have to stop at between Abidjan and Ouagadougou. It is unlikely that the situation has changed. Influential economic actors, such as producer groups or individual firms, are often granted special protection or subsidies. These discretionary actions result in a foreign trade regime that is characterized by repeated exceptions and exclusions from liberalization. As a result, both ECOWAS and UEMOA resemble more of a preferential trade area than a free trade area or customs union.

Liberalization of  
foreign trade

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Burkina Faso, as a member country of regional economic communities, still has a way to go to regularize the different – and, on average, modest – import tariff rates. As with other African countries, the African continent accounts for only 10%–15% of the country’s exports, while the bulk of its exports – cotton and gold – are traded extra-regionally, with the rest of the world. As Burkina Faso has signed and ratified the acts of the African Continental Free Trade Area, it can be expected that 90% of the country’s intra-African trade will be further liberalized with the implementation of the free trade area. Related econometric estimates for export and GDP growth are pointing in a positive direction.

However, with the rise of terrorist incidents in all frontier areas and attacks on the main overland roads another significant barrier to trade has emerged, which risks compounding the challenges to trade Burkina Faso faces as a landlocked country.

The financial sector, under the tight control of the WAEMU central bank – the Banque Centrale des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest – is small but basically sound. According to World Bank data, the banking sub-sector is composed of 15 banks, four non-bank financial institutions, 16 insurance companies, two pension funds and 33 microfinance institutions. The sector is concentrated, with the top five banks accounting for 72% of sector assets. The banking system remains shallow, as it caters mainly to large borrowers in the formal sector, holds a significant amount of government bonds purchased on the WAEMU securities market and provides some consumer credit. This explains the “lack of access to finance” as the main constraint for SMEs.

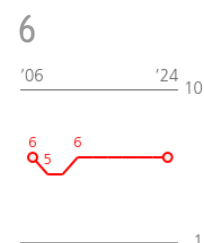
The sector has survived the COVID-19 pandemic well, supported by the easing of regulations by the Banque Centrale des États de l’Afrique de l’Ouest.

## 8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

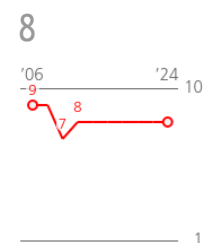
As a member of the West African Monetary and Economic Union (UEMOA/WAEMU), Burkina Faso lacks autonomy over its monetary and fiscal policies.

The common currency used in the region, the CFA franc, is pegged to the euro, with the peg guaranteed by the French treasury. While the Central Bank of West African States (the Banque Centrale des États de l’Afrique de l’Ouest) maintains some independence for certain policy measures, its exchange rate policy is heavily influenced by the European Central Bank. Thus, UEMOA member states pursue exchange rate targeting by definition. Since 1994, the CFA franc’s parity with the French franc and later the euro has remained unchanged. However, the CFA franc has experienced the effects of a strong euro, arguably becoming overvalued. Conversely, the CFA franc experienced the effects of the euro’s depreciation against the U.S. dollar in later years. Throughout the decades of the CFA franc regimes, it

Banking system



Monetary stability



has remained controversial whether the undeniable advantage of monetary stability outweighs the abandonment of monetary and fiscal sovereignty, which reduces the economic policy space.

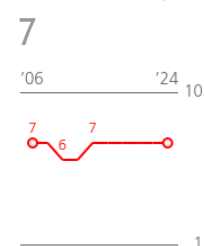
As a systemic consequence, consumer price inflation and its volatility have remained very limited over recent decades and can be expected to stay that way as long as CPI depends on money supply. However, the National Statistical Institute (INSD) revised the latest available CPI figure upward to 3.9% (2021). The substantial underlying factors, namely food supply shortages and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to drive inflation higher in 2022 and 2023.

Burkina Faso's treasury has limited policy space regarding fiscal policy, although national treasury bonds can and have been issued. As much as the Maastricht criteria matter for fiscal discipline in the European Union, similar UEMOA criteria matter for Burkina Faso. Due to the sharp increase in defense-related expenditures (20% of total expenditure), the high public wage bill and increasing humanitarian needs, the fiscal deficit increased to 5.7% of GDP in 2020 and 6.0% of GDP in 2021. With an inflation rate (CPI) near 4% in 2021, the country exceeded the 3% criteria for both the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio and inflation rate, though not dramatically. However, according to national figures (INSD), the inflation rate soared to 17.6% in late 2022.

Despite all the challenges, Burkina Faso remains well below the UEMOA public debt threshold of 70% of GDP, with a debt level of 55% at the end of 2021. As a result, Burkina Faso has been unaffected by the recent debt crisis in Africa. These figures demonstrate Burkina Faso's significant level of convergence within UEMOA. However, the preliminary 2022 INSD figures reveal concerning trends, including a surge in the inflation rate and a substantial decline in real economic growth. Stemming from unfavorable global conditions and the deterioration of the domestic situation, these developments have created the conditions for a perfect storm in the country.

It must be acknowledged that the entire architecture of the UEMOA and its currency, the CFA franc, which is firmly pegged to the euro, have faced significant criticism from West African scholars and advocacy groups during the period under review. This criticism stems from the strong control exerted by the French treasury, which limits the policy options available to West African national banks and finance ministries in their pursuit of development-oriented approaches. In recent instances of unrest in capital cities throughout the Sahel, CFA franc banknotes have been burned as symbols of the region's ongoing dependence on France. While this index reflects a high score for the country's prudent monetary and fiscal policies, observers within the region may argue the opposite.

