

Burkina Faso

NOT FREE

30
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	3 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	27 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

53/100 **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale.



[TOP](#)

Status Change

Burkina Faso's status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to the effects of two successive military coups, including the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the legislature, and an expanding conflict with Islamist militant groups.

Overview

Two separate coups organized by the military in 2022 plunged Burkina Faso into political crisis, eliminating many of the significant political reforms implemented after the 2014–15 political transition. While civil society and organized labor remain strong forces for democracy, Burkinabè also face continued insecurity and violence from armed militant groups, militia groups, and government forces, displacing millions of people. Though the military's justification for its two illegal seizures of power was to address growing security and humanitarian crises, insecurity worsened following the takeovers.

Key Developments in 2022

- In January, Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba led a military coup that ousted the democratically elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. Damiba justified his actions by citing the worsening security situation and Kaboré's inability to resolve it. A temporary government was installed by the military junta in March, with Damiba naming himself president.
- Captain Ibrahim Traoré led a second coup in September, dismissing Damiba's transitional government, suspending the constitution, and placing power in the military junta Traoré had formed and led. Less than two weeks later in October, the Traoré junta organized a national forum, during which Traoré was formally recognized as president. The forum also drafted a charter that provided him the authority to name a transitional government and legislate by decree until the naming of legislators.
- In April, former president Blaise Compaoré was found guilty of conspiracy in the 1987 assassination of former president Thomas Sankara and was sentenced to life in prison in absentia. Despite his conviction, in July Compaoré traveled from Côte d'Ivoire, where he had been living, to Ouagadougou at the invitation of then junta-leader Damiba. He was allowed to stay for a few days before returning to Côte d'Ivoire.

- The security environment was deteriorating in the country before the first coup in January, but the two seizures of power during the year by military juntas deepened the crisis. Security forces and state-aligned militias have committed widespread extrajudicial violence and Islamist groups have attacked armed forces and civilians openly, all of which has displaced millions of civilians. More than two dozen Fulani people were killed by armed groups in the town of Nouna in late December.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

Two separate military coups in 2022 restored military rule after nearly eight years of political reforms that had yielded democratic gains. In January, Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba led a military coup that ousted the democratically elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. Captain Ibrahim Traoré led the second coup in September, dismissing the transitional government set up by Damiba in March, suspending the constitution, and placing power in the military junta he had formed and led. Less than two weeks later, in October, the Traoré junta organized a national forum, during which Traoré was formally recognized as president. The forum also drafted a transitional charter which provided him with the authority to name a transitional government and legislate by decree until the naming of legislators.

Traoré named Appollinaire Joachim Kyelem de Tambela as his prime minister to serve as head of a 23-member transitional government, which was created in late October.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 due to two separate coups fomented by military officers that removed the elected and interim presidents.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0/4

The two coups dissolved both the elected parliament and the subsequent transitional bodies. In November 2022, the Traoré-led junta and its national forum established a 71-member transitional legislature through the transitional charter. Twenty members of the legislature were chosen by Traoré. The rest were made up of 16 members from the security and defense forces; 13 civil society leaders who were not affiliated with a political movement; 12 members from political parties (4 from the former majority party, 4 from the former opposition, 2 from the unaffiliated opposition, and 2 from other parties); and 10 other members from civil society. The 20 members appointed by Traoré and the 16 from the security and defense forces make up a one-seat majority at 36 members. The charter cannot be revised without Traoré's support and a two-thirds majority vote from the transitional legislature.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because coup leaders dissolved the elected parliament in January, and a subsequent transitional assembly was dissolved in the September coup.

