Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty

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Executive Summary

For the first time since 1987, succession is being openly discussed in Burkina Faso. Under the current constitution, President Blaise Compaoré, in power for more than a quarter century, is not allowed to contest the presidency in 2015. Any attempt to amend the constitution for a fifth-term bid could provoke a repeat of the 2011 popular uprisings. However, even if Compaoré abides by the constitution and leaves power in 2015, his succession may still prove challenging as he has dominated the political scene for decades, placing severe restrictions on political space. International partners must encourage him to uphold the constitution and prepare for a smooth, democratic transition.

Preserving Burkina Faso’s stability is all the more important given that the country is located at the centre of an increasingly troubled region, with the political and military crisis in neighbouring Mali possibly spilling over into Niger, another border country. Burkina Faso has been spared similar upheaval so far thanks to its internal stability and robust security apparatus, but deterioration of the political climate in the run-up to 2015 could make the country more vulnerable. A presidential election is also due in 2015 in Côte d’Ivoire, a country with which Burkina Faso has very close ties. This special relationship and the presence of a significant Burkinabe community in the country mean that a political crisis in Ouagadougou could have a negative impact on a still fragile Côte d’Ivoire.

Burkina Faso also holds significant diplomatic influence in West Africa. Over the past two decades under Blaise Compaoré’s rule, the country has become a key player in the resolution of regional crises. The president and his men have succeeded, with much ingenuity, in positioning themselves as indispensable mediators or as “watchdogs” helping Western countries monitor the security situation in the Sahel and the Sahara. A crisis in Burkina Faso would not only mean the loss of a key ally and a strategic base for France and the U.S., it would also reduce the capacity of an African country in dealing with regional conflicts. The collapse of the Burkinabe diplomatic apparatus would also mean the loss of an important reference point for West Africa that, despite limitations, has played an essential role as a regulatory authority.

There is real risk of socio-political crisis in Burkina Faso. Since coming to power in 1987, Blaise Compaoré has put in place a semi-authoritarian regime, combining democratisation with repression, to ensure political stability – something its predecessors have never achieved. This complex, flawed system is unlikely to be sustained, however. It revolves around one man who has dominated political life for over two decades and has left little room for a smooth transition. In fact, there are few alternatives for democratic succession. The opposition is divided and lacks financial capacity and charismatic, experienced leaders; and none of the key figures in the ruling party has emerged as a credible successor. If Compaoré fails to manage his departure effectively, the country could face political upheaval similar to that which rocked Côte d’Ivoire in the 1990s following the death of Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

Another threat to Burkina Faso’s stability is social explosion. The society has modernised faster than the political system, and urbanisation and globalisation have created high expectations for change from an increasingly young population. Despite strong economic growth, inequalities are widespread and the country is one of the
poorest in the world. Repeated promises of change have never been fulfilled, and this has led to broken relations between the state and its citizens as well as a loss of authority at all levels of the administration. Public distrust sparked violent protests in the first half of 2011 that involved various segments of the society, including rank-and-file soldiers in several cities.

For the first time, the military appeared divided between the elites and the rank and file, and somewhat hostile to the president, who has sought to control the defence and security apparatus from which he had emerged. The crisis was only partially resolved, and local conflicts over land, traditional leadership and workers’ rights increased in 2012. Such tensions are especially worrying given the country’s history of social struggle and revolutionary tendencies since the 1983 Marxist-inspired revolution.

Blaise Compaoré’s long reign is showing the usual signs of erosion that characterise semi-autocratic rule. Several key figures of his regime have retired, including the mayor of Ouagadougou, Simon Compaoré – not a relative of the president – who managed the country’s capital for seventeen years; and billionaire Oumarou Kanazoé, who until his death was a moderate voice among the Muslim community. In addition, the death of Libya’s Muammar Qadhafi, a major financial partner, was a blow to Compaoré’s regime.

President Compaoré has responded to these challenges with reforms that have not met popular expectations and have only scratched the surface. Further, he has remained silent on whether he will actually leave office in 2015. He has concentrated power, in the country and within his Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) party, in the hands of a small circle of very close allies and family members, including his younger brother François Compaoré, who was elected to parliament for the first time on 2 December 2012. The president’s silence and his brother’s political ascent continue to fuel uncertainty.

President Compaoré has less than three years left to prepare his departure and prevent a succession battle or a new popular uprising. He is the only actor capable of facilitating a smooth transition. By upholding the constitution and resisting the temptation of dynastic succession, he could preserve stability, the main accomplishment of his long rule. Any other scenario would pave the way for a troubled future. Similarly, the opposition and civil society organisations should act responsibly and work to create conditions for a democratic process that would preserve peace and stability. International partners, in particular Western allies, should no longer focus exclusively on Compaoré’s mediation role and the monitoring of security risks in West Africa; they should also pay close attention to domestic politics and the promotion of democracy in Burkina Faso.

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I. Introduction

An independent state since 5 August 1960, Burkina Faso, formerly called the Upper Volta, has a population of 16 million and covers an area of 272,000 sq km. It shares borders with six countries, including Mali, which is going through a serious political and military crisis, and Côte d’Ivoire, which is only just emerging from a decade of armed conflict. Burkina Faso’s strategic position on the edge of the Sahara makes it a bridgehead for surveillance of the Sahel-Saharan region. Preserving its stability is of the utmost importance.

Burkina Faso’s relatively good international image contrasts with the domestic situation, which has deteriorated in recent years. After several violent uprisings, notably in 1998-1999, unrest in the first half of 2011 exposed the weaknesses of an ageing and controversial regime. As after all waves of violence, promises of reform and solutions temporarily led the protests to die down.

However, many people, especially the youth, are tempted to impose their own justice because they no longer have faith in a judiciary that overtly lacks independence. The population is growing frustrated with widespread corruption and the persistence of socioeconomic inequalities in spite of strong economic growth and undeniable socio-economic progress. Such discontent, combined with an anaemic political life and sham elections, leads to low voter turnout. At the same time, the weakness of the opposition and civil society has made violence the only option for changing the situation.

This report, Crisis Group’s first on Burkina Faso, is mainly historical in content. It analyses the background to the forthcoming problematic transition and warns that any attempt by President Compaoré to remain in power indefinitely will threaten the country’s future. It is based on interviews held in Burkina Faso in September 2011, March and July 2012 and telephone interviews and electronic communications in the first half of 2013. Crisis Group met members of the government and the ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès, CDP), a wide range of opposition and civil society representatives and traditional leaders. Interviews with national and international actors were complemented by readings on Burkina Faso. The report is one in a series that analyses the security, political and socio-economic dynamics of Sahel countries, an indispensable effort in the wake of the crisis in Mali. Burkina Faso and Niger must be the subject of renewed attention.

1 For example, life expectancy rose from 48.3 years in 1994 to 54.07 in 2012. The gross primary school enrolment rate rose from 57 per cent in 2005 to 77.6 per cent in 2011. Strong economic growth averaging 5.5 per cent per year was maintained between 1997 and 2007 and is estimated at 7 per cent for 2012. However, the benefits of this growth have been unequally shared, as shown by the fact that 46 per cent of the population still live below the poverty line. See L’Etat du Monde (Paris, 1995), p. 266; World Bank and The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency.

2 A forthcoming Crisis Group report will analyse the political and security situation in Niger.
II. A Long Period of Instability

Ruled by the French since the end of the nineteenth century, Upper Volta was a merger of the kingdoms of the Mossi empire and non-state societies living to the south and west of these kingdoms. Throughout its colonial history, this territory, which provided the French with a pool of labour, had unstable borders. From 1932 to 1947, it was dismembered and shared between its neighbours: Côte d’Ivoire, Niger and what is now Mali. A desire for independence, particularly manifested by its traditional leaders, did not only express a struggle for emancipation and freedom. Reconstitution of the territory was one of the driving forces that led to the birth of an independent Upper Volta on 5 August 1960.

This longstanding desire to maintain the country’s territorial integrity has led to a strong sense of belonging to the same political space among the population, and there have never been any separatist demands or strong ethno-regionalist tensions. The struggle for independence was peaceful, negotiated and led by two main currents: the traditional Mossi chiefs and officials in the colonial administration. One of the latter, Maurice Yaméogo, became the first president of the young republic.

Although Yaméogo did not amend the constitution, which provided for a multi-party system, he established an authoritarian regime with a de facto single party, the Rassemblement démocratique africain (RDA), which dominated francophone Africa at that time. He silenced the opposition parties without resorting to violence.

3 The Mossi, Moosí, Moosé or Mossé, according to the transcription, are the country’s main ethnic group. They account for just over 48 per cent of the population. Prior to colonisation, the Mossi empire, the Moogo, comprised three geographical and political entities: the kingdoms of Ouagadougou in the centre, Yatenga in the north and Tenkodogo in the centre east. Traditional Moonga (singular of Mossi) society had a rigid hierarchy with a system of social classes dominated by hereditary nobility. The society’s respect of this hierarchy and its functioning administration allowed the emperor to control his territory through a large network of local chiefs and sub-chiefs. The Mossi speak Mooré. For more on Mossi history and civilisation, see Michel Izard, *Moogo*, L’émergence d’un espace étatique ouest-africain au XVIe siècle (Paris, 2003); Joseph Issoufou Conombo, *M’ba Tinga, Traditions des Mossé dans l’empire du Moogho Naba* (Paris, 1989); Pierre Ilboudo, Croyances et pratiques religieuses traditionnelles des Mossi (Stuttgart, 1990).

4 A military territory from 1896 to 1904, then part of the colony of Upper-Senegal-Niger from 1904 to 1919, it became the colony of Upper Volta from 1919 to 1932.


6 A son of peasants and born in Koudougou in 1921, Maurice Yaméogo was educated at the small Catholic seminary of Pabré, where many of the Burkina elites were trained at the time. From 1948, he sat on the federal Grand Council, where he held the post of grand councillor of French West Africa.

7 The RDA was a federation of French-speaking African political parties formed at the October 1946 Congress of Bamako. Initially affiliated to the French Communist Party, the only metropolitan party represented at the congress, the RDA adopted an increasingly conservative orientation after 1950 under the leadership of Félix Houphouët-Boigny. The Volta branch of the RDA, the Union démocratique voltaïque (UDV-RDA), was founded in 1957. The RDA participated directly or indirectly in all the country’s governments until 1980. It competed with another federal party, the left-wing Parti du regroupement africain (PRA). Some PRA leaders joined the RDA after 1960. See Robert J. Mundt, *Historical Dictionary of Côte d’Ivoire* (London, 1995), p. 145.

Combined with unpopular economic measures, widespread corruption and attempts to rein in the traditional chiefs, Yaméogo’s authoritarianism provoked a national revolt, organised by the trade unions, traditional chiefs and intellectuals. “Monsieur Maurice”, as his countrymen called him, was overthrown by street demonstrations on 3 January 1966.