Fiscal stability



## 9 | Private Property

Protection of private property is weak in the rural sector, particularly in relation to statutory land tenure and traditional land control. Several decades of large-scale land acquisition and non-formal traditional land control have created contradictions. To address this issue, the government, with substantial donor support, especially from U.S. sources, has initiated a program to grant land titles under the 2009 Rural Land Tenure Law. Thousands of title deeds have been issued in pilot districts. However, the Office National du Foncier au Burkina Faso's coverage remains partial.

The judicial system is formally independent but highly inefficient due to lengthy legal procedures. Additionally, throughout Burkina's history, the judiciary has faced pressure from the executive and corruption. Corruption and impunity are widespread, particularly within the three police corps. Generally, anti-corruption laws are ineffective. Although the High Authority for State Control and Anti-Corruption was established in 2007, it was not until 2015, under the new political regime, that the body gained administrative and financial autonomy, as well as new responsibilities. Significant results have yet to be observed.

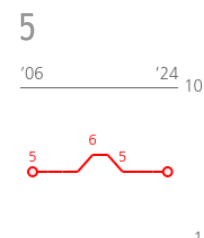
The most recent Enterprise Survey of the World Bank is from 2019. The survey covered 394 firms, with almost two-thirds of them categorized as small (five to 19 employees), 60 labeled as large firms with over 100 employees and the remaining categorized as medium firms.

As the World Bank's Doing Business Report series was discontinued in September 2021, other indicators must be used to assess the business climate and private sector dynamics. The World Bank's alternative Entrepreneurship Database provides a score for the latest available year, 2018, indicating a remarkable 3,416 new limited liability companies, serving as a proxy for the formal sector. The new business density, which measures business dynamics, is 0.33 per 1,000 working people – well within the African average.

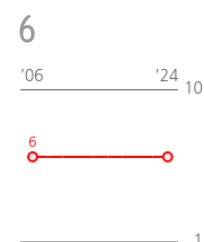
The national Statistical Yearbook (2022) contains more recent data for 2021 and presents a sobering account. Of the total 16,890 enterprises, half (8,043) are engaged in commerce, 276 in industry, 7,569 in various services and the remaining 1,002 in artisan industries. Based on the earlier counts, it can be inferred that the vast majority of these enterprises are micro businesses. The number of firms in the industrial sector has decreased by over 50% since 2018, likely reflecting the ongoing crisis.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the fact that the country is at war, some new industrial undertakings (e.g., in pharmaceuticals and textiles) have been launched during the review period and are supported by the government.

Property rights



Private enterprise



## 10 | Welfare Regime

In Burkina Faso, social safety nets provided by public authorities are extremely limited. The unique Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale (CNSS), which primarily caters to employees in the public and formal private sectors, covers only a small minority of the working population. As of 2021, the country surpassed half a million individuals (516,230) covered by social security (INSD Annuaire Statistique 2021), but less than 3% of the population received social security benefits in 2019. The Agence nationale pour l'emploi (ANPE) registers jobseekers but does not offer unemployment benefits. In this regard, Burkina Faso reflects the common scenario of limited social security systems in Africa.

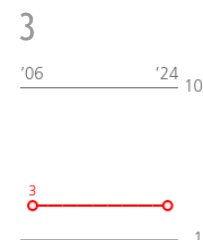
Historically, cash transfers have been limited to donor projects, specifically the Programmes de Travaux Publics à Haute Intensité de Main d'Oeuvre, which were initially piloted under the Sankara regime and could be of significant importance in addressing youth unemployment – one of the internal root causes of the current turmoil.

Since 2014, Burkina Faso has participated in the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP), which is managed by the World Bank and co-funded by France, Germany, Denmark and the United Kingdom. The program is designed to support the development and implementation of adaptive social protection systems in six Sahelian countries. According to the World Bank, Burkina Faso's SASPP activities are based on the national Social Safety Net Project, known locally as Burkina-Naong-Sa Ya. The objective of the project is to establish an adaptive safety net system, and increase access for poor and vulnerable households, providing cash transfers and supporting public works, among other activities. The project aims to reach at least 1.2 million individuals and, according to World Bank statistics, it has already reached about one million in 2022. Funding for the project is still entirely dependent on donors and a comprehensive national system has not yet been implemented.

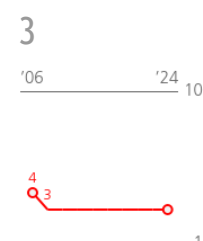
The previous editions of the BTI consistently reported a significant lack of equality of opportunity for women and members of ethnic or religious groups in Burkina Faso. The country has one of the lowest literacy rates worldwide, with only 39.3% for the overall population and 31.0% for women in 2018. The gross enrollment ratio in education indicates that 92.6% of children are enrolled in primary education, 40.6% in secondary education and only 7.8% in tertiary education.

While the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for gross enrollment ratio is 1 at the primary and 1.1 at the secondary level, it drops to 0.6 at the tertiary level. This suggests that girls face greater disadvantages in accessing educational opportunities at the tertiary level. Considering the current crisis, it is highly likely that enrollment figures have

Social safety nets



Equal opportunity





decreased significantly, with girls being disproportionately affected. Furthermore, the ethnic disparities in these figures may have widened.

In terms of female participation in the labor force, women accounted for 45.3% of the total labor force in 2022. However, inequalities and disparities persist across various sectors in Burkina Faso.

## 11 | Economic Performance

The economy of Burkina Faso is characterized by its resilience. Despite facing political challenges with approximately 40% of the country no longer under central government control, economic indicators show a surprisingly positive performance on average.