A3 0-4 pts

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

0/4

The transitional charter, which operates as the guiding legal text under Traoré's junta, stipulates that all legal matters be determined by the 1991 constitution unless otherwise decided by the transitional legislature. Until the legislative session opened in November 2022, Traoré legislated by decree. There is no defined electoral framework in the interim other than a deadline to hold elections by 2024.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because coup leaders suspended the constitution in January and again in September, effectively overturning existing electoral law.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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

1/4

The laws regulating political parties were effectively suspended following the January and September 2022 coups. Political parties received token representation in the transitional legislature based on their affiliations under the previous civilian administration. Immediately following the September coup, the junta suspended all political and civil society activity, though they restored party and civil society representation in the weeks following. The suspension underscored the limited power political parties and civil society wield in the current military government.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because the military dissolved the elected parliament and has dominated the subsequent transition, limiting the ability of parties to function.

B2 0-4 pts

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

0/4

Following the September 2022 coup, no legal framework for an electoral process had been enacted, meaning there was no clear means for a party to gain power. Presumably, the organization and administration of elections would be a priority of the transitional legislative assembly that took office in November. The junta, Traoré, and the transitional charter stipulated that elections would be held by July 2024.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 0 because the military coups removed political parties ability to win power through elections and because no party can operate without the military's consent.

B3 0-4 pts

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

0/4

The junta has attempted to characterize its seizure of power as popular and enjoying public support, but it is effectively ruling by decree. Burkina Faso's armed forces remain fragmented, and power has changed hands in an arbitrary, tumultuous manner, all underscored by the two coups in 2022. In parts of the country, armed militant groups target local leaders for assassination and abduction, effectively controlling the territory.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 due to the military's total dominance of the political system following two coups.

B4 0-4 pts

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

1/4

The two coups in January and September 2022 have returned the military to the center of the political arena, eliminating political rights for the population.

Stigmatization of the Fulani (Peul or Fulbè) community also grew during the year, as insecurity spread throughout the northern and eastern areas of the country.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 1 because coup leaders dissolved the elected parliament in January, stopping Burkinabè from engaging in political participation through elections.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 / 4

Lieutenant Colonel Damiba dissolved the National Assembly following his January 2022 coup and created a transitional government in March. Captain Traoré in late September staged another coup and in October dissolved the transitional legislature established under Damiba. Traoré legislated by decree until members of a new transitional assembly took office and a legislative session opened in November.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 because elected government bodies were dissolved by coup leaders.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

1 / 4

Prior to the 2022 coups, corruption was already widespread, particularly among customs officials and municipal police as well as several other public sectors. Few, if any, impediments remain to safeguard against official corruption following the coups of 2022. Formal bodies exist to address corruption, such as the Higher Authority for State Control and the Fight Against Corruption (ASCE-LC), and the independent Anti-Corruption National Network (REN-LAC). Their ability to provide oversight of the junta, however, has been minimal, accelerating the deleterious effects of corruption on public services.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because the junta engages in corruption and allows no avenue for accountability.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

0 / 4

Very little is known about the composition of the ruling junta, which refers to itself as the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR). Many political parties

and civil society organizations have underscored this fact and the danger this lack of transparency presents.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 0 due to the lack of any meaningful openness from the junta in its decision-making, its membership, and in its appointment of members to transitional bodies.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

2/4

The media environment in Burkina Faso is relatively robust. However, growing and continued physical insecurity has curbed media access, and military leaders have further constrained the press. In May 2022, the military government blocked the operations of the Higher Council for Communication, a body tasked with ensuring respect for journalistic ethics, promoting freedom of expression, and safeguarding the media's access to sources of information. In December, Traoré appointed a new council president, allowing the agency to function again.

Authorities also suspended French broadcaster Radio France Internationale (RFI) in December, accusing them of having disseminated a message of intimidation attributed to a “terrorist leader,” though they did not reference any specific RFI report. Journalists face increased risks due to militant attacks, and some have been threatened, abducted, and killed in recent years.

D2 0-4 pts

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

3/4

Burkina Faso is a secular state, and freedom of religion is generally respected. The population is predominately Muslim with a large Christian minority. Followers of both religions often engage in syncretic practices. However, religious activity is affected by ongoing insecurity. In February 2022, Islamic militant groups attacked the Saint Kisito Christian seminary in Bogui.

