



## Notes on recent elections

## Election note: Burkina Faso's 2015 presidential and legislative elections



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On 29 November 2015, Burkina Faso held presidential and legislative elections. These elections served as the closing bracket on a period of transition brought about by the October 2014 uprising that ousted former President Blaise Compaoré. The elections were originally scheduled for 11 October 2015, but an unsuccessful coup by the former Presidential Guard (RSP) in September resulted in a postponement. When the elections were held on 29 November 2015, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress (MPP) won a decisive first-round victory in the presidential contest with over 53% of the votes. In the legislative election that was held concurrently, Kaboré's party won a plurality, but not a majority, of legislative seats.

## 1. Background

Former President Blaise Compaoré took power in a military coup in 1987. He served as president for 27 years and his party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), dominated legislative elections during that time (Pryce and Nascimento, 2014). After term limits were reintroduced to the constitution in 2000 but not applied retroactively, Compaoré was able to run in, and win, the 2005 and 2010 presidential elections although he had already served two terms in office (1991–1998 and 1998–2005).<sup>1</sup> After winning his fourth term in 2010, there were frequent calls, particularly from Compaoré's own party, the CDP, to remove term

limits so that he could run again. Facing widespread opposition from other elected officials, the CDP instead called for a referendum on whether the constitution should be modified to allow Compaoré to run in the 2015 presidential election.

Though it was never officially scheduled, mere discussion of a referendum on term limits triggered massive protests over the course of several months, culminating in an uprising in October 2014 that forced Compaoré and his family into exile in Côte d'Ivoire (Ariotti, 4 November 2014). The parliament was stormed, and other government buildings were sacked and damaged during the uprising before the military took control. Former presidential guard (RSP) member Yacouba Isaac Zida temporarily took charge, though within three weeks he ceded power to Michel Kafando, a civilian and longtime diplomat. Kafando was named interim President, and he named Zida Prime Minister of the transitional government (Zouré, 2014b). The transitional government was to govern until new elections could be held (Le Monde, 2014).

In spite of the difficulties facing the interim government, preparations for new elections, scheduled for 11 October 2015, proceeded smoothly. On 21 September 2015, however, the presidential guard (RSP) stormed a meeting at the Presidential Palace, taking President Kafando and Prime Minister Zida hostage, along with two other ministers. The coup leaders attempted to dissolve the transitional government, solidifying the perception that Compaoré was continuing to meddle in Burkinabè politics from afar (Carayol, 2015). Faced with strong domestic and international disapproval, the coup attempt lasted only a week before the Burkinabè Army marched on the capital and reinstated Kafando. Presidential and legislative elections were rescheduled for 29 November 2015.

## 2. Electoral rules

Burkina Faso's presidential elections are conducted using a two-round absolute majority voting system. If a candidate receives an absolute majority of valid votes in the first round, he is elected; if not, the two candidates who received the most votes proceed to the second round. If needed, a second round is held 15 days after the Constitutional Council announces the top two candidates from the first round.

The 127 deputies of the National Assembly are elected by proportional representation with closed lists and two independent

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<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the length of the presidential term was changed from seven to five years.

electoral tiers. Seats are allocated, in both tiers, using the Hare quota with the largest remainder method (Code Electoral, 2015). The districts that constitute the lower tier coincide with the 45 provinces in Burkina. District magnitude, and hence electoral system proportionality, is fairly low. While district magnitude in the lower tier ranges from two to nine seats, all but eight provinces have a district magnitude of two, and the average district magnitude is 2.5.<sup>2</sup> The upper tier comprises a single district for the entire nation with a district magnitude of 16. Thus, 111 deputies are elected from the provincial-level districts, and 16 are elected in the national-level district (IFES, 2015). Parties are eligible for public campaign funding, though party lists that do not include at least 30% women are ineligible for 50% of the public funding earmarked for them (IFES, 2015).