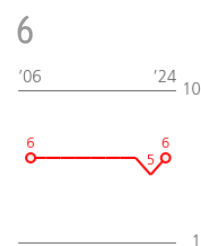
The primary source of growth and employment figures is the National Institute for Statistics and Demography (INSD). According to the INSD, the economy experienced a strong recovery in 2021, with nominal GDP of nearly \$20 billion and real GDP growth of 6.9%, equivalent to a growth rate of 4% per capita, reaching a relatively high level of \$2,462 per capita (PPP). This growth can be attributed to the contribution of the extractive industry, as seen in neighboring Mali. These figures are supported by the World Bank's latest update from September 22 (prior to the second coup d'état), which states that growth was driven by a 10% rebound in services and an increase in gold exports. However, a decrease in precipitation led to a decline in agricultural production, resulting in a 4% contraction in the primary sector. The latest INSD figures indicate a stagnation of GDP (0.4%) in the third quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, and this trend is likely to continue.

How is this reflected in employment opportunities? The low International Labour Organization (ILO)-modeled unemployment figure of 4.8% over the past four years (2017 – 2021) is of limited relevance, as it mainly reflects the situation in the formal sector and not the vast informal sector, which dominates in most African countries. Another INSD figure provides a better portrayal of the labor market discrepancy. In 2021, there were 1,315,534 job applicants for 4,702 positions available in the public sector.

The increase in imports, particularly of hydrocarbons and foodstuffs, widened the current account deficit in 2021 to an estimated 3.0% of GDP, compared to just 0.1% in 2020. However, it was not until late 2022, in the wake of the crisis generated by the war in Ukraine, that the deficit worsened. Overall, the external situation still appeared to be under control.

Beyond these aggregate figures, recent research published in 2022 on structural change and productivity growth in Africa, including Burkina Faso, allows for a deeper analysis of the extent of economic transformation. This research disaggregates

Output strength





GDP per capita performance. Similar to many other sub-Saharan countries, Burkina Faso achieved fairly limited output per worker (or farmer) growth of 2.9% in total from independence to 2015. This indicates that most of the growth was extensive rather than intensive, driven by an increase in the number of people employed, primarily in agriculture. The enhancement of productivity between sectors, with individuals moving from less productive sectors (e.g., agriculture or petty trade) to more advanced ones, accounted for only 1.2% out of the total 2.9%. This means that it was mostly services (with limited productivity) that provided new job opportunities. The gold mining sector, both artisanal and industrial, proved to be the most dynamic, along with some modern services such as finance and communication. The challenge of achieving deeper structural transformation and significantly improving employment opportunities remains.

Burkina Faso has achieved one significant structural transformation thus far. Gold mining, which started modestly in the 1980s, has become the dominant export product in recent years. The INSD dashboard for the third quarter of 2022 provides the following export value figures. In 2005, cotton accounted for 60.4% of total exports, livestock products for 15.3% and gold for a mere 3.9%. However, in 2021, gold is estimated to represent 70.6% of total export value, while cotton decreased to 8.2% and livestock fell to zero. In 2021, Burkina Faso ranked as Africa's fourth largest gold exporter after Ghana, South Africa and Sudan.

This particular structural shift may not necessarily be desirable. While gold, as an easily taxable resource, has provided some fiscal relief, Burkina Faso has become, by any standard, a mineral resource-dependent economy, similar to those relying on oil or diamonds. This exposes the country to the risks traditionally associated with the "resource curse," where the production of other tradable goods, particularly the manufacturing industry or modern agriculture, is unlikely to grow significantly. The only risk that Burkina Faso does not face is the induced overvaluation of the exchange rate, as it already uses the CFA franc.

Lastly, it is important to address data quality. Burkina Faso's economy has seemingly recovered well after the COVID-19 shock, but the methods used by the INSD and international oversight institutions (e.g., the World Bank and IMF) to obtain and validate real economic figures in vast areas to which statistical agents no longer access, except for gold mining enclaves, are not explained. Trend extrapolation or using sentinel sites in the state-controlled territory would be an inappropriate methodological approach, especially when certain commodities such as livestock are disproportionately affected. The apparent disconnect between political and economic data must be critically observed as the crisis unfolds.

## 12 | Sustainability

Since the Sankara years, Burkina Faso authorities have made serious strides toward addressing the wider environmental challenge. President Sankara launched the so-called *Trois Luttés* (Three Battles) against the abusive cutting of wood, bush fires and cattle roaming – with the goal of sensitizing local populations to their own responsibility regarding environmental degradation not only the international community’s responsibility. The program has not been followed-up with the same intensity under subsequent governments, with the exception of donor aid for ingenious low-cost water retention schemes (so-called *diguettes*) and tree-planting schemes. In a new attempt, the government adopted in 2019 the *Stratégie Nationale de Restauration, Conservation et Récupération des Sols* and its action plan (2020 – 2022) to stem soil degradation, the consequence of increasingly irregular rainfall and poorly adapted cultivation techniques. Its operational relevance will largely depend on financial engagements with donors and the political environment in the countryside. Thus, the strategy, which is critical given the high figures for irreversible soil degradation in the country, is in jeopardy.

With a more comprehensive view on sustainability issues, in a 2021 SDG brief, *Afrobarometer* synthesized opinions from 2019 on a number of sustainable development goals. Respondents saw some progress on a remarkable 13 SDGs, although opinions on climate change remained ambiguous. The topic is said to have reached more people, but the understanding of negative climate change effects has apparently even worsened.