His six years in power witnessed the development of forces and dynamics that are still at work in Burkina Faso today: the trade unions, the religious and traditional authorities, the urban intellectual circles and the military. Upper Volta was already fluctuating between authoritarianism and democracy. The military filled the vacuum left by a weak and divided political opposition that found it difficult to channel popular discontent.

The army chief of staff, Sangoulé Lamizana, took over from Maurice Yaméogo in a bloodless coup. Lamizana established an atypical military regime that emphasised conciliation and good management, implemented democratic reforms and returned power to a civilian government in 1970. However, neither the Second Republic founded by the 1970 constitution nor the Third Republic established in 1977 brought stability. These two regimes were weak, undermined and paralysed by political quarrels, including within the RDA. Each time deadlock was reached, semi-authoritarian governments returned under the banners of “national renewal” and “national unity”, though opposed by the trade unions.

This permanent instability eventually worked to the advantage of the extreme left. The traditional political parties were so discredited that only the small extreme left-wing groups had a presence in the street, noted a former minister. The existence of an extreme left-wing minority combined with a fragmented military produced two coups on November 1980 and November 1982 respectively. Three competing groups of officers formed the military elite: an old guard trained on the battlefields of European colonial wars, such as Lamizana, a veteran of Indochina and Algeria; an intermediate generation who attended French military schools, including Colonel Zerbo; and a generation of young junior officers, influenced by extreme left-
wing ideas, including Captains Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré, the main figures in the 1983 revolution.
III. Revolution and Counter-revolution

The Sankara revolution and its aftermath are key to understanding contemporary Burkina Faso. Most of the country’s leaders and several influential opposition members were fervent revolutionaries. The Blaise Compaoré government’s strong regional influence also took root in the 1983 coup. However, more than any other, this period illustrated the contradictions of the society: though rural and conservative, Burkina Faso went further than any other West African state in implementing revolutionary politics that were popular at that time in the region. The country has always been torn between respect for the established order and resistance to it. This also makes it difficult to understand this secret and nuanced society and therefore to predict its future. Blaise Compaoré’s sudden halt to the revolution in 1987 and the return to a more conservative system further illustrated this paradox.

A. The Sankara Revolution

On the night of 4 August 1983, Captain Thomas Sankara took power with the support of Blaise Compaoré and commandos based at the national training centre, the Centre national d’entraînement commando (CNEC). Two other coups were also being prepared at that time, an indication of the country’s extremely unstable situation. In the aftermath of the coup, which was bloodier than in the past, political violence became the norm and a historic revolution began. Many of the country’s leaders, as well as its current name, emerged during this period. On 4 August 1984, Upper Volta became Burkina Faso, which means “land of honest men”. A combination of two of the country’s main languages, Burkina means “honesty” or “honour” in Mooré, and Faso, a Dioula term, means “land” or “homeland”.

According to Sankara, the coup was a reaction to “23 years of neo-colonialism” and aimed “to build a popular democratic state”. The 21-member government that took office on 25 August was composed of young left-wing army officers and members of extreme left-wing parties. It included five soldiers: Captains Thomas Sankara, Blaise Compaoré and Henri Zongo, Major Jean-Baptiste Lingani and Commander Abdoul Salam Kaboré. The remaining portfolios were allocated to civilians, including eight members of Marxist-Leninist groups. The new government’s structure was also

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15 In 2010, the rate of urbanisation was 26 per cent. In the sub-region, only Niger has less urban population (21 per cent in 2010). But Burkina Faso has had the strongest urban population growth in West Africa with 6.2 per cent for the period 2010-2015. The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency.
16 Located in the south east of the country at Pô, the CNEC was one of the cradles of the revolution. Its commander was Thomas Sankara, then Blaise Compaoré and, as from 1987, Gilbert Dienderé, the current private army chief of staff of the president. It is now called the Centre d’entraînement commandos (CEC).
17 Colonel Yorian Gabriel Somé planned to take power on 6 August and eliminate Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré. Saye Zerbo was also preparing a coup for 5 August. Thomas Sankara and his companions were aware of these plans. Kaboré, op. cit., p. 151.
19 Thomas Sankara’s 2 October 1983 Discours d’orientation politique (DOP) set out the revolution’s political and economic program.
20 Five were members of the pro-Soviet LIPAD and three belonged to the pro-Chinese Union des luttes communistes (ULC). See Savonnet-Guyot, op. cit., p. 181.
typically revolutionary and dominated by the National Council of the Revolution (Conseil national de la révolution, CNR) chaired by Thomas Sankara. The all-powerful CNR led the revolution and there was no opposition.21

In November 1983, the government established Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (Comités de défense de la révolution, CDRs) as the CNR's local branches. The CDRs were omnipresent “grassroots organs of democratic and popular power”.22 The Popular Revolutionary Tribunals (Tribunaux populaires révolutionnaires, TPRs), the third revolutionary institution, had jurisdiction to try political crimes and offences, attacks on the safety of the state and the misappropriation of public funds. There was no public prosecutor or lawyers for the accused, who had to defend themselves. Cases were prepared directly in the tribunal on the basis of what were often cursory investigations conducted by “mobile investigation teams”.23

Sankara launched large socioeconomic reforms that prioritised the most vulnerable segments of society. He asked the military to produce what it consumed; encouraged women to emancipate themselves from “feudal men”;24 called on the population to buy local produce; promoted the collective construction of public infrastructure; began land reform; and introduced “commando” vaccination and literacy programs.25

In hindsight, it remains difficult to assess the popularity of the revolution; it was creative and hyperactive but also experimental, coercive and sometimes repressive. As with Saye Zerbo’s coup in 1980, the public initially welcomed it. A large segment of the population, especially the youth and the most disadvantaged, supported Sankara because of his sincerity, austere life style and eloquence. The revolution transformed society by giving women and youth a place that they did not previously have in what was a patriarchal society. Access to health care and social housing and the fight against corruption led to progress. Formerly known for its high poverty rate, Burkina Faso became famous for its atypical revolution, a source of pride for many.26

However, the revolution also had enemies and not all of them were to be found in the conservative segments of society. The middle class, especially civil servants, and the petite bourgeoisie, which faced a high level of taxation and suffered abuses at the hands of the TPR, did not welcome the reforms.27 Sankara clashed with two key

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21 Summoned to the presidential palace, all former politicians were told they were forbidden from undertaking any political activities, were under house arrest and could receive no more than three visitors at a time. Savonnet-Guyot, op. cit., p. 181.

22 They were present in the villages, the communes, the administrative services, military units and schools in rural areas. Organised in accordance with the communist principle of “democratic centralism”, the duty of the CDRs was to defend the revolution, participate in the country’s economic and cultural development, defence, security and political education of the people.

23 Kaboré, op. cit., pp. 177-184.

24 The CNR introduced “men-only market days”. On these days, women were banned from going to market and the men had to do the shopping. However, the CNR did not set any age limits and many fathers avoided the task by sending one of their sons instead. Crisis Group interviews, Ouagadougou residents, March 2012.


27 For example, civil servants had to buy produce from the state-owned Union des coopératives agricoles et maraichères du Burkina (UCOBAM). Crisis Group interviews, Ouagadougou residents,
institutions that also opposed previous regimes on several occasions: traditional chiefs and the trade unions. By abolishing the privileges of the former, Sankara's government lost an important network in rural areas.

In his Political Orientation Speech (Discours d’orientation politique, DOP), Sankara denounced "the reactionary forces who draw their power from the feudal traditional structures in our society". On 3 December 1983, the CNR abolished all the privileges of traditional chiefs. The CNR competed and clashed with trade unions for legitimacy as the leader of social reform. The unions then mobilised the workers against the revolutionary council, even though the latter claimed to defend the interests of those very same workers. There was major disagreement within the council about what attitude to adopt towards the unions. The CDRs were accused of using brutal methods that included public humiliation, surveillance, denunciations and the settling of scores – all of which became the norm. "Sankarism" committed abuses, such as the execution of Colonel Yorian Gabriel Somé and seven men suspected of plotting against the government in 1984.

The revolution, which lasted a little under four years, led to a complete renewal of the political class. Several of its leaders are still ruling Burkina Faso with President Compaoré. It would be difficult to establish an exhaustive list, but participants in the revolutionary period included the following key actors today: Salif Diallo, an outstanding former agriculture minister, began his political career as director of Blaise Compaoré’s cabinet during the revolution; Simon Compaoré, mayor of Ouagadougou (1995-2012), was also director of Blaise Compaoré’s cabinet in 1985; Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, president of the national assembly until the December 2012 elections, was director general of Burkina Faso’s International Bank from 1984 onwards.

The politicians who grew up with the revolution developed outstanding political skills. The political and militarist culture of the CDRs and their repressive actions have had a lasting effect on the public and the country’s leaders. Three decades later, people are still reluctant to express their political opinions or criticise the government. The climate of surveillance and distrust under the CDRs deepened in the following period, which began with a political assassination that marked the beginning of the current regime.

September 2012. Moreover, more than 2,000 civil servants were affected by the “cut-backs” announced by the TPRs. Crisis Group interview, former minister, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

28 Savonnet-Guyot, op. cit., p. 188.
29 Savonnet-Guyot, op. cit., p. 186.
32 Three soldiers and four civilians were shot. On 15 July 1984, another soldier was executed in Ouagadougou by a commando whose members have never been identified. Kaboré, op. cit., p. 218.
33 Crisis Group telephone interview, fellow traveller of the revolution, May 2012.
34 Crisis Group interviews, civil society leaders, political leaders, Burkina citizens, September 2011 and March 2012. The CRD’s mission was to denounce anti-revolution people, assess the work of civil servants and supervise the participation of everybody in the fields. Crisis Group interviews, Ouagadougou residents, September 2012. The legacy of the revolution, which encourages silence and secretiveness, combines with cultural traits of Burkina society in general and Moaaga society in particular, which treat silence and discretion as positive values and gossip and extroversion as negative.
B. Rectification and Normalisation

The Sankara revolution was weakened by complex internal quarrels. Compaoré opposed Thomas Sankara reportedly because he wanted to give a different direction to the revolution or, more simply, because he wanted to take power. The specific reasons that led to the 15 October 1987 coup, and the exact circumstances in which it took place, are still the subject of many interpretations. Sankara and thirteen others were killed. Accusations that other countries were behind the coup remain controversial. Some blamed Liberia’s Charles Taylor and Prince Johnson and others the Ivorian President, Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

35 LIPAD and a segment of the CNR fought for control of the CDRs. This power struggle ended with LIPAD’s exclusion from the government in 1984. This strengthened the position of the pro-Sankara UCL, which was the only civilian group remaining in the CNR. To counter the UCL’s influence, other organisations, infiltrated by Blaise Compaoré, were created, such as the Union des communistes burkinabè (UCB) and the Organisation militaire révolutionnaire (OMR). See Jimmy Kandeh, Coups from Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa (New York, 2004), p. 134.