D3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Academic freedom is unrestricted in principle, though due to past repressive tactics against student-led protests, a legacy of tension between the government and academic organizations persists.

Islamic militant groups in the north and east regularly threaten schools and teachers, resulting in the closure of numerous institutions. These groups have killed public school officials for refusing to adhere to and teach extremist ideology and curriculums. Prolonged insecurity and militant Islamist violence has left large swathes of territory without primary and secondary education for years. From January to November 2022, 5,574 schools were closed due to insecurity, affecting over a million students.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because Islamist militant groups threatened or attacked schools and teachers for failing to adhere to and teach extremist ideology, resulting in the closure of thousands of schools, affecting more than a million students.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

3/4

Private discussion is unrestricted in much of the country. However, attacks and intimidation by Islamic militants in the north and east, an increased security presence in response to their activities, and 2019 penal-code revisions have dissuaded people from discussing local news, politics, and other sensitive topics. In some areas,

Burkinabè fear surveillance from the informers of Islamic militants, who may attack communities who speak out against them.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

2/4

The transitional charter relies on the 1991 constitution as a legal foundation; the 1991 constitution does provide for the freedom of assembly. Demonstrations in support of the ruling junta in 2022 have appeared to occur organically and comprise at most a few hundred individuals in any mobilization.

During the chaotic days of Captain Traoré's coup from late September 2022 to early October, demonstrators in support of the coup vandalized, looted, and set fire to buildings housing French government offices. Junta leaders had claimed France was harboring Lieutenant Colonel Damiba at a military base during this period.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?

2/4

While many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate openly and freely, human rights groups have reported abuses by security forces in the past. NGOs face harassment in carrying out their work and NGO leaders argue that some legal provisions, including vaguely worded terrorism laws, can be misused to silence human rights defenders.

The operating space for NGOs and human rights organizations became further constrained in 2022 due to growing violence and the return of military rule. Towns, displacement camps, and large swathes of territory are routinely cut off from state authorities. Humanitarian access is limited particularly in northern Burkina Faso where armed conflict is at its worst.

E3 0-4 pts

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

3/4

The two military coups in 2022 left the basic structure of the 1991 constitution in place, which does provide for the right to strike and to form trade unions. However, the transitional charter following the September coup clearly places superseding authority in the executive to intercede in organized labor activity.

In the past, unions frequently and freely engaged in strikes and collective bargaining and coordinated with civil society to organize demonstrations on social issues. However, the government has used legal means to suppress union activity, including the denial of permits for planned demonstrations.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2/4

The judiciary is formally independent but has historically been subject to executive influence and corruption. The Constitutional Council in October 2022 officially inaugurated Captain Traoré as president after his military coup the previous month.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

1/4

Constitutional due-process guarantees are undermined by corruption and the inefficacy of the judiciary and police force. The judicial system is also affected by ongoing insecurity, which has caused the closure of some courts and has limited access to judicial services.

In April 2022, former president Blaise Compaoré was found guilty of conspiracy in the 1987 assassination of former president Thomas Sankara and was sentenced to life in prison in absentia. Despite his conviction, in July Compaoré traveled from Côte d'Ivoire, where he had been living, to Ouagadougou at the invitation of then junta-leader Damiba. He was allowed to stay for a few days before returning to Côte d'Ivoire. The high profile visit revealed the limits of the Burkinabè justice system in holding powerful figures to account.

F3 0-4 pts

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

0/4

The security environment is affected by Islamic militant groups, bandits, and militias. Traditional leaders, government officials, lawmakers, and civilians are regularly targeted for kidnapping or assassination by militants. Militants target government institutions, like health clinics and schools, restricting access to government services. Children are increasingly being recruited by militants and engage in armed activity. Ongoing violence has prompted significant internal displacement; humanitarian organizations in a joint letter in September 2022 reported that nearly 2 million Burkinabè were internally displaced.