One notable feature of the 2015 elections was a modification to the Electoral Code, banning “all persons who supported an unconstitutional change that threatened the principal of democratic alternation, notably the principle of presidential term limits” (Code Electoral, 2015). This language outlined the conditions under which past members of the CDP could be prevented from running for office. Members of the CDP brought the case before the Community Court of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which declared that the modification to Burkina’s electoral code was a ‘violation of human rights,’ as it barred some individuals from the ‘right to freely participate in elections’ (ECOWAS, 2015). The Burkinabè government countered that the external court had no jurisdiction to hear the case and ignored its ruling. As a result, some members of the CDP were banned from the presidential and legislative elections. Additionally, a condition of serving in the transitional government was to forego participation in the 2015 elections.

### 3. Elections

#### 3.1. Candidates

Fourteen candidates contested the presidency, four of whom ran as independents (Diallo, 2015). Two leading candidates were Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the People’s Movement for Progress (MPP) and Zéphirin Diabré of the Union for Progress and Change (UPC). Both were nationally-known politicians. Kaboré had long been a Compaoré insider before breaking away from the CDP to establish the MPP in January 2014, when the removal of term limits became a significant issue. Diabré had long represented the established opposition (Zouré, 2014a). In the legislative elections, 81 parties and 18 “groups of independents” contested the election, resulting in a total of 7058 candidates for the 127 seats in the National Assembly (Diallo, 2015). Most of the candidates focused on broad platforms that emphasized developmental goals, both in terms of human capital and economic prosperity; priorities such as education and training were highlighted.

#### 3.2. Election observation

Election observers, both from domestic and international groups, played an important role in these elections. According to the CENI’s official certifications, 17,160 observers were deployed to the country’s 17,898 polling stations. Underscoring the tremendous pressure from citizens for free elections, 16,284 of that total were national observers (Diallo, 2015). Burkinabè civil society

organizations took a lead role in encouraging citizens to stay as observers at the polling stations after voting, while other groups formed a coalition known as the “Convention of Civil Society Organizations for the Domestic Observation of Elections” (CODEL) and reported information on polling stations in real time (Bertrand, 2015). Domestic security forces were also mobilized, with some 25,000 agents in place to secure the polling places, the transportation of ballots, and the proclamation of the results (Diallo, 2015).

### 4. Results

This was the first election in Burkina Faso in which the ballot-counting process occurred in a public and transparent fashion. Several election sites released figures in real time. CODEL also reported its own results, which were highly correlated with the official figures.<sup>3</sup> This transparency provided legitimacy in a transitional setting, where delays in ballot counting are often considered to be politically motivated (Carolan, 2015).

#### 4.1. Presidential elections

Table 1 shows the results of the presidential election. According to the results validated by the Constitutional Council, voter turnout in the presidential context was approximately 59.87% (Constitutional Council, 2016). Of the 5,517,016 registered voters, 3,302,882 cast a ballot in the presidential election. To win outright in the first round, a candidate had to win a majority of valid votes cast. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (MPP) easily achieved this, winning 53.46% (1,669,214 valid votes). Zéphirin Diabré (UPC), the candidate with the second-most votes, made headlines by accepting the results prior to their official publication, congratulating Kaboré on his win, and reassuring both domestic and international observers that the results would not be contested.

#### 4.2. Legislative elections

The results of the legislative election are shown in Table 2. According to the results validated by the Constitutional Council, 3,303,500 ballots were cast for legislative elections, resulting in a voter turnout rate of 59.88% (Constitutional Council, 2016). The clear plurality winner was Kaboré’s MPP, which won 55 of the 127 legislative seats; in second place, the UPC won 33 seats. Perhaps most surprising was the resilience of the former ruling CDP, which managed to win 18 seats despite the invalidation of many of their most well known candidates. Although the MPP won a clear plurality of seats, they fell short of the 64 necessary to control a majority in the National Assembly.