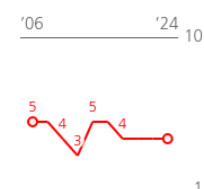
Regarding sustainability issues, however, it must be recalled that 2019 marked a turning point in the recent history of Burkina Faso, with terrorist threats in the country starting to sky-rocket, and the number of victims of terrorism in Burkina Faso for the first time exceeding the number in neighboring Mali and Niger. At the end of 2019, most Burkinabè were likely to respond very differently to numerous questions, in particular the sustainability of the social situation.

Education is widely recognized as a crucial factor for the socioeconomic transformation of a country. The U.N. Education Index provides a measure of education levels by considering the average years of schooling for adults aged 25 and the expected years of schooling for school-age children. Burkina Faso’s score was 0.324 in 2021, with the country ranked the fourth lowest globally, just ahead of neighboring Chad, Mali and Niger, highlighting the regional nature of the challenge.

As a result, the adult literacy rate in Burkina Faso is only 39.3% among the population aged 15 and over, with the country ranked the seventh lowest worldwide in 2018, alongside its Sahelian counterparts. However, there is a positive note in the data from the National Institute for Statistics and Demography (INSD), which shows that the literacy rate has more than doubled since 1994 (18.9%), and among the cohort aged 15–19 in 2018 two-thirds (65.4%) were literate. This suggests a brighter aspect.

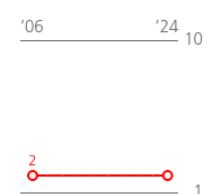
Environmental  
policy

4



Education policy /  
R&D

2



Burkina Faso allocated approximately 5.6% of its GDP to education in the late 2010s, which is a relatively high proportion, although it is important to consider the country's small economic size. On the other hand, research and development (R&D) expenditure is limited, amounting to just 0.2% of GDP. It is worth noting that Burkina Faso has a diverse tertiary education landscape, with nearly 200,000 students enrolled in the 2020/2021 academic year.

However, the positive long-term trend in education, particularly among younger cohorts, has been disrupted by the closure of approximately 4,000 out of a total of 15,077 primary schools nationwide due to insecurity. This setback severely hampers the country's potential for further socioeconomic transformation and modernization.

## Governance

### I. Level of Difficulty

Burkina Faso faces severe challenges with regard to a number of indicators: as such, the country experiences extreme poverty, a lack of an educated workforce and the disadvantage of being landlocked with inadequate infrastructure.

Additionally, Burkina Faso grapples with a combination of other interrelated constraints. On the one hand, health-care progress, supported by international cooperation, has contributed to lower mortality rates and increased life expectancy. However, development has not led to a significant decline in birth rates. This has resulted in what is referred to as a stalled demographic transition, similar to neighboring Niger and Mali. As a result, U.N. population projections for Burkina Faso require constant upward revisions. The annual population growth rate, according to INSD, stands at 2.94%. If all conditions remain constant, the country is expected to have over 30 million inhabitants by 2030 and over 40 million by 2050.

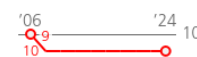
Stagnant or declining agricultural yields per hectare, coupled with a lack of substantial job creation in the industrial sector, contribute to a situation where the growing young population largely lacks decent employment opportunities. The spread of Islamist terrorism has further exacerbated the situation, resulting in the loss of approximately 40% of national territory and limited access to public services. Thousands of schools and health facilities have been closed, disproportionately affecting access to these services for girls. The once-strong sense of national cohesion and trust has significantly deteriorated. A weak security and judicial apparatus, weakened by endemic corruption, has been unable to maintain peace or effectively combat terrorism. As a result, self-defense groups have emerged and partially intensified intercommunal conflicts, particularly between 2016 and 2019.

The combination of these exceptional challenges has pushed the country to a tipping point where even the most capable government would struggle to find comprehensive solutions or a path toward normalcy. Despite appearances of normal daily life in the capital city, the nation's very existence is currently under threat.

A more nuanced picture emerges when considering natural disasters and pandemics. While climate change does pose risks in Burkina Faso, such as irregular weather patterns with extreme floods and droughts, the impact is not solely characterized by reduced rainfall and widespread desertification. Therefore, an analysis focused solely

Structural  
constraints

9



1

on “climate change reductionism” is considered inappropriate in the literature. Similarly, while the country remains exposed to significant health risks, the COVID-19 pandemic has been relatively well-contained due to a combination of structural factors and effective policy measures. Despite facing challenges in accessing antiviral drugs, COVID-19 is no longer a major constraint for Burkina Faso.

Burkina Faso features a long history and plural landscape of civil society, with religious and inter-religious organizations, and powerful trade unions, especially teacher unions and advocacy NGOs. Charitable organizations have emerged in tandem with the growth of international development and humanitarian aid.

Since the 1980s, national NGOs have been represented by the Secrétariat Permanent des ONG (SPONG), an established government interlocutor. An influential umbrella organization in the rural sector is the Federation Nationale des Groupements Naam.

Given the very small size of the formal sector in the economy, which is limited to a number of larger firms in trade or industry and to the public sector, trade unions have throughout the history of the country punched above their weight – to an extent where in the deep national crisis that has prevailed at least since 2016, corporatist interests have taken precedent in trade union action, namely in teacher strikes.

A remarkable feature of the civil society landscape is the existence of organizations that overlap academic research and advocacy, such as the Laboratoire-Citoyennetés/ACE-RECIT. A sign of civil society’s strength has been the emergence of rather spontaneous youth-driven civil organizations in the political crises that culminated in 2014/15. Groupings such as Balai Citoyen have manifested their discontent with established NGOs and political parties and have had considerable influence on the further course of action.