36 Crisis Group interview, former minister, Ouagadougou, March 2012.

37 In a radio broadcast on 19 October 1987, Blaise Compaoré said this about the circumstances of Thomas Sankara’s death: “... Some of you are still wondering why 15 October? For more than a year, a dormant and then open conflict opposed two antagonistic conceptions of the August revolution .... The crisis reached its height when he [Sankara] decided last June to dissolve all left-wing organisations. I told him we were opposed to this vision because it was precipitated and would lead to the militarisation of power and the certain repression of militants of these organisations, which would necessarily resist .... While we were working towards a peaceful and revolutionary outcome, unknown to us, the bureaucratic wing was preparing a brutal, violent and bloody ending. On 15 October, we were all told that a consultation meeting would be held at 8pm at the office of the National Council of the Revolution .... During that meeting, we were to be surrounded, arrested and shot. Security forces under the Conseil de l’Entente opposed the 8pm plot and decided to take the initiative. As revolutionaries, we had to be brave and fulfil our duty .... We will continue to do so consistently and with determination to achieve the revolution’s objectives. This brutal outcome shocked all of us, as human beings and me more than anyone because we were brothers-in-arms and friends. Also, we feel that here was a revolutionary comrade who had made a mistake. As a revolutionary, we owe him a burial worthy of the hopes that he raised during his life. However, when political issues and especially the leadership and management of the state, the nation and the people are concerned, we must not be overly sentimental when dealing with these issues”. The entire speech can be found at: http://bit.ly/13xe5Xa. Extracts are quoted by Jaffré, Les années Sankara, op. cit., pp. 218-219. More recently (2012), when questioned about the 15 October 1987 events, Compaoré said: “What happened to us then was no different than what happens elsewhere in the world. Closed, totalitarian regimes that are hostile to freedom never end well. The revolution was a unique historic experience but it showed its limits. When this kind of movement is unable to maintain freedom, it cannot work. The investigation into Thomas’s assassination has not been conclusive, in a context, at the time, of emergency. Burkina is not the only country that has such unresolved affairs”. See “Blaise Compaoré: ‘Je n’ai pas changé’, Jeune Afrique, 15 October 2012.

38 See, for example, “Prince Johnson: c’est Compaoré qui a fait tuer Sankara avec l’aval d’Houphouët-Boigny”, Radio France internationale, 27 October 2008. Blaise Compaoré has always denied any involvement in Sankara’s murder. The Burkina Faso government has officially rejected the accusations made by Prince Johnson. In October 2008, Philippe Sawadogo, government spokesperson, said that, “these accusations have not been backed up with evidence ... 21 years of groundless statements. I wonder, who is behind these fabrications?” See “Derrière les révélations de Prince Johnson, les soutiens burkinabè et ivoiriens à la rébellion du Libéria”, Radio France internationale, 28 October 2008. On the alleged involvement of other countries, see Jaffré, Les années Sankara, op. cit., pp. 255-260.
What is certain is that supporters of Compaoré carried out the coup led by his current private army chief of staff, Gilbert Diendéré. Compaoré took power, along with the two other historic leaders of the 1983 revolution still alive at that time, Henri Zongo and Jean-Baptiste Lingani. Zongo and Lingani became ministers, but their role was quickly limited and their support for Compaoré was in fact obtained under duress. They were shot in 1989 after denouncing the government’s “right-wing drift”.

The new government, called the Popular Front (Front populaire, FP), said it wanted to “rectify” the revolutionary process. It adopted a paradoxical policy that alternated between reconciliation or “arrangements” with the social classes marginalised by the revolution and the physical elimination or exclusion of its opponents. The government sought legitimacy by reinstating “all the teachers dismissed in 1984 for going on strike and suspended civil servants”, and moving “to the right” by informally and gradually rehabilitating the traditional chiefs, old elites and certain economic operators. These political and social measures laid the foundations for Blaise Compaoré’s power.

At the same time, he crushed pro-Sankara segments of society, who were forced to pledge their allegiance or go into exile, as well as sectors of the military who might threaten his rule. He violently threatened and ostracised his opponents, inspiring great fear. 25 years later, an opposition leader confirmed, “Blaise Compaoré has never been loved, but has been feared for a long time”. Alternating between democratisation and repression, he consolidated his power and made a major political breakthrough by creating, in April 1989, the Organisation pour la démocratie populaire/Mouvement du travail (ODP/MT), which merged several small left-wing groups

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39 In the late 1980s, Diendéré gave the following version of events to the Belgian author Ludo Martens: “On 15 October ... Sankara’s chauffeur, Corporal Der and others came to warn us that Compaoré, Lingani and Zongo were to be arrested that evening .... Our reaction was that Sankara should be arrested before that happened .... We knew that Sankara had a meeting of the Council at 4pm and we decided to go and arrest him at that meeting. Shortly after 4pm, Sankara’s Peugeot 205 and a security car arrived at the house .... We surrounded the cars. Sankara was wearing sports clothes. As always, he was armed with an automatic pistol in his hand. He immediately opened fire and wounded one of our men. At that moment, all the men went wild, everybody opened fire and we lost control of the situation”. Martens also mentions the contribution made by the journalist Sennen Andriamirado on 15 October 1988 at a conference on “Thomas Sankara” in Paris: according to the only surviving adviser of President Sankara, Alouna Traoré, “someone came into the room and ordered everybody to leave the premises. Everybody was shot as they left”. See Ludo Martens, Sankara, Compaoré, et la révolution burkinabè (Anvers, 1989), pp. 60-68.

40 Crisis Group telephone interview, fellow traveller of the revolution, October 2012.

41 See Kaboré, op. cit., pp. 238-240.

42 The word “rectification” is used for the first time by the Popular Front in a 16 October 1987 communiqué.


44 Popular Front Communiqué no. 5, 15 October 1987.


46 Among the many atrocities that immediately followed Blaise Compaoré’s coup were the execution of nineteen soldiers in the Koudougou battalion who had militarily opposed Compaoré’s men. See Kandeh, op. cit., p. 140. There is a mausoleum to the memory of the victims near Koudougou and supporters of Thomas Sankara go there to pay tribute to him. “Burkina Faso: Évènements du 27 October 1987 à Koudougou – ‘Le Lion’ sur la tombe de ses soldats”, Le Pays, 27 October 2009.

47 Crisis Group interview, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
and became a tool to control political life. The ODP/MT included the UCB, the OMR and fragments of the GCB.

The period that followed the Popular Front took the same path. For internal and external reasons, Blaise Compaoré was forced to seek even more democratic legitimacy. In the country itself, “political democratisation led to a flood of demands for democratisation and access to the state”.48 Externally, President François Mitterrand’s “La Baule speech” at the sixteenth France-Africa summit in June 1990 was an important turning point in relations between France and its former African colonies. He affirmed that, “the winds of freedom blowing East must inevitably blow South too .... There is no development without democracy and there is no democracy without development”. Mitterrand forced all francophone African leaders to “relax authoritarianism” by conditioning aid on their commitment to democratisation.

Driven by these two factors, Blaise Compaoré started a democratisation process: a new constitution was adopted in June 1991, founding the Fourth Republic, and a consultation brought 22 political parties to the table in June 1991. However, the government did not break with its authoritarian and violent tendencies. Blaise Compaoré refused to organise a national sovereign conference and was the only candidate in the December 1991 presidential election, in which 25.28 per cent of the population voted. His government was accused of assassinating opposition leaders, including Oumarou Clément Ouédraogo, leader of the Parti burkinabè du travail and former close associate of Compaoré, who was killed in an attack in the centre of Ouagadougou.49 A commission of inquiry established in 1991 identified a junior officer as the main suspect, but he was acquitted in 2005. 50 Like many others, the “Oumarou Clément case” was never solved. Opposition representatives and human rights groups demanded that these investigations reach a conclusion.

48 Loada, Blaise Compaoré ou l’architecte, op. cit., p. 291.
49 The journalist and writer Vincent Ouattara made a list of blood crimes committed by the government between November 1982 and October 2001. Ouattara documented 50 deaths from 15 October 1987 to 13 December 1998. Fourteen were killed during the October 1987 coup. The others, most of them soldiers, academics and journalists, according to Ouattara, were either shot after a summary judgement, for example, Henri Zongo in September 1989; tortured to death by soldiers such as the medical student Boukary Dabo in May 1990 and Professor Guillaume Sessouma in 1990; killed in a suspicious accident, such as Lieutenant Gaspard Somé in 1991; executed, such as the journalist Norbert Zongo in December 1998; or killed by the security forces, such as the school students Blaise Sidiani and Emile Zigani in May 1995. See Vincent Ouattara, L’ère Compaoré: crimes, politique et gestion du pouvoir (Paris, 2006), pp. 215-226 et Kaboré, op. cit., p. 261.
IV. A Semi-authoritarian Regime

Blaise Compaoré’s success was due to his capacity to build a semi-authoritarian regime on the foundations of a weak military dictatorship, moving towards democracy without ever achieving it, and creating a seemingly free and open political system. This regime is based on three key institutions: the military, a political party and the traditional chieftdoms. This architecture allowed him to create the stability that his predecessors never achieved while keeping enough control over society and politics to govern without real opposition and giving civil society enough space through a subtle game of alliances, compromises and illusions. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, political and public freedoms coexisted with authoritarian practices inherited from the end of the 1980s.

Though the ruling party observed the electoral calendar, it dominated the elections and the electoral rolls were not very inclusive. The press was free so long as it did not mention the murky affairs of the ruling elites. The number of political assassinations fell but all of them remained unpunished. This ambiguity also characterised economic management. A poor country, Burkina Faso does, however, have a well-maintained and operational road network, good telecommunications, a regular electricity supply and a professional and regularly paid civil service. Nevertheless, the benefits of growth are distributed unequally in a society that has poor educational standards and in which corruption shattered Sankara’s dreams of building a land of honest men.

A. The Military, the Party and the “Electoral College”

1. A political-military regime

Blaise Compaoré entered the reserve before retiring from the army and has not appeared in uniform since the 1991 presidential election, but he has kept his rank of captain. The armed forces do not seem to interfere in the country’s internal affairs, but despite gradual political normalisation and stability since Compaoré came to

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51 3,924,328 were registered on the electoral roll, out of a five million potential voters aged over eighteen. In 2010, the number was 3,232,006 out of a potential seven million. The construction of a new biometric electoral roll for the December 2012 elections increased the number of registered voters to 4,421,003 (58 per cent of projected voters). To explain this degree of exclusion, the academic Augustin Loada wrote: “No doubt the explanations for electoral abstentions put forward by some authors who blame a lack of social integration and the political inexperience of citizens can be applied to the case of Burkina Faso. However, there may also be strategic abstentions and intentional non-enrolment by some voters ...” See Augustin Loada, “L’élection présidentielle du 13 November 2005: un plébiscite par défaut”, Politique Africaine, no. 101 (Paris, 2006); “Rapport sur les enjeux des élections présidentielles”, Centre pour la gouvernance démocratique, November 2010; and “Biométrique: 4 421 0003 inscrits, la désillusion n’est pas loin”, Bendré, 29 August 2012.