### 5. Installation of new government

Roch Marc Christian Kaboré’s official investiture ceremony was held on 31 December 2015.<sup>4</sup> Appointing the government took longer, however. Burkina Faso has a semi-presidential system, which means that the government – the prime minister and the other ministers – must maintain the support of a legislative majority. For the MPP, building a legislative majority was not obvious;

<sup>3</sup> Websites releasing information in real time included CODEL’s <http://burkinavote.com/>, and a partnership between the Open Data Initiative, the CENI, and several other international organizations: <http://www.burkina2015.bf/>.

<sup>4</sup> The decision to have a military officer act as Master of Ceremonies, in full military garb, was criticized by some who felt that the installation of a civilian president was marred by the inclusion of a symbol of military authority (LeFaso.net, 6 January 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The average district magnitude in the lower tier was calculated based on information from CENI (Accessed 25 January 2016 <http://www.ceni.bf/?q=legislatives2015>).

**Table 1**  
2015 presidential elections in Burkina Faso.

Name	Party	Votes	Vote share (%)
Adama Kanazoé	Youth Alliance for Independence and the Republic (AJIR)	37,911	1.21
Issaka Zampaligré	Independent	38,428	1.23
Saran Serémé	Party for Change and Development (PDC)	54,178	1.74
Françoise Toé	Independent	8222	0.26
Bénéwendé Stanislas Sankara	Union for the Renaissance/Sankarist Party (UNIR/PS)	86,392	2.77
Maurice Denis Salvador Toussaint Yaméogo	Democratic Rally for Faso (RDF)	15,431	0.49
Ablassé Ouédraogo	Alternative Faso (Le Faso Autrement)	60,464	1.94
Ram Ouédraogo	Ecologists' Rally of Burkina (RDEB)	21,459	0.69
Zéphirin Diabré	Union for Progress and Change (UPC)	924,879	29.62
Boukaré Ouédraogo	Independent	14,961	0.48
Tahirou Barry	National Renaissance Party (PAREN)	96,377	3.09
Victorien Barnabé Wendkouni Tougouma	African People's Movement (MAP)	51,989	1.66
Roch Marc Christian Kaboré	People's Movement for Progress (MPP)	1,669,214	53.46
Jean-Baptiste Natama	Independent	42,558	1.36
Total Votes Cast <sup>a</sup>	3,302,882		
Invalid Votes	180,419		
Turnout <sup>b</sup>	59.87%		

**Note:** All data are taken from the official results published by the Constitutional Council here: <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.gov.bf/index.php/les-elections/les-resultats-definitifs/resultats-definitifs-presidentiels/presidentielles-2015>. Party affiliations from Jeune Afrique and can be accessed here: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/273168/politique/presidentielle-burkina-14-candidats-confirmes-conseil-constitutionnel/>.

<sup>a</sup> Subtracting the number of invalid votes results in the "total expressed vote," which is 3,122,463.

<sup>b</sup> The total number of registered voters was 5,517,016, of whom 3,302,882 cast a vote (including those that were ultimately invalid). The majority required for a first-round win was thus calculated to be 1,561,233 votes.

**Table 2**  
2015 Legislative elections in Burkina Faso.

Party	Votes	Seats in 2015	Seats in 2012	Seat change
Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally (ADF-RDA)	96,865	3	19	-16
Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP)	417,096	18	70	-52
Alternative Faso (Le Faso Autrement)	45,438	1	1	0
Movement for Democracy in Africa (MDA)	18,429	1	0	+1
People's Movement for Progress (MPP)	1,096,170	55	0	+55
New Alliance of Faso (NAFA)	131,225	2	0	+2
New Time for Democracy (NTD)	69,966	3	0	+3
Organization for Democracy and Labour (ODT)	28,450	1	1	0
National Renaissance Party (PAREN)	59,248	2	0	+2
Party for Democracy and Socialism-Builders' Party (PDS-METBA)	58,670	1	2	-1
Rally for Democracy and Socialism (RDS)	25,691	1	1	0
Union for a New Burkina (UBN)	27,421	1	0	+1
Union for the Renaissance/Sankarist Party (UNIR/PS)	118,469	5	4	+1
Union for Progress and Change (UPC)	648,596	33	19	+14
Total Votes Cast	3,303,500			
Invalid Votes	153,970			