The remarkably consistent rise in Burkina Faso’s respective BTI score reflects the evolution of conflict intensity in Burkinabè society over the long term. In the first decade of the 2000s, conflict intensity was considered very low (with a score of two). This mirrored a society where, despite a series of coups d’états, most political actors embraced a culture of mutual respect and understanding, particularly across religious and ethnic lines. Tolerance became a hallmark of Burkina Faso’s societal fabric.

The situation began to change from 2015/16 onward, when “external” violent actors began to infiltrate the northern and eastern parts of the country. This reached a tipping point in 2019 when for the first time Burkina Faso reported more victims of terrorist acts than Mali or Niger.

Partly as a cause and partly as a response to that situation, the nature of internal armed groups began to change – namely state security forces, self-defense groups and traditional hunter groups (e.g., the Koglweogo and Dozo). In the words of CSO representative, Antoine Sawadogo, there has been a reconversion of the Koglweogo, which originally emerged to protect territory, tackle cattle theft and guard against

#### Civil society traditions

4

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1

#### Conflict intensity

9

'06 '24 10



1

criminals. In response to the growing threat of jihadism, they also became involved in the fight against terrorism. Many of them joined the national militia, the Volontaires de la Défense de la Patrie (VDP). The population's opinion of the Koglweogo has always been ambivalent. Lately, in view of the increasing challenges posed by jihadism, more and more people welcome their efforts although they see some of their methods as problematic. The strongest rejection of the Koglweogo has been expressed by Peulh organizations and advocates, although their criticism, which was very strong between 2018 and 2020, has abated during the period under review.

The instauration of the VDP put a lightly armed militia group in place, legally installed on January 21, 2020. They are partly controlled by the state security forces and partly act on their own account, as they too have started to settle conflicts by turning against real or alleged supporters of terrorism.

A new round of peace and reconciliation talks opened by the first junta in early 2022 was quickly abandoned by the second junta in favor of increasing the military effort. The new junta launched a new wave of recruitment in October 2022. By the beginning of 2023, 90,000 new VDP had been recruited of which 50,000 will be based in their respective communities, while 40,000 will be involved in the national fight against terror.

In December, the government and allied militias reportedly killed more civilians than the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) and JNIM combined, according to data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. At the end of 2022, a 1% levy on all private and public salaries was put in place to fund the war effort.

Today's conflict intensity is such that the country is on the brink of an all-out civil war, arduously contained by repressive means in the capital city and on the central plateau. Prospects are grim.

## II. Governance Performance

### 14 | Steering Capability

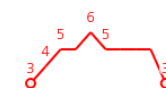
The Programme Nationale de Développement Economique et Sociale, which dates from July 2016, focuses on three pillars: institutional reform and modernization, improving human capital, and promoting jobs and growth. It remained the country's developmental reference document until the recent political turnaround, which is testimony to a certain long-term orientation of policymaking. However, the three main pillars are wide-ranging and not a means of political prioritization as such. Instead, they appear designed to accommodate donor interests with a high degree of diversity.

Question  
Score

Prioritization

3

'06 \_\_\_\_\_ '24 10



1

The effective implementation of core political reference documents such as the Programme Nationale de Développement Economique et Sociale is difficult to measure, especially when no systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanism is attached, from objectives to measurable outputs, outcomes and impact. Since 2015, various governments and the National Assembly have carried out numerous legal and administrative initiatives. However, it is difficult to mention any major reform carried out under any of the civilian governments since the restart of the political system in 2015.

Implementation

5



Policy learning

4



The ability to learn from past policies and effectively prioritize new ones seems to be a critical and lacking aspect in Burkina Faso. While the broad scope of the Programme National de Développement Economique et Sociale allows for the incorporation of various political ideas, the government’s capacity and willingness to address three significant areas requiring political attention appears notably absent. Corruption has reached alarming levels, decentralization has largely failed to provide essential services to rural communities and the deteriorating security situation demands urgent action.

Burkina Faso voluntarily participates in the G20 Compact with Africa, which includes several reform-oriented countries on the African continent. An updated reform matrix as of May 2022 demonstrates the implementation of numerous reforms, such as new mining and labor codes, as well as a revised framework for land management. While the matrix provides a comprehensive overview of the actions taken by the civilian government in Burkina Faso, it does not serve as conclusive evidence of effective execution on the ground, as there remains a notable implementation gap.

15 | Resource Efficiency

At the central state level, various governments have over the years frugally managed state resources, notwithstanding ingrained corruption Fiscal discipline has been imposed by UEMOA rules (including a temporary relaxing during the COVID-19 crisis) to which Burkina Faso continues to adhere to today. Burkina Faso is not among the countries currently over-indebted and seeking IMF relief.

Efficient use of assets

3



Burkina Faso has a three-decade-long history of donor-aided decentralization. The outcome is a three-level structure of local administration, with 13 regions, 45 provinces, and 351 departments covering rural and urban communities, of which the two biggest ones – Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso – are further subdivided. The system is a mixture of governors and province-level administrators, designated by the central government, with elected mayors and councilors. Despite several rounds of reform decentralization, Burkina Faso cannot be considered efficient. Arguably it has one administrative level too many for a poor country (with the regions too large and the provinces too small). With an arguably enormous leakage of fiscal resources, due

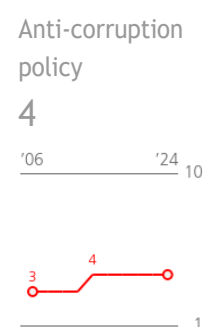
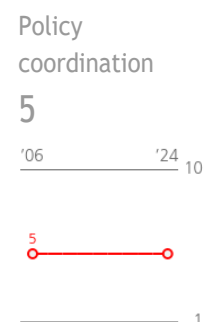
to corruption and inefficiency, decentralized structures have acquired a solid reputation for failing to bring the state closer to the people. With the flight of most public servants from provinces no longer under government control, the decentralization of governance has essentially broken down.