52 A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report stated that the proportion of national income belonging to the 10 per cent poorest in the country was 1.8 per cent, compared to 60.7 per cent for the richest 10 per cent. Stephen Smith, Négrologie (Paris, 2003), p. 60.

53 Crisis Group telephone interview, journalist, September 2012. The Burkina military, formed on 3 August 1960 on the eve of independence, was composed of former members of the French colonial forces. It has approximately 12,000 members, of which 5 per cent are officers, 40 per cent non-commissioned officers and 55 per cent rank and file. There are 7,800 land troops, 3,000 gendarmes, 600 air troops and 600 fire-brigade troops. The defence budget accounts for about 4.5 per cent of the national budget. See “Faut-il dissoudre l’armée burkinabé ?”, Le Faso.net, 20 April 2011.
power, the government can still be defined as a political-military regime. The military plays a central role.

First, Blaise Compaoré remains a member of the military and this influences his way of governing, which could sometimes be likened to “strategic planning”. He listens, makes his mind up and issues orders to his colleagues, said a former minister of the revolution. More generally, the military has been the main guarantor of the stability of his rule. As in neighbouring countries, stability within the army goes hand in hand with political stability. This is all the more important in Burkina Faso given that the political opposition is too weak to offer an alternative through elections. The military remains the institution most likely to overthrow the government and the latter therefore needs to be able to control it and protect itself.

Its role has evolved as the regime became more democratic. Between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, segments of the military were accused of being the government’s main instrument to maintain its authority and eliminate its most radical opponents. A minority of its members is strongly suspected of being involved in political violence. It took until the murder of the journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998 for these activities to be publicly denounced and documented. That period is over but some former army officers remain highly influential in the government, particularly in foreign policy, the presidency’s turf. They have formed part of many regional mediation missions in recent years, and have facilitated Burkina’s participation in many military training programs run by regional organisations and Western partners.

After the rectification period, the military was purged and the most threatening elements were killed or forced into exile, although this did not eliminate the danger of a coup. At the same time, an elite unit was established called the Régiment de sécurité présidentielle (RSP), whose role was to create a cordon of security around the president. It comprised between 600 and 800 men recruited from among the best

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54 Crisis Group interview, politician, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
55 Ibid.
56 At the Day of Forgiveness organised by the Burkina authorities on 30 March 2001, President Compaoré’s speech seemed to implicitly recognise these political crimes: “People of Burkina Faso, on this solemn occasion, in my capacity as president of Burkina Faso ensuring the continuity of the state, we ask for forgiveness and express our profound regret for the torture, crimes, injustices, bullying and all other wrongs committed by Burkinabes on other Burkinabes in the name of and under the protection of the state, from 1960 to this day”. Speech of the president of Burkina Faso at the National Day of Forgiveness. In June 1999, President Compaoré also set up a Committee of Wise men, including three former heads of state, religious leaders and civil society. The committee’s report also highlighted these crimes: “The Committee of Wisemen note with bitterness that the blood crimes following the political violence in 1982 continue to this day”. See “Rapport du Collège des sages sur les crimes impunis de 1960 à nos jours”, 30 July 1999.
57 See Section VI.
60 For example, Warrant-Officer Hyacinthe Kafando, former ally of Gilbert Diendéré and former leader of the RSP. “Chief Kaf” was accused of attempting a coup in 1996 and was forced into exile. He returned in April 2001. He is no longer in the army and was elected to parliament in 2007. “Hyacynthe Kafando: un député pas comme les autres”, L’opinion, 27 April 2007.
61 An attempted coup led by Captain Luther Ouali Diapagri and sixteen other soldiers, including former RSP members, was foiled in October 2003. In April 2004, Ouali was sentenced to ten years imprisonment with no remission. “Luther Ouali Diapagri retrouvé”, L’Observateur Paalga, 23 June 2011.
elements of the security forces. These soldiers were not chosen on ethnic or regional
criteria, but for their loyalty to the president, in exchange for which they received
privileged treatment. They lived in the best accommodation, were paid the highest
wages and did not have to abide by the same code of conduct as the rest of the troops
when off-duty. The higher quality of their weapons and training gave them an edge
over other units.

The military’s structure and discipline helped the government control it. For a
long time, it was considered a model in West Africa, but standards declined, event-
tually leading to mutinies in the first half of 2011 and current reforms. The military
has never suffered from over-manning like, for example, in Guinea. Its senior offic-
ers have all received high-level training and the balance between the different ranks
has always been observed. The military was structured in such a way as to minimise
the risks of a coup. Until recently, there were very few combined forces and mostly
specialised units, which makes it difficult for a single unit to have a broad enough
operational capacity to destabilise and oppose the RSP. Finally, the military main-
tains a strong culture of secrecy. Only the most senior officers have access to all the
information. Outsiders have very little influence on it and are therefore unlikely to
infiltrate and destabilise it.

2. A virtually single-party system

The CDP, the second institution on which the regime is based, allows the head of
state to control political life. The CDP was created on 5 February 1996 as an extension
of the ODP/MT, with similar but more ambitious objectives. By merging the
ODP/MT and thirteen other parties, Blaise Compaoré united myriad small and
medium-sized groups while neutralising a significant opposition minority. The
goal was the same as when the ODP/MT was created: controlling political life and
containing the democratic opposition. This “hyper-party” left only three other major
actors on the political scene: the Alliance pour la démocratie et la fédération (ADF),
the RDA and the Parti pour la démocratie et le progrès (PDP).

The 11 May 1997 legislative elections showed the domination of the new presi-
dential party, which elected 101 deputies out of 111. The remaining seats were shared
between the above-mentioned three parties. The nine other parties that presented
candidates received only 8 per cent of votes and no seats. Sixteen years later, “the
CDP is doing well .... The CDP has an absolute majority in the communes. It is in
control of all the regional territorial councils, it has a majority in parliament.”

The CDP is virtually a single party in what is supposed to be a multiparty system.
“The president is the axis around which the whole structure revolves”. He unoffi-
cially appoints members of the party’s decision-making bodies. Statutorily, “congress
is the only decision-making body to select the members of the party’s leading

62 Crisis Group telephone interview, former member of the Burkina military, May 2012.
63 Crisis Group interview, former member of the French military, Dakar, January 2011.
64 See Section VI.
65 Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
66 Ouattara, op. cit., p. 90.
67 Kaboré, op. cit., p. 277.
68 “Entretien avec Alain B. Yoda, secrétaire à l’information du CDP”, Le Pays, 1 March 2012. In
2006, the CDP won 320 out of 359 town councils.
69 Crisis Group interview, journalist, March 2012.
structures”. In fact, “it is Blaise Compaoré and his advisers who decide. At the last congress of the CDP, in March 2012, the presidency decided on a list of leaders and then communicated it to the decision-making bodies”. The vote that followed was no more than a formality. Some party members would like to introduce greater democracy and allow currents to exist officially, but nobody has so far dared to say this openly. Moreover, the recent change of leadership at the head of the party has not seen any movement in that direction.

This hegemony, known in Burkina as “tuk guili”, mainly results from the gap in human and financial resources between the opposition and ruling party. The CDP attracts the best leaders in a poor country that only has a few of them. It is the only party that is present throughout the entire territory. During the presidential elections, the CDP has always been able to draw on far more financial resources than its opponents. In 2005, the Union pour la renaissance/Mouvement sankariste (UNIR/MS), whose candidate came second behind Blaise Compaoré with 4.85 per cent of the vote, spent CFA 12 million ($23,000) on its national campaign. The CDP spent CFA 983 million ($1.8 million) and received “uncounted cash and in-kind donations from people close to the government or wanting to get close to it”. In a system that places no restrictions on the financing of political parties, the CDP has the considerable advantage of having more money.

This domination has proved to be self-sustaining. Many members of the administration are convinced they owe their position to their adhesion to the ruling party even if they do not agree with its policies. Ordinary citizens also believe that nothing can be obtained without being a member of the CDP. The nature of this system not only leaves very little space for the opposition but also gives the executive a “clear primacy over the other branches of power”, particularly the legislature. With a large parliamentary majority and a disciplined group of lawmakers, the CDP has turned the national assembly into a rubber stamp that finds it hard to fulfil its function of controlling the government’s action. Up until March 2012, the president of the assembly was also president of the CDP.

3. The “red hats”
The traditional chiefdoms are the third cornerstone of the regime. Their rehabilitation under the Popular Front was more the result of political pragmatism than of any ethnic consideration. Since 1960, no Burkinabe politician has played the ethnic or regional card to stay in power or manipulate voters, as has occurred for example in

70 Ibid.
71 Crisis Group interviews, journalist and CDP official, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
72 Crisis Group interviews, former minister and CDP member, Abidjan, May 2011.
73 See Section VI.
74 “Take everything” in the Mooré language.
76 Crisis Group interviews, opposition and civil society leaders, Ouagadougou, September 2012.
78 The CDP won the December 2012 legislative elections with 70 seats. The twelve other parties represented in the assembly have the other 57.
79 Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was replaced as head of the CDP by Assimi Kouanda in March 2012. His successor is Soungalo Ouattara, former general secretary of the presidency and civil service, labour and social security minister, elected on 28 December 2012.
Côte d’Ivoire. That does not mean, however, that there is no friction between the various groups in the country, whose people speak around 60 different languages.\(^8^0\)

The Mossi, President Compaoré’s ethnic community, have not always held executive power despite being the majority group. The fact that General Lamizana and Saye Zerbo belonged to the Samo ethnic group, from the west of the country, did not create any special tension during their presidency. Similarly, Blaise Compaoré’s prime ministers are not always from the majority ethnic group. Informally and without being regulated by law, the sharing of government and administration positions is relatively well-balanced among ethnic groups.

In the first days of the rectification campaign, the government was very unpopular and the country shaken and divided by the revolution and its excesses. The need for conciliation and stability led to rehabilitation of the traditional chiefs. They are especially present in the Moaaga and Gourmantché ethnic groups, which together represent more than 60 per cent of the population.\(^8^1\) Also called “red hats” because of their distinctive headgear, they provided local support to the Popular Front by forming a second, informal level of administration and an extension of its power outside the capital. For example, these networks of local dignitaries, very respected in rural areas, are important in mediating and resolving local disputes.\(^8^2\)

When the country entered a more democratic phase with the establishment of the Fourth Republic, the chiefs took on another job that was undoubtedly much more important: they became election organisers for Blaise Compaoré. This was a way of thanking the government for rehabilitating them, but they also took personal advantage of the dominant position held by President Compaoré and the CDP. “The richer political parties are, the more they can count on the active collaboration of the highest possible number of ‘crowned heads’. And the traditional chiefs fitted comfortably into this rich and powerful party that, as all such ruling parties, abuses its position in every way possible.”\(^8^3\) Although some chiefs lean towards the opposition, the majority support the strongest side.\(^8^4\) Finally, as the academic Augustin Loada explains, the relations between the traditional chiefs and Blaise Compaoré “are also based on traditional forms of power, in this instance, the traditional Moaaga state and its principle source of legitimacy, the naam”.\(^8^5\)

Although it has never been publicly denounced, traditional chiefs secretly issue voting instructions to the people before every important election.\(^8^6\) Their influence over the rural population is not only due to a certain popular attachment to tradition but also to their often positive role in local development, dispute resolution and sometimes the modernisation of society.\(^8^7\) The people have long obeyed their voting instructions and still do despite the modernisation of society. President Compaoré

\(^{8^0}\) Conflict between Peul pastoralists and farmers are frequent in Burkina Faso, but they remain local and never take on a national dimension. See the list of languages in Bernard Zongo, \textit{Parlons mooré} (Paris, 2004), pp. 25-32.