Government forces and state-allied militias like the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) commit extrajudicial violence, particularly against the Fulani ethnic group. Militants, militias, and government forces are believed to orchestrate forced disappearances. Security forces, militias, and civilians faced armed attacks during 2022, causing numerous casualties. Allegations of torture and abuse of suspects in custody by police are common, and prison conditions are poor. Security forces have been accused of forcibly detaining and abusing civilians. Security in the country has deteriorated since the military took power in the first coup of the year in January 2022.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

1/4

While the constitution outlaws all forms of discrimination, prejudice occurs in practice. Members of the Fulani ethnic group have expressed dissatisfaction over government neglect, discrimination, and abuse, particularly at the hands of security forces and militias. Their treatment has worsened since the military seized power in January 2022 and recruited volunteer militias that have intentionally targeted Fulani people. More than two dozen Fulani civilians were killed, apparently by the VDP, in the town of Nouna in late December. Military rule has also eliminated legal guarantees of protection.

LGBT+ people, as well as those living with HIV, routinely experience discrimination, including difficulty accessing health services. While illegal, gender discrimination remains common in employment and education.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to an increase in discrimination against Fulani people, mostly caused by volunteer militias recruited by the junta to intentionally target members of that ethnic group.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?	1 / 4
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Due to insecurity, the government has established heavily guarded checkpoints on roads and has instituted curfews and states of emergency in some provinces. Travelers are sometimes subjected to bribery or harassment by security forces at checkpoints. The town of Djibo, which houses at least 285,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), was blockaded by militants during much of 2022, making it difficult for aid groups to deliver food and medicine. Displaced women fleeing extremist violence have been targeted by Islamist militant groups, and the number of sexual assault cases has risen drastically in the Center North region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said in June that authorities control only 60 percent of the country’s territory.

G2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

In recent years, the government has implemented reforms to reduce the amount of capital necessary to start a business, facilitating the ability to obtain credit information, and improving the insolvency resolution process. However, the business environment is hampered by corruption and insecurity. The two military coups in 2022 cast further doubts over the regulatory environment individuals would confront.

Insurgents regularly interfered with commercial activities in 2022, including by stealing livestock, imposing taxes, and interrupting mining operations. State authorities have little control over a significant portion of the country.

Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 because internally displaced Burkinabè have suffered the destruction of property due to conflict and because the authorities are unable to ensure property rights throughout the country.

G3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Women face discrimination in cases involving family rights and inheritance. Early marriage remains an issue, especially in the north. The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is less common than in the past, but still occurs. Domestic violence remains a problem despite government efforts to combat it. Gender-based violence has become more widespread of a challenge with the rising physical insecurity driven by extremist groups. The United Nations Population Fund estimated that more than 660,000 people will need protection from sexual assault and rape.

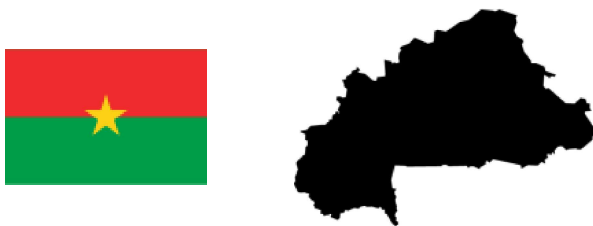
G4 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Burkina Faso is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking. Child labor is prominent in the mining sector, with 20,000 children working in gold mines. Children are also recruited by militant groups. Women from neighboring countries are recruited by traffickers and transported to Burkina Faso, where they are forced into prostitution.

According to the US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons Report 2022*, the Burkinabè government did not prosecute suspected traffickers and provided insufficient support and shelter for trafficking survivors during the report’s coverage period.



On Burkina Faso

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

30/100 **Not Free**

Other Years

2022

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