Consecutive governments in Burkina Faso have made serious efforts to coordinate and prioritize comprehensive national planning exercises, such as the latest Plan national de développement économique et social (2016 – 2020). Depending on uncoordinated and unpredictable international donor resources for most of the execution of policies retained in planning, effective policy coordination remains a problem.

The perception of corruption is widespread and the government’s rhetoric and institutional action in fighting corruption is significant. Besides the Superior Authority of State Control, an entity under the authority of the prime minister that merges the High Commission for the Coordination of Anti-Corruption Activities, the State Inspector General, and the National Commission for the Fight against Fraud, there is the Public Accounts Court, which audits the government’s accounts and complements the functions of the Superior Authority of State Control, and the Regulatory Authority of Government Tenders, which monitors government contract processes. All of these bodies have comprehensive mandates, and they have already exposed corruption at different levels of government and administration. In almost no cases, however, have their findings or recommendations been followed by action. Though the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, the government hardly implements it effectively.

The anti-corruption network Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption’s assessment of the situation in 2021, just before two military coups, was particularly severe, accusing the then president Kaboré of “mutisme” and the National Assembly of being just a “caisse de résonance” of the government, which appeared wholly unacceptable following the Inata event in November 2021, which marked a political turning point (see History and Characteristics of Transformation).

From the internationally supported Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption’s reporting system, a highly significant trend stands out. The years 2015 and 2016 marked an all-time low for all corruption indicators, obviously related to the regime change and high hopes for an honest administration. These years turned out to be an inflection point, as all indicators then quickly rose to and beyond pre-change levels, with a record high in 2021. The same period – 2016 to 2021 – saw a dramatic increase in terrorist attacks. However, these attacks did not urge the Kaboré government to close ranks and raise financial discipline. The turn of events in 2022 appears plausible based on these and related indicators of dismal government performance.





## 16 | Consensus-Building

The 2014 revolution in Burkina Faso, which led to the removal of authoritarian president Blaise Compaoré, was triggered by his attempt to violate the constitution for personal gain. This event marked a transition from a semi-democratic regime to a fully parliamentary democracy. Subsequently, fair and free elections were held in 2015 and 2020, although the latter was affected by limited participation due to security challenges.

However, both elections faced criticism from national and international observers regarding the extent of political change. Elite continuity remained evident and the government struggled to effectively address major challenges, including the escalating terrorist threat since 2016.

The leaders of the two military coups in 2022 explicitly referred to these governance failures to justify their actions, while promising to restore democracy after an interim period. The timing of a return to democratic elections is currently a subject of national and international debate, particularly with ECOWAS. The focus is on when such elections should take place, with the current goal of 2024. This emphasis suggests that there is still a strong consensus among Burkinabè political actors regarding the value of democratic institutions. However, trust in the military rulers' commitment to democracy remains uncertain, especially given recent actions to curb media freedoms and allegations of alignment with Russia.

In a small, landlocked and low-income country such as Burkina Faso, markets are inherently imperfect and informal, even without improper political interference. All political actors in Burkina Faso have shown a commitment to the principles of a market economy, as reflected in legislation and pro-market initiatives. For example, the Salon International de l'Artisanat de Ouagadougou serves as a platform to attract international buyers interested in Burkinabè artisanal products. Similar initiatives are abundant.

No significant political actor, except for proponents of an Islamist economy in the Greater Sahel, opposes the idea of a market economy, including the military rulers of the second junta, who are suspected of colluding with Russia. All stakeholders welcome foreign direct investment from private companies of any origin.

However, the debate surrounding a market economy has both historical and contemporary international dimensions. The Sankarist revolution in 1983 promoted a fundamental critique of global market imbalances and the division of labor, which is widely believed to hinder the attempts of African countries to catch up in the global market. During his tenure, Thomas Sankara rejected structural adjustment programs proposed by the IMF and World Bank, which advocated for sweeping market-

Consensus on goals

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oriented reforms. Instead, he promoted a program of self-centered “auto-adjustment” that included elements resembling today’s regional value chains.

Sankara’s critical stance toward globalization, along with his early emphasis on gender and ecological issues, continues to resonate in Burkina Faso and beyond. It is important to note that this critical perspective does not make Sankara and his current supporters, including those within the ruling junta, opponents of a market economy per se. Rather, it underscores the need for acknowledging critical views on the functioning of global markets in order to establish a basic agreement on the value of a market economy.

Two key cases significantly impact West and Central African economies, including Burkina Faso. The first case involves international trade policy. Policies such as U.S. cotton subsidies or EU free trade agreements have a major impact on Burkinabè cotton farmers and the ability to establish competitive manufacturing industries. African scholars, including those from Burkinabè universities, have raised concerns. Until these concerns are adequately addressed, the perception of a skewed market economy persists.

The second case pertains to Burkina Faso’s participation in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), a post-colonial entity that remains heavily influenced by France. Scholars and civil society activists in the region have engaged in a lively debate regarding the effects of the fixed and potentially overvalued exchange rate of the CFA franc on economic development within the WAEMU/UEMOA. While some criticisms may be exaggerated, the unfavorable international environment must be seriously considered when assessing the potential for establishing a consensus on the virtues of a market economy in the country.