\(^{8^1}\) An ethnic group from the east of the country, the Gourmantché account for about 7 per cent of the population. They are the country’s third most numerous ethnic group after the Mossi and the Peul. See http://bit.ly/10O7GYJ.

\(^{8^2}\) Crisis Group interview, member of the Moaaga chiefdom, Ouagadougou, March 2012.

\(^{8^3}\) Alfred Yambangda Sawadogo, \textit{La chefferie coutumière à la croisée des chemins} (Ouagadougou, 2011), p. 117.

\(^{8^4}\) Crisis Group interview, member of the Moaaga chiefdom, Ouagadougou, March 2012.

\(^{8^5}\) “Power of the chief” in Mooré. This power is received both from the divinity and the ancestors.

\(^{8^6}\) Crisis Group interview, member of the Moaaga chiefdom, Ouagadougou, March 2012.

\(^{8^7}\) Crisis Group telephone interview, member of the Moaaga chiefdom, January 2013.
therefore has faithful, extremely numerous voters, with voting instructions passed on to potentially two thirds of the population. This system turns the vote, which is essentially an individual act according to the famous formula of “one person, one vote”, into a compulsory, collective act that further undermines democracy. The debate on the role of the traditional chiefs in political life re-emerged during the crisis in 2011 and the opposition put forward proposals to achieve more satisfactory institutional arrangements.

Business circles were also rapidly rehabilitated after the 1987 coup and came to form another cornerstone of the system. They discreetly fund the CDP. As in many other countries, private companies make donations to political parties. But some parties are also considered an instrument for money-laundering and the corruption that has spread during the last two decades. The arrest in 2011 of the director general of customs, Ousmane Guiro, partially revealed the true extent of clientelist practices. Burkina, once seen as the most virtuous country in West Africa, is no longer an exception in the region.

His arrest was presented as proof of the government’s wish to fight large-scale corruption. In 2012, Transparency International’s annual report noted progress. However, the public believes the government is only interested in finding scapegoats and has no genuine will to combat a system that works to its advantage. Several

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88 Crisis Group interview, academic, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
89 See Section VI.
90 On 27 September 1991, businesspeople offered a dinner at the officers’ mess in Ouagadougou to show their support for Blaise Compaoré, candidate in the 1991 presidential election. One of them, Ilboudo Tintin, said, “we strive for economic progress and have decided to organise this dinner in support of your candidacy and to show our commitment to your policy of peace and democracy”. Ouattara, op. cit., p. 90.
91 For four decades, the billionaire Oumarou Kanazé occupied a major role in his country’s economic, political and spiritual life. Born in 1927 in Yako in the north of the country, Kanazé was a self-educated man who made a fortune from public contracts. He allied himself with all the governments of Upper Volta and Burkina. As a former minister said, “nobody gave him any problems because he sometimes even helped the government financially”. Kanazé played an important role in the Compaoré regime. A member of the Fédération associative pour la paix avec Blaise Compaoré (FEDAP-BC) and close to the CDP, he funded the party and contributed to many public infrastructure projects. He guaranteed support for the CDP in his native region, the Passoré, also the birthplace of Gilbert Diendéré and Thomas Sankara. His role was not only financial. He brought people together and helped to defuse conflict. For example, as head of the Muslim community, he was able to unite the currents in that community. His death in October 2011 deprived Compaoré’s system of one of its main pillars. See Issaka Ouédraogo, El Hadj Oumarou Kanazoe, un autodidacte devenu milliardaire (Ouagadougou, 2011).
93 Guiro is alleged to have hidden cases containing close to CFA 2 billion ($3.5 million) at the home of a family member. Envelopes full of cash had the names of “donors”, including the heads of customs offices and major economic operators, whose names have not been revealed. Guiro was allowed provisional release for health reasons in July 2012 and was never brought to trial “ Arrestation de Ousmane Guiro: voici comment les choses se sont passées”, Mutations, January 2012 and “Liberté provisoire d’Ousmane Guiro – C’est sur ces choses là qu’il faut communiquer”, L’Observateur Paalga, 22 July 2012.
94 Crisis Group interview, member of the government, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
interlocutors from different circles interviewed by Crisis Group felt that the government neither encourages nor effectively fights corruption.95

B. A Divided Opposition

The fragmentation of political life, with at least 74 active political parties in Burkina Faso, is the main handicap of an opposition that presents voters with a confusing and thus not very credible political offer.96 Until the December 2012 elections, the opposition was divided into two major groups: a “radical” neo-Sankarist party and a moderate opposition that came out of the old RDA family. The former adopted an attitude of “circumstantial or enduring intransigence towards the government”.97 The latter opted for compromise, believing it could influence the system from within, but it has an often poorly defined middle-ground position between the presidential majority and the opposition. These two groups are in turn divided: turf wars have weakened the small neo-Sankarist parties, the largest of which is Bénéwendé Sankara’s UNIR/PS, and the ADF/RDA broke up in 2003, leading to the formation of the UNDD.98

Faced with such political dispersion, Blaise Compaoré has had no difficulty winning four presidential elections, each time with more than 80 per cent of votes,99 especially as the opposition lacked money, campaign staff and local representation. This skills shortage makes it difficult for the opposition to formulate new ideas or draft a realistic and coherent program. Opposition parties often criticise Blaise Compaoré and call for his departure without making constructive proposals. There is neither a solid political platform that could unite the opposition nor a charismatic leader capable of leading the divided opposition to the electoral battle.100

95 Crisis Group interviews, journalists, politicians, academics, jurists, Ouagadougou, September 2011 and March 2012.
96 It is difficult to give an exact picture of all political groups. Parties are often formed and often dissolved. In September 2011, Burkina had more than 155 officially recognised parties. Since then, the territorial administration, decentralisation and security ministry has made efforts to update the records. As a result, 80 parties were suspended definitively or for twelve months. On 23 September 2012, on closure of the lists for the 2 December 2012 legislative and municipal elections, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) registered candidacies of 74 political parties. Crisis Group interviews, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011 and March 2012; and “La liste des partis politiques suspendus”, L’Observateur Paalga, 9 May 2012.
98 In 2003, the ADF/RDA split into two. Gilbert Noel Ouedraogo became leader of the ADF/RDA and kept its name. Hermann Yaméogo, who was till then leader of the ADF/RDA, formed his own party, the Union nationale pour la démocratie et le développement (UNDD). The UNDD has the same acronym as the party formed by his father Maurice Yaméogo in 1977, the Union nationale pour la défense de la démocratie.
99 Compaoré, the only candidate, was elected president with 86.1 per cent of votes in 1991. In 1998, he was re-elected with 87.5 per cent, beating two opponents that did not have much support. In 2005, running against thirteen candidates, he received 80.3 per cent of votes. In 2010, he faced six opponents and was elected for the fourth time with 80.2 per cent of votes. See www.ceni.bf/?q=ceni.html. These four elections, which were completely dominated by the all-powerful president and party, were never challenged by the international community.
100 Ibid.
Throughout the last two decades, Blaise Compaoré has strived “to control and even eliminate all alternative forces likely to produce a counter-elite”.\textsuperscript{101} However, the opposition has helped him not only by its inability to unite and formulate a credible alternative but also by its acceptance of the situation. It has seemed incapable of believing in victory, and has limited itself to occupy the little space it was granted and the minor role it was expected to play. It therefore finds it difficult to recruit activists, especially among young people who do not identify with it.\textsuperscript{102} Since 2010, a new opposition formed inside the system is in place and recorded its first success in the December 2012 legislative elections.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{101} Loada, \textit{Contrôler l’opposition}, op. cit., p. 269.
\textsuperscript{102} Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
\textsuperscript{103} See Section VI.
V. Small Country, Major Power

At the head of a poor nation without natural resources, Blaise Compaoré chose to turn his country into a regional diplomatic power. Since 1990, Burkina Faso has been directly involved in seven West African crises, in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Togo, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Mali. A keystone of the regime, this intense military and political activity has yielded significant political and economic benefits. Ouagadougou aims to have an impact on the regional political environment to ensure its internal security and external influence, consolidate its relations with Western powers on which it is heavily financially dependent, and identify markets to compensate for the landlocked nature of his country. Côte d’Ivoire occupies a special place in this picture. Compaoré is not only the president of the 16 million Burkina Faso citizens who live in the country, he is also guarantor of the security of millions more who live between Abidjan and Korhogo in northern Côte d’Ivoire.

A. Mediation, Burkina Faso’s Trademark

Over the years, Burkina Faso has developed a kind of “mediation industry”, which has brought it political and economic dividends. It was still involved in the Liberian conflict when it became a mediator in the Togo crisis in June 1993. Mediation in Togo was followed by several other missions in Niger, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Mali. Ouagadougou has also hosted several major international meetings and conferences, such as the 1996 France-Africa summit, the 1998 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meeting and the 2005 meeting of Francophone countries.

The most important political gain of these mediation missions is without doubt that it has succeeded in partially hiding the ugly side of the government, including its support for controversial figures on the international scene. Blaise Compaoré’s “good offices” have allowed him to polish his image, thanks to an efficient and organised communications machinery. He is often presented as a “peace envoy” and a craftsman of such successes as the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement (OPA).

Burkina Faso’s involvement in the Mano River conflicts was considered a thing of the past. During a July 2002 conference on Liberia in Ouagadougou, Salif Diallo, then agriculture minister, stated, “as you know, we contributed to the fight against the dictatorship – during the government of the deceased [President] Samuel Doe – but today we have to admit that despite the sacrifices made by our brothers in Liberia, the country still faces fundamental issues of democracy and progress”. Blaise Compaoré has therefore been able to appear as a virtuous and indispensable actor for regional stability. This image strengthened his hand when seeking Western support.

On the domestic front, a large proportion of the population believes that Burkina owes its international prestige to Compaoré’s intense regional diplomacy. He has consolidated his government’s position by successfully handling destabilising external factors, particularly the occasional flow of refugees from conflicts in neighbouring

106 “Les médiations de Blaise Compaoré: une méthode singulièr qui fait recette”, Sidwaya, 23 April 2012.
countries. His diplomatic prestige has also allowed him to place many of his men in regional and international institutions.\(^{107}\) These appointments have not only allowed him to remove or reward important figures in his government, they have also increased Burkina’s influence abroad.