**Note:** There are 127 seats total in the National Assembly. Current seat totals from validated Constitutional Council results, available here: <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.gov.bf/index.php/les-elections/les-resultats-definitifs/resultats-definitifs-legislatifs/legislatives-2015>. Note that 99 parties competed in the legislative elections; only those that received seats in the 2015 election are shown here. The complete list is available from the Constitutional Council link. Data on seats in 2012 are from [Pryce and Nascimento 2014](#). Based on total votes cast and 5,517,016 registered voters, the legislative voter turnout was 59.88%.

it was unlikely to form a government with the second-largest party (UPC, the long-term opposition) or the third-largest party (CDP, from which the MPP had split). On 28 December 2015, seven parties in the parliament (MDA, NTD, ODT, PAREN, PDS/METBA, RDS and UNIR/PS) announced the formation of a legislative coalition, "Burkindlim," which would support the president's MPP, thereby constituting a legislative majority ([Ouédraogo, 2015](#)). Burkindlim's additional 14 seats paved the way for an MPP-dominated government to form.

On 7 January 2016, Paul Kaba Thiéba, a technocrat who had worked both for the Central Bank of West African States and the West African Monetary Union, was named prime minister ([LeFaso.net, 8 January 2016](#)). On 13 January 2016, the 29-member government (which included 7 women) was announced ([LeFaso.net, 14 January 2016](#)). The government comprises several parties and technocrats, including the President's party (MPP), the Union for the Renaissance/Sankarist Party (UNIR/PS), and the National Renaissance Party (PAREN). The President, unusually for a

head of state in a semi-presidential regime, took control of the Defense portfolio.

On 15 January 2016, two days after the official announcement of the new government but before the ministers could be expected to be fully in charge of their new portfolios, terrorists attacked a hotel and nearby café in Ouagadougou, the capital city ([Le Monde, 2016](#)). 30 people, mostly foreign nationals, were killed. In a speech the following day, President Kaboré accused the perpetrators of the attacks of attempting to destabilize the newly democratically elected government, and called on citizens to be vigilant and cooperative with the national defense forces ([Kaboré, 2016](#)).

## 6. Conclusion

Moving forward, Kaboré and his new government face difficult tasks both domestically and abroad. Domestically, they must establish democratic rule in the face of a weak economy. Broad campaign promises focusing on development, job creation, and

institutional reform will require significant resources, while pressure to secure the borders and maintain international security are likely to become major priorities as well. The strength of civil society organizations also suggests that citizens will be paying attention, and expecting results.

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# Election note: The 2014 midterm elections in the United States



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## 1. The 2014 congressional elections in the United States

In years when the United States presidency is not up for election, Congressional elections are expected to produce low turnouts and big gains in the number of seats held by the minority party. It is not uncommon in these midterm elections for the minority party to capture the majority in one of the two houses of Congress, changing the balance of power both within Congress and with the executive branch.

The 2014 midterm elections for Congress fulfilled all these expectations, but had deeper impacts as well. In the electoral arena, dark money – campaign expenditures on behalf of candidates by ostensibly committees independent of the candidate and funded by

unidentified contributors – emerged as force in both state and Congressional elections, predominantly in support of key Republican candidates for the Senate and House. Politically, the Tea Party factions within the Republican Party were buoyed by a few key successes in defeating traditional Republican candidates. These successes gave Tea Party insurgents leverage to move all GOP candidates into electoral agendas that were ideologically absolutist, wholly anti-Obama and toxic to policy compromises with Democrats. In terms of governance, the Republican takeover of the Senate left President Barack Obama to face a united Republican Congress determined to undermine any and all presidential initiatives. Obama's response was to attempt to move his programs and policies forward through executive orders, memoranda and agreements rather than through legislation.

## 2. Midterms as low turnout elections

In the presidential system used by the United States, the entire membership of the House of Representatives stands for election every two years from single-member districts. Approximately one-third of the Senate is up for election every two years – vacant seats add to the total in any given year. Senators serve six-year terms and