The latest rounds of sweeping reforms in Burkina Faso occurred during the years 2014 and 2015 when the earlier semi-authoritarian regime was overthrown and – after some turmoil – a new governmental system was put in place with most political actors agreeing.

However, the government lacks control over the traditionally powerful trade unions, the military and in particular emerging radical Islamist actors, which now threaten the whole system of governance from inside and outside the country.

Burning social cleavages were not an important feature in the social and political life of Burkina Faso until about 2015. Even under the Sankara presidency with its revolutionary traits and the violent traits of the Compaoré presidency, the country maintained the largely peaceful coexistence of most social groups (e.g., among different ethnic groups, and between herders and farmers). In the period under review, social cleavages have aggravated, mainly due to the strategic manipulation of jihadist groups. By integrating vigilante groups and expanding paramilitary groups of volunteers in the fight against terrorism, the political leadership risks further

Anti-democratic actors

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Cleavage / conflict management

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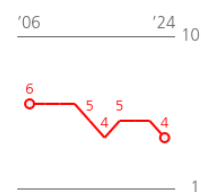
escalating the conflicts in some regions. Recently, however, the VDP seems to be more and more welcomed by the population, which is tired of the state’s inability to protect them from terrorist attacks. A major question that remains to be answered is how the VDP will be disarmed and demobilized at a later stage.

The escalation of conflict comes in stark contrast with a long-standing tradition of public consultation with civil society, traditional authorities and economic actors at every important juncture of the country’s political transformation. Public consultation has not been totally abandoned, even after the two military coups in 2022. However, it has largely given way to a predominantly military answer to the resolution of conflict. Nevertheless, a large number of civil society associations, NGOs and religious institutions are involved in civilian projects and struggles for peace, social cohesion and reconciliation.

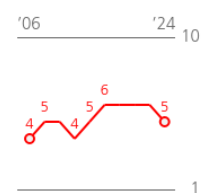
A distinction is in order when discussing reconciliation in Burkina Faso, as it has two important dimensions that only partially overlap. The first dimension is the negative legacy of the Compaoré presidency. This includes acts of violence and injustice, such as the murder of Thomas Sankara and his comrades in October 1987, the murder of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1999, and the victims of the violent transition in 2014 and 2015. Although some progress has been made in prosecuting those responsible and pursuing national reconciliation in this regard, a complete resolution has not yet been achieved.

The other dimension of reconciliation pertains to the local level, particularly escalating intercommunal conflict and violence, often referred to as farmer-herder clashes, and to the intertwined series of terrorist attacks and armed responses. As the number of such incidents soared in the period under review, according to data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, it is now widely acknowledged at the local, regional and national levels that reconciliation efforts are in order, and that these efforts should involve some armed Islamist groups who are willing to participate in talks.

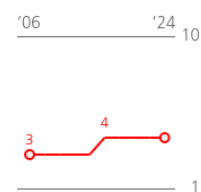
The approach taken by successive Burkinabè national governments has evolved significantly over time. While the various RMK governments made little effort to support local peace talks and even opposed such talks under French influence, the Damiba junta created a special ministerial portfolio for reconciliation. However, this approach was short-lived, as it was swiftly abandoned under the Traoré-led junta. It remains an open question how far the current military government will pursue a conciliatory approach to intercommunal conflict and radical Islamism. Damiba’s approach to reconciliation has been sharply criticized, especially after he invited former president Blaise Compaoré to Ouagadougou for “national reconciliation” talks. Furthermore, given that neither local peace talks nor reintegration efforts have led to a de-escalation of the situation, as demonstrated by the Thiou case, people in Burkina Faso increasingly agree that the problem of terrorism can only be resolved



Public consultation  
5



Reconciliation  
4



through military intervention and the formation of armed defense of communities. This stance is further evident in the more than 100,000 people who have registered to become VDP and support the state in fighting terror.

## 17 | International Cooperation

Based on a long tradition of development planning and without interruption following the violent succession in 1987, successive governments have managed to attract high levels of international development assistance.

There have been noticeable sectoral successes in urban and rural water supply, health outcomes, and land conservation. These achievements serve as a testament to the progress made in those sectors. However, the same level of success is not as evident in education or private sector development. On balance, development resources have not been massively squandered, over and beyond the opportunities for corruption and rent-seeking built into the international aid system.

Despite the critical situation in the country, major international partners appear determined to continue or even expand their aid engagements in Burkina Faso. However, the challenging circumstances make it increasingly difficult to effectively implement regular project assistance, as differentiated from humanitarian aid.

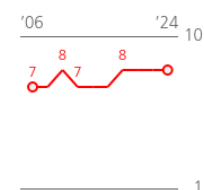
If the new military leadership in Burkina Faso follows the short-lived tradition of well-reasoned “auto-centered” and corruption-hostile development, as under President Sankara, this positive development trajectory may continue. However, if the military leadership turns to Russian assistance, particularly the Wagner group, the outcome and impact on the country’s development will have to be entirely re-evaluated. Thus far, the new military junta has expressed its intention to establish its own local militia with the VDP, for which 90,000 men and women have been recruited by the end of 2022. While the government buys weapons from Russia and disinformation campaigns linked to the Wagner network have been proven, the integration of Wagner group military personnel into Burkina Faso’s fight against radical Islamism has not been established.

Successive governments in Burkina Faso over the last decades have adhered to most international conventions and mostly complied with them where applicable. A notable exception is the observation of core labor market standards, which have been neglected in mining.