The economic dividends are also important. As a diplomat said, “Burkina has become rich thanks to its neighbours”.\(^{108}\) These gains are not only the illegal gains made from real or alleged interference. By becoming an indispensable actor in the region, Compaoré has been able to negotiate political and financial support from his main development partners. His role as a mediator has facilitated the activities of Burkina businesspeople in several neighbouring countries, for instance, Côte d’Ivoire.\(^{109}\) The organisation of regional and international conferences has boosted economic activity in Ouagadougou. Some members of the government also have a vested interest in this, receiving high wages either for a permanent international position or for short-term mediation activities. All or some of these gains have been invested in Burkina Faso. As with domestic affairs, these mediation missions are conducted by a small group of loyal colleagues, who usually go back to the revolutionary or rectification period. They often participate in several successive missions.

The key figure in this system is the current foreign minister, Djibril Yipene Bassolé. He played a leading role in the missions to Togo, Côte d’Ivoire and Mali.\(^{110}\) Moustapha Limam Chafi, one of Blaise Compaoré’s advisers, was involved in managing the crisis between the Niger government and the Tuareg rebellion. He is one of the most important unofficial Burkina diplomats. The son of a large retailer in the Mauritanian diaspora, he grew up in Senegal and then Niger. He was a friend of Sankara and Compaoré during the revolution. A polyglot, knowledgeable about the desert and its peoples, he was also responsible for liaison between Ouagadougou and the Forces nouvelles rebellion during the Ivorian crisis.\(^{111}\) Before participating in the negotiations between the ECOWAS mediation team and the rebel groups in northern Mali, he worked to free several hostages kidnapped by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).\(^ {112}\) Sadio Lamine Sow was a diplomatic adviser to the Burkina president for twenty years before becoming foreign minister in the government of Mali’s first transition prime minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra.\(^ {113}\)

\(^{107}\) For example, the former prime minister, Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, was appointed president of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2012. He was assistant governor of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) in the mid-1990s. The Burkina national Lassina Zerbo is executive secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation (OTICE). The former foreign minister, Ablassé Ouédraogo, was assistant director general of the World Trade Organisation.

\(^{108}\) Crisis Group interview, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

\(^{109}\) See footnote 142.

\(^{110}\) Djibril Yipene Bassolé has had a long and successful career as a diplomat. A colonel in the gendarmerie, he also has a lot of experience in military affairs and personally knows many important senior officers in West African militaries. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Abidjan, July 2012.


\(^ {113}\) “Qui veut tuer le conseiller spécial de Blaise Compaoré ?”, *L’Indépendant*, 7 February 2006. Cheick Modibo Diarra was a member of the board of the International Council for Solidarity with Burkina Faso (Conseil d’administration du Conseil international de solidarité avec le Burkina Faso, Cisab). Based in Paris, this organisation is responsible for promoting the Compaoré government’s image. See www.cisab.org.
Burkina mediation missions operate according to the same well-established template, which Djibril Bassolé explained at a lecture he gave in Washington DC.\textsuperscript{114} The key factor is the mediator’s personality. He must “make all the protagonists accept each other and build bridges between them”. Compaoré relies on his longevity in power and the links he has established with regional elites. “Largely inspired by the endless discussions that are part of African tradition”, the talks must be “very discreet” because the mediator is the “confidant of the protagonists”. Particular care is given to “procedural issues”, to the selection of the teams of negotiators and the venue for negotiations, to the timetables and “to the conditions for interactions with the media”. They usually include a monitoring mechanism. Finally, local representatives, who are drawn from a second line of trustworthy men from the army or the higher echelons of the administration, ensure the mediator remains up-to-date about the situation on the ground.\textsuperscript{115}

However, these missions have their limits. Organised within the ECOWAS framework, their \textit{modus operandi}, which is centred on the president’s strong personality, leaves little space for other opinions. They can be perceived as serving the interests of Burkina Faso rather than those of the region. They often tend to freeze crises rather than resolve them, as with the APO which did not resolve the root causes of the Ivorian crisis.\textsuperscript{116}

They also have a negative impact on the management of Burkina’s internal affairs. “By focusing too much on external matters, Compaoré has forgotten the internal issues”, said a diplomat based in Ouagadougou.\textsuperscript{117} “Blaise Compaoré has hoisted the Burkina flag high and has made mediation missions in Africa the country’s trademark. This is very important when it comes to securing development funds … If the people of Burkina question the impact of Blaise Compaoré’s mediation missions, this is because they often have the impression the president has forgotten them and is more concerned with other people’s problems”.\textsuperscript{118}

B. \textit{Côte d’Ivoire, A Question of Survival}

Burkina has never exported its internal problems to its neighbours, except perhaps its poverty. Several million Burkina citizens or people of Burkina origin now live in Côte d’Ivoire as a result of the policy of exporting labour that started with the French colonists and continued under Félix Houphouët-Boigny.\textsuperscript{119} “It is rare for Burkina families to have no relatives living in [Côte d’Ivoire]”.\textsuperscript{120} Despite strong growth, the

\textsuperscript{114} See “Enjeux sécuritaires et stabilité régionale en Afrique: l’expérience du Burkina Faso en matière de médiation et de prévention et de gestion des conflits”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 23 March 2012.
\textsuperscript{115} For example, General Ali Traoré was appointed representative of the mediator in the Guinean crisis in 2010. A former justice minister (2000-2007), Boureima Badini was special representative of the mediator in the Ivorian crisis between 2007-2011.
\textsuperscript{117} Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{118} “Médiation de Blaise Compaoré: que gagne le Burkina?”, \textit{Le Pays}, 16 April 2012.
\textsuperscript{119} The Burkina community is the main foreign community in Côte d’Ivoire. The last census dates from 1998 and counted 2.2 million Burkinabe nationals resident on Ivorian soil. No precise figures have been made available since then and estimates vary from three million to more than four million. See Christian Bouquet, \textit{Géopolitique de la Côte d’Ivoire} (Paris, 2005), p. 177.
\textsuperscript{120} Crisis Group interview, academic, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
economy is unable to feed millions of “pawéogo”, function without the billions of francs of remittances or reintegrate them into a society in which they are not popular.\(^{121}\)

From the first years of independence, Ouagadougou was sensitive about the Ivorian question.\(^{122}\) It took on a new and conflict-ridden dimension when the Ivorian President Henri Konan Bédié launched the policy of “Ivoirité” in 1990. In Ouagadougou, this provoked fears that the possible return of thousands of Burkina emigrants might destabilise the country. This fear was heightened by events in Tabou.\(^{123}\) Bédié’s fall in December 1999 was met with relief in Ouagadougou and drivers even celebrated by blowing their car horns in the city centre.\(^{124}\)

However, neither the government of Robert Gueï nor that of Laurent Gbagbo, elected in October 2000, renounced this discriminatory policy. President Gbagbo’s first year in power was marked by attacks on people from northern Côte d’Ivoire and the Sahel countries, including Burkina Faso.\(^{125}\) These events strained relations between Abidjan and Ouagadougou, which demanded better treatment for its nationals. The lack of substantial dialogue did not lead to a direct war between the two countries but prompted Compaoré to support the rebellion, which would not have been able to control more than 60 per cent of Côte d’Ivoire’s territory without a solid rear base in Burkina Faso.\(^{126}\)

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\(^{121}\) “Pawéogo” is a Mooré word meaning those who have left the country and remained abroad. Another group of migrants from Côte d’Ivoire are called “diaspos”, which applies more specifically to Burkina nationals who have returned from Côte d’Ivoire, live in the city and have a certain level of education. See Mahamadou Zongo, “La diaspora burkinabé en Côte d’Ivoire”, *Politique africaine*, no. 90 (2003), p. 120. The reintegration of Burkinabe returnees poses both economic problems – given the lack of resources and arable land in Burkina Faso – and social problems – those born in Côte d’Ivoire have no roots in Burkina Faso. Crisis Group interview, academic, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

\(^{122}\) Maurice Yaméogo’s government drew severe criticism when he proposed introducing automatic dual nationality. Burkina trade unions interpreted this measure as manipulation by Ivorian and French employers seeking to supply Côte d’Ivoire with cheap labour. See Bruno Jaffré, *Biographie de Thomas Sankara, la patrie ou la mort* (Paris, 1997), p. 41.

\(^{123}\) In November 1999, about 20,000 Burkina nationals were driven out by autochtones from around this town in south-west Côte d’Ivoire and were forced to return to Burkina Faso. “Chasse aux Burkinabè en Côte d’Ivoire: 20000 immigrants victimes d’un nettoyage foncier dans le sud”, *Libération*, 25 November 1999.

\(^{124}\) Observation by Crisis Group researcher, present in Ouagadougou at that time.

\(^{125}\) For example, the open letter from the Amicale des scolaires et étudiants burkinabè nés à l’extérieur. In this document, published by *Le Pays* on 14 August 2001, the pupils wrote: “for a while now, we have noticed that pupils and students wanting to go on holiday and visit their parents in Côte d’Ivoire are being turned back. These Burkinabe citizens, however, have the documentation required by immigration authorities in the sub-region, ECOWAS card, visa ...”.

\(^{126}\) Since 2001, Staff-Sergeant Ibrahim Coulibaly, military leader of the rebellion, and about 50 non-commissioned officers and Ivorian soldiers were staying in Ouagadougou and were regularly in contact with the authorities. During the months that followed the attempted coup on 19 September 2002, the rebels held monthly meetings at a place they called the “beach”, a meeting point a few kilometres over the border into Burkina Faso. They crossed the border at night, with all lights off. Once they were in Burkina Faso, flashing lights indicated where to go. “Having parked their vehicles at the side of the road, the occupants got out to listen to Ibrahim Coulibaly, who reminded them of their course of action”. In Ouagadougou, senior RSP officers worked on the supply of arms and ammunition for the rebels, who had a small office on Avenue Yenenga in Ouagadougou in the mid-2000s. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°72, *Côte d’Ivoire: The War is Not Yet Over*, 28 November 2003, pp. 9-14. Crisis Group interview, former member of the Forces nouvelles, Bouaké, October 2011. Crisis Group email correspondence, former member of the Forces nouvelles, April 2009.
It is interesting to follow the precise chronology of events to understand how the lack of dialogue between the two governments finally led to this situation. On 11 July 2001, the Burkina Faso ambassador to Abidjan was abducted and briefly held by four armed men. Côte d'Ivoire was slow to present an official apology and did not investigate the incident. During a visit to France on 16 October 2001, Compaoré criticised President Gbagbo’s land policy in a speech to the French national assembly’s commission of foreign affairs. A few days later, the daily newspaper *Notre Voie*, the official outlet of Laurent Gbagbo’s Front populaire ivoirien (FPI), published an article entitled: “Blaise Compaoré continues to threaten Côte d’Ivoire.”

On 4 December 2001, the Ivorian president visited his counterpart in Ouagadougou. The two presidents made a number of commitments, which they never observed. The first half of 2002 saw a final period of negotiations with the dispatch of several Burkina emissaries to Abidjan. This unsuccessful mediation was followed by a diplomatic ballet that saw President Compaoré make an official visit to Ghana, receive the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, on 21 July, and recall his ambassador to Abidjan on 30 July. The assassination of the Ivorian politician Balla Keita in Ouagadougou and the arrest of one individual responsible for the robbery of the headquarters of the Central Bank of West African States in Abidjan,

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128 Reported in *Le Pays* on 23 October 2001, this article ended with the following statement: “no Burkinabe national is or will ever own land in Côte d’Ivoire”.
129 In a joint communiqué, they agreed to seek solutions to their common problems, including concerning “security, police harassment, land and property law, child labour”. “Les présidents s’engagent pour la paix”, *Le Pays*, 4 December 2001.
130 In March 2002, Maurice Mélégué Traoré, then president of the National Assembly, led a delegation of ten Burkinabe parliamentarians to Côte d’Ivoire “to contribute to boosting the influence of the Burkina community in Côte d’Ivoire”. In April 2002, Juliette Bonkoungou, president of the economic and social council, led another delegation to Côte d’Ivoire and had talks with President Gbagbo on 7 April 2002. “La plaidoirie de Mélégué Traoré”, *Le Pays*, 22 March 2002 and “Juliette Bonkoungou reçue par Laurent Gbagbo”, *L’Observateur Paalga*, 8 April 2002.
131 Economic cooperation, the focus of this visit, was considerably strengthened after the outbreak of the Ivorian conflict. For example, the Ghanaian port of Tema became an important outlet for Burkina foreign trade. See “Communiqué conjoint issu de la visite d’Etat effectuée au Ghana par son excellence M. Blaise Compaoré”, 4 July 2002.
134 Balla Keita was assassinated in Ouagadougou on the night of 1-2 August 2002. Former education minister under Houphouët-Boigny, then adviser to the presidency under Henri Konan Bédié, Keita became close to General Gueï after the 1999 coup. He later became secretary general of the Union pour la démocratie et la paix en Côte d’Ivoire (UDPCI), a party formed by Gueï. After Laurent Gbagbo came to power, Keita was assaulted by soldiers and decided to go into exile. He settled in Ouagadougou in March 2001, where the authorities discreetly gave him the status of political refugee and accommodation in a government house for high-level guests. Although the house was under guard, he was stabbed probably by a guest he knew who first spiked his drink. This murder was never solved and neither was Keita’s role in preparing the Ivorian rebellion clarified. Three journalists who investigated immediately after the crime were arrested and then released by the Burkina authorities. Crisis Group interviews, journalists, diplomats, politicians, members of civil society, Abidjan, October 2011 and Ouagadougou, September 2011. See Crisis Group report, *Côte d’Ivoire: The War is Not Yet Over*, op. cit., pp. 9-10 and 14.
135 This was Sia Popo Prosper, who was arrested in Ouagadougou on 16 September 2002, three days after the start of the Ivorian rebellion. The bank robbery took place on 27 August 2002 in broad
also in Ouagadougou, took place only a few weeks before the attempted 19 September 2002 coup in Côte d’Ivoire.

By backing Ivorian rebels, Burkina insured itself against an uncertain future. Rebel control of northern Côte d’Ivoire, adjacent to its own territory, gave Burkina a measure of control over the situation and provided an area through which to filter and slow down the possible flow of Burkina refugees returning from Côte d’Ivoire. In addition, by becoming indirectly involved in the Ivorian conflict, Burkina could influence and constantly pressure its neighbour. At the beginning of 2003, the military option was rendered obsolete by French intervention and the subsequent deployment of a UN force. Compaoré then demonstrated his opportunism and opted for a more political way forward, by withdrawing support from the rebellion’s main military chief and accepting Gbagbo’s proposal for direct dialogue that led to the APO.

Compaoré succeeded in turning a threat into a triple advantage. The APO allowed him to ensure diplomatic control of the crisis and influence the terms of the settlement. At home, he exploited patriotism when he particularly needed it because his government was in crisis. Economically, he succeeded in offsetting the negative repercussions on his country. The Ivorian crisis certainly slowed down the flow of liquid cash from Burkina expatriates and temporarily closed access to the port of Abidjan, but the country benefited from the rebellion through money received from the rebels and illegal trafficking transiting through its territory.

With the end of the Gbagbo regime, relations between the two countries have gradually returned to normalcy. Burkina Faso still plays a role in the Ivorian reconciliation process and believes “that the seeds of crisis still exist”, but this role has been discreet. In fact, economic cooperation has taken precedence over politics and diplomacy. As noted by Boureima Badini, Blaise Compaoré’s special representative in

daylight. A commando of eight men wearing suits, armed with submachine guns, entered and left the bank without firing a shot. They were aided by many internal accomplices, including Sia Popo Prosper, one of the bank’s guards. They got away with CFA 2.6 billion (about $4 million). “Comment les bandits ont réussi le coup”, Le Pays, 29 August 2002; “Casse à la BCEAO: un vrai-faux hold-up ?”, Le journal du Jeudi, 12-18 September 2002.

After signing the ceasefire negotiated under the auspices of ECOWAS on 17 October 2002, President Gbagbo officially asked France to monitor the ceasefire line. See Thomas Hofnung, La crise en Côte d’Ivoire (Paris, 2005), p. 65.

Ibrahim Coulibaly left Burkina Faso about a month before his arrest in France on 25 August 2003. According to a colleague, he said he was given the choice of leaving the country or being “eliminated” because “his refusal to accept a political solution to the crisis and his desire to speak to the media meant Coulibaly had become a problem for Ouagadougou”. Crisis Group telephone interview, 7 May 2012.

See Section VI.

Ouagadougou was an important market for produce from the central, northern and western areas of the country, such as cotton, cocoa, precious woods, etc. Crisis Group interviews, former members of the Forces nouvelles, Bouaké, 2009, 2010 and 2011. Rebel funds were also reportedly deposited in Ouagadougou banks, for example, by Martin Kouakou Fofié, former commander of the Korogho zone. “Des millions de Fofié disparaissent d’une banque”, L’Inter, 20 August 2011. For more on the transport of cocoa from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso, see “Final report of the Group of Experts submitted in accordance with paragraph 11 of Security Council resolution 1842 (2008)”, 9 October 2009, p. 55.

Abidjan, “the countries are not only friends; they also have shared interests. And it is in our interest to see that our people make the most of the new found peace in Côte d’Ivoire”.\textsuperscript{141} Many Burkinabe economic actors are trying to gain a foothold in Côte d’Ivoire.\textsuperscript{142}

Coincidentally, the next Ivorian presidential election is scheduled for November 2015, around the same time as in Burkina Faso. If the polls in Côte d’Ivoire were to trigger instability, this would certainly have an impact on Burkina Faso but the reverse is also true. Even with a government that is supposedly “a friend” of Abidjan, the integration of millions of Burkina nationals in Ivorian society continues to pose a problem, particularly in the west of the country. The possibility that it might have to receive Burkina migrants fleeing conflict in Burkina Faso would increase communal tensions and the pressure on land in this troubled part of Côte d’Ivoire.

C. The West’s Best Friend

Burkina Faso is very dependent on foreign aid. International cooperation and development funds cover about 80 per cent of public expenditure. International aid has been constant for many years and averages about $400 million per year.\textsuperscript{143} In addition to direct aid from partner states, several thousand national and foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have offices in the country. There were 16,000 of them by the mid-2000s. The ten largest organisations contribute more than CFA 60 billion ($120 million) into the economy every year.\textsuperscript{144} This massive presence of NGOs is due to the country’s history and good working conditions – security is guaranteed and the administration relatively efficient.\textsuperscript{145}

Blaise Compaoré’s government is acutely aware of the importance of aid given the lack of resources. For 25 years, he has ensured he did not fall out with anybody and remained open to all forms of cooperation. He has carefully managed his international image and implemented an intelligent and dynamic partnership policy. This policy relies on the constant search for new partners;\textsuperscript{146} the establishment of beneficial relations with atypical partners, such as Taiwan;\textsuperscript{147} the continuation of the South-

\textsuperscript{141} “Le Burkina Faso comme vigie de l’Afrique de l’Ouest”, La dépêche diplomatique, 17 February 2012.

\textsuperscript{142} According to several sources, several Burkinabe businesspeople settled in Côte d’Ivoire after the post-election crisis. Mady Kanazé, eldest son of Oumarou Kanazé, clinched several contracts for road repairs in northern Côte d’Ivoire. Faso Construction et Services won the contract for the Allassane Ouattara sports centre in Grand Bassam. Coris Bank, led by the Burkinabe banker Idrissa Nassa, officially opened a branch in Abidjan. “Quand Soro joue les VRP de Blaise”, La lettre du continent, 19 January 2012 and Crisis Group interviews, economic officials, Abidjan, June 2012.

\textsuperscript{143} See “Partenariat burkinabé-danois, stratégie de la coopération 2006-2010, Danish foreign ministry, Danida”, September 2007.


\textsuperscript{145} In the 1960s, Burkina received aid from religious, especially catholic, NGOs. Their presence increased with the drought in the 1970s and the enthusiasm brought by the Sankara revolution in European left-wing circles. Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, July 2012.

\textsuperscript{146} Recently, Burkina Faso approached Kuwait and Qatar to finance the construction of a new international airport at Donsin. “Qatar visite d’amitié de Blaise Compaoré”, Cisab, 14 July 2011 and “Construction de l’aéroport de Donsin: les bailleurs de fonds confirment”, L’Express du Faso, 20 June 2012.

\textsuperscript{147} Burkina Faso is one of only four African countries to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Relations were established in 1994.
South cooperation started during the revolution, notably with Qadhafi’s Libya;\textsuperscript{148} and new methods such as decentralised cooperation, a key focus of the former mayor of Ouagadougou, Simon Compaoré.\textsuperscript{149}

Two major powers support Blaise Compaoré: France and the U.S. He has become indispensable to them by promoting the image of a poor but enterprising and well administered country capable of resolving regional crises and using its networks for the release of Westerners detained by Islamist movements in the Sahel and Sahara. Relations with France have been steady and virtually problem-free since the beginning of the 1990s, but the same cannot be said of the U.S. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Washington criticised Ouagadougou for its links with Charles Taylor and Muammar Qadhafi.\textsuperscript{150} Burkina reestablished contact with the Bush administration by agreeing to be the first and so far the only West African country to plant the U.S. firm Monsanto’s genetically modified cotton.\textsuperscript{151}

In recent years, Blaise Compaoré has strengthened his links with France and the U.S. by letting them use his territory as a military base from which to conduct surveillance operations in the Sahara.\textsuperscript{152} This allowed his government to avoid criticism, pressure and sanctions for its involvement in the crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire. However, the lack of international criticism leaves Burkina Faso without an external alert system, with no country willing to provide it with an honest and frank appraisal of its structural problems. It was therefore with a certain level of surprise that many diplomats based in Ouagadougou witnessed the serious crisis in the first half of 2011\textsuperscript{153} and the behaviour of the military, until then regarded as a model.