Another exception is human rights. Allegations of human rights violations by armed forces (military, gendarmerie and police) have dramatically risen since the emergence of the terrorist threat. However, these violations have not been adequately prosecuted. In turn, this has given rise to a sense of impunity among security agents, exacerbating political and social tensions.

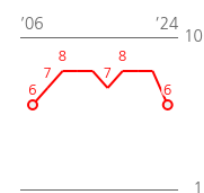
Effective use of support

8



Credibility

6



Until about the beginning of the last decade, Burkina Faso's authorities held a solid reputation for being a reliable (while not very efficient) development cooperation partner. A recent case is Burkina Faso's involvement in the G20 Compact with Africa. The Compact with Africa was initiated in 2017 under Germany's G20 presidency to promote investment in Africa. The compact's primary objective is to increase the attractiveness of private investment through substantial improvements to the macro, business and financing frameworks. Burkina Faso was accepted as one of 12 reform-minded countries in Africa, despite the growing crisis the country was already experiencing.

De facto credibility declined considerably over the last years of the Kaboré/MDP presidency, as it became apparent to international partners that the government was making little effort to combat rising terrorism or its root causes (e.g., in the failure to deliver decentralized public services). As of 2022/2023, government credibility has become difficult to reliably assess. The military juntas that were installed following the two successive coups d'état received a fair amount of credibility from larger parts of the population and the media, as they openly acknowledged earlier government failures. However, the credibility of both military and civilian initiatives cannot be judged, yet. Credibility, as in neighboring Mali, will depend on which international partners the government decides to work with.

Burkina Faso actively participates in various international and regional organizations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA/WAEMU). ECOWAS has a broader mandate, including peacekeeping, and is on its way to becoming a customs union. Meanwhile, UEMOA/WAEMU is an imperfect customs and monetary union nested within ECOWAS, and Burkina Faso is a committed member.

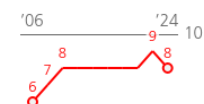
Burkina Faso has historically played a constructive role in international cooperation. According to the latest edition of the Africa Regional Integration Index, Burkina Faso ranks second in ECOWAS for its integration efforts, after Côte d'Ivoire. However, the two military coups in 2022 created serious conflicts with ECOWAS authorities, leading to Burkina Faso's suspension until the country returns to democracy and a schedule for free elections is agreed upon. While there are indications that an agreement may be on the 2024 election calendar, it is still too early to determine the direction of the current ruling junta.

Burkina Faso is part of several regional alliances with specific mandates, although their impact on the ground is challenging to measure. Examples include the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (Comité Permanent Inter-Etat de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel) and the Authority of Liptako-Gourma.

The high intensity of conflict within Burkina Faso and along its borders also affects regional cooperation. In 2017, bilateral partners, such as France and Germany, along with multilateral organizations, such as the African Development Bank, the World

#### Regional cooperation

8



1

Bank, the European Union and the UNDP, launched the Sahel Alliance to address challenges faced by the G5 Sahel member countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). Other Western countries have since joined the alliance. However, the effectiveness of the G5 Sahel Alliance has raised questions, which should not be attributed to the Burkinabè authorities.

As conflict has spread southwards, the government of Burkina Faso has also sought cooperation with coastal countries in combating cross-border terrorism, exemplified by the Accra Alliance. However, the effectiveness of this initiative is yet to be proven.

## Strategic Outlook

Burkina Faso is undergoing a significant transformation and no longer fits the label of a “fragile” state with very “vulnerable” populations. However, the spreading threat of Islamist terrorism has pushed the country to the brink of further territorial disintegration. While state collapse is still unlikely, it cannot be entirely ruled out.

Addressing the roots of terrorism, national reconciliation and talks with reachable terrorist groups, as well as ending ethnic discrimination, are of crucial political importance. Strategically, the ruling military regime has shifted its approach between the two successive juntas in 2022. The focus has moved from seeking peace and stability through talks and reconciliation to a more forceful approach to combating Islamists, including the deployment of additional paramilitary volunteers. This change in strategy, welcomed by the majority of the population, carries the risk of exacerbating inter- and intra-communal tensions. One contributing factor is the increase in violent conflicts between the two main Islamist terrorist groups, ISWAP and al-Qaeda.

During the period under review, Burkina Faso has become a target of inflammatory social media campaigns, potentially orchestrated by internet entities in Russia. These campaigns promote new international partners (e.g., Russia and, to a lesser extent, China) at the expense of traditional Western partners, particularly France. This social media trend aligns with the second junta government’s explicit emphasis on military cooperation with partners from the east. The feasibility and desirability of the internationally requested return to the previous constitutional order will be subject to national and international discussions within the ECOWAS and AU frameworks.

In this transitional situation, reinforcing the established practice of development aid, such as within the framework of G5 Sahel, will do little to stabilize overall governance and improve people’s livelihoods. Development aid needs to adapt to effectively navigate a new political landscape characterized by scattered power centers and decentralized negotiations for new equilibria. It should also respond to trends of post-colonial emancipation and neocolonial critique.

Economically, the key challenges are evident. In the areas under government control, concerted efforts from the government and private sector are needed to achieve the structural transformation of an economy overly reliant on agriculture and gold mining, with minimal manufacturing. Harnessing the significant revenues from the mining sector for the benefit of workers and the overall economy is crucial. However, the feasibility of such efforts remains uncertain amidst the looming threat of political collapse.

Fundamentally, Burkina Faso needs to renew its entire political system, revitalize its armed forces and eradicate corruption, which has undermined both civilian and military rule, especially in the face of ongoing attacks.