\textsuperscript{148} Libya’s economic aid was important. It particularly manifested itself with the establishment of a branch of the Libyan Arab Foreign Bank of Burkina in 1989, which became the Banque commerciale du Burkina in 2003; the Libyan group Tamoil’s takeover of the Tagui chain of gas stations, a bankrupt Burkinabe company; and the opening of Hotel Libya in 2005, owned by the Libyan African Investment Co (LAICO). See Adebajo, op. cit., p. 55; “Compaoré, le chouchou émancipé de Kadhafi”, SlateAfrique.com, 15 June 2011; “Tiny Burkina Faso confronts Gadhafi’s enormous legacy”, McClatchy Newspapers, 15 September 2011.

\textsuperscript{149} In 2009, there were 110 partnership agreements between Burkina and French local authorities. Simon Compaoré, who is not related to the president and whose surname is very common in Burkina, was the main instigator of these partnerships. “Evaluation de la coopération décentralisée au Burkina Faso”, French foreign and European minister, 2009.

\textsuperscript{150} Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

\textsuperscript{151} The Burkina government’s decision to grow Monsanto’s Bt cotton followed a June 2004 international conference in Ouagadougou that a Monsanto delegation attended. Led by its then vice-president, Robert B. Horsch, the delegation had an official meeting with the Burkinabe prime minister on 22 July 2004, the day before the conference ended. On the U.S. side, the conference was organised by the department of state and the department of state for agriculture. On the Burkina side, Salif Diallo, the agriculture minister, was in charge of the conference. “Paramanga Ernest Yonli reçoit le groupe américain Monsanto”, Sidwaya, 25 June 2004; “Les OGM réconcilient publiquement le Burkina Faso et les Etats-Unis”, Altervision, 25 June 2004. Hervé Kempf, La guerre secrète des OGM (Paris, 2003).

\textsuperscript{152} The U.S. established an airbase on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, from where small aircraft regularly take off on surveillance missions across the Sahara. Meanwhile, France has stationed a detachment of its Commandement des opérations spéciales (COS) in the country, composed of about 80 men. “Us expands secret opération in Africa”, Washington Post, 14 June 2012; “Washington a tissé un réseau de bases aériennes secrètes en Afrique”, Le Monde, 14 June 2012; Crisis Group interview, military officer, Abidjan, June 2012.

\textsuperscript{153} Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Ouagadougou, September 2011 and Abidjan, October 2011.
VI. Is Burkina Faso Fragile?

President Compaoré’s government has experienced two major internal crises in 25 years. It only just managed to overcome the first one and was weakened by the second. Both of these crises were sparked by murders in which members of the security forces were implicated. In December 1998, the journalist Norbert Zongo was killed. The independent commission of inquiry setup by the government identified elements of the RSP as “serious” suspects. In 2011, a school student died after being beaten up by police officers. These two incidents showed that the violence inflicted by the security forces and inherited from the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods remains a permanent threat to the government’s stability.

These brutal practices are certainly rare in Burkina Faso, where most of the police, gendarmerie and army are attached to democratic principles. However, since 1998, the public has been adamant in denouncing the brutal actions of a handful of elements and the impunity they enjoy. One of the immediate dangers to President Compaoré is another blunder by the security forces that would result in a third cycle of protests likely to spiral out of control.

A. The Norbert Zongo Case

On 13 December 1998, the charred bodies of the journalists Norbert Zongo and three of his friends were found in their vehicle 100km south of Ouagadougou. Norbert Zongo, a well-known journalist and director of the weekly *L’Indépendant*, had regularly denounced the corruption and crimes attributed to the government. Before his death, this 49-year-old man was working on the unresolved murder of the driver of François Compaoré, the president’s younger brother and special adviser. Zongo had been receiving threats for several months. Five days before his tragic death, he published an editorial that mentioned his own demise. Despite suspicions to the contrary, François Compaoré has always denied involvement in the case. For example,
in November 2012, he said that “not one of the 200 statements in the long report by the independent commission of inquiry says I am guilty”.159

Zongo’s death highlighted both the RSP’s violent methods and what a journalist described as the government’s carefully concealed criminal acts.160 Zongo’s murder, which the government initially claimed was an “accident”,161 provoked an unprecedented popular uprising. On 16 December, more than 15,000 people followed Zongo’s funeral procession in Ouagadougou “in a revolutionary atmosphere”.162 This anger was harnessed by the opposition and civil society which, for once, worked together. The opposition parties joined the Burkina Human Rights Movement (Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l’homme et des peuples, MBDHP), the trade unions, the co-ordinating body for intellectuals and the student movement to form the Collective of Mass Organisations (Collectif des organisations de masse).

Faced with this spontaneous and unexpected challenge, Blaise Compaoré and his party adopted a policy of trench warfare that combined toughness, manipulation and concessions.163 The first of these concessions was the formation of an independent commission of inquiry (CEI) to investigate the murder. Although the government obstructed the inquiry to some extent,164 the CEI’s May 1999 report named “six serious suspects”, all RSP members, as the likely perpetrators of the murder. It also said that the motive for the crime could well be found in “the investigations conducted in recent years by the journalist and in particular his recent investigations into the death of David Ouédraogo, François Compaoré’s driver”.165 The commission recommended that “legal proceedings be initiated on the basis of the results of the inquiry”.

However, Zongo’s murder highlighted the failings of the justice system, especially its lack of independence from the government. Three weeks after the murder, no police investigation had begun and no effort was made to collect evidence. The bodies of Zongo and his friends were buried without an autopsy. The police took no witness statements, even though the case was brought to an investigating judge on 24 December 1998.

As it was believed to be the probable motive for the crime, the David Ouédraogo case was referred to the military justice system on 31 March 1999. Five members of the presidential guard were charged with “torturing to death” the driver and they appeared before a military court on 17 August 2000. On 19 August, Warrant Officer

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159 Interview with the monthly *Notre Afrik* no. 27.
160 “Le pouvoir burkinabè ébranlé par la mort d’un journaliste. Nobert Zongo en était le principal pourfendeur”, *Libération*, 6 January 1999. One of the driver’s colleagues described the treatment he suffered at the hands of several RSP soldiers: “at about 3.30-4pm on 5 and 6 December, David and I were driven out on the road to Ouahigouya by a group of six to eight council soldiers, who hit and burned us .... They made David and I lie on our backs on a wood fire, having first tied our legs and arms”. “Rapport de la commission d’enquête indépendante”, op. cit.
161 On 14 December 1998, the news broadcast by the Télévision nationale du Burkina Faso used the words “accidental death”. See the documentary by Luc Damiba and Abdoulaye Diallo about the killing of the journalist, *Borry Bana, le destin fatal de Norbert Zongo*, 2003.
162 “Le pouvoir burkinabè ébranlé…”, op. cit.
164 The independent commission of inquiry’s report stressed that “the dismissal of the support staff on 13 March 1999 by the ministers responsible for the commission, without giving notice to the commission ... slowed the momentum of the commission and was detrimental to the investigation because the support staff would have helped with administration, communications, information, ad hoc secretarial and security tasks”.
165 “Rapport de la Commission d’enquête indépendante”, op. cit., p. 32.
Marcel Kafando and Sergeant Edmond Koama were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment and the soldier Ousséni Yaro to ten years. Only one of the six suspects named by the CEI was charged in connection with Zongo’s murder. Marcel Kafando was charged with Zongo’s “murder” and “arson” in February 2001. However, in July 2006, the case was dismissed for lack of evidence after a key witness retracted statements that formed the basis for the charges.

The Zongo case was a turning point in the history of Compaoré’s regime. Even though divisions among the opposition made it impossible for it to overthrow the system, “it created areas of freedom that did not exist before”. Civil society became better organised and citizens more confident about demanding their rights. Zongo’s death paradoxically strengthened freedom of the press because it became difficult for the government to attack journalists after the uprising sparked by the murder of their most celebrated professional. More than anything else, this case, which nearly proved fatal to the government, undermined the president’s credibility and spread mistrust of the system among the general public.

To respond to the protests, the government made promises that later proved empty, committing to institutional and political reforms. A Committee of the Wisemen, convened to “promote reconciliation in people’s hearts and consolidate social peace”, made wide-ranging recommendations in a 30 July 1999 report. A National Day of Forgiveness was organised on 30 March 2001. However, the system eventually took back with one hand what it had given with the other. Forgiveness did nothing to change a justice system that has lost credibility and that has failed to resolve murders.

The government did little to take the recommendations of the committee into account. In 2004, it rewrote to its advantage the electoral code that had introduced the more proportional system recommended by the committee and that had allowed the opposition to make a legislative breakthrough two years previously. The 2005 and 2010 presidential elections used an electoral roll that included a little more than 3 million voters – out of 16 million people. These two elections were “plebiscites by default” that masked the reality of an ageing and weak system.

B. The Spring 2011 Crisis

1. A multifaceted crisis that spiralled out of control

On the night of 19-20 February 2011, Justin Zongo, a school student in Koudougou, died after being beaten up in a police station. The next day, students clashed with police in Koudougou leaving several injured and substantial material damage. As in

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166 Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
167 These included the creation of a monitoring organisation, the National Elections Observatory (Observatoire national des elections, ONEL); changes to the electoral code (proportional representation for the legislative elections and a single ballot paper were adopted); and improved guarantees for the freedom of the press. See “L’après Zongo”, op. cit.
168 This committee, created by presidential decree on 1 June 1999, was composed of former Burkina heads of state, religious and traditional leaders and support staff.
169 For example, the death of a gendarme and an RSP member involved in the David Ouédraogo case in June and August 2000 respectively, the killing with an axe at Ouagadougou prison of Father Di Giovambattista, who was hearing the confession of one of the “serious suspects” in the Zongo case detained at that prison, and a member of the choir organised by the priest, the journalism student Michel Congo, murdered in unresolved circumstances on 20 October 2001.
1998, the authorities’ lacklustre response meant they claimed Justin Zongo died of meningitis. They later changed their mind. The public did not heed appeals for calm from religious and traditional authorities or the victim’s father and the government, and the anger spread to several other cities, including Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya, in the north. This was the beginning of three months of extreme tension and a multifaceted crisis. Shopkeepers, peasants, magistrates, lawyers, cotton growers and soldiers all protested in turn, without at any point forming an alliance or seeking to create a mass movement. This is what saved the government.

With its roots in previous crises, the 2011 upheaval was the result of a series of problems that remained unresolved because “the government usually lets crises come and go without resolving anything”. This violent crisis, with an official death toll of nineteen, weakened Blaise Compaoré’s government, as in 1998. However, it differed from the preceding crisis on one point: discontent was not channelled by any political force, trade union or other organisation. The protests developed in a very fragmented way, without leaders or a platform of demands; “people went out onto the streets to defend their interests, not to promote a cause”. The political parties tried in vain to harness the people’s anger.

In order to tighten its grip on power, the government had stopped listening to civil society and political organisations, which resulted in the protests gradually taking on more of an autonomous character. Members of such organisations, as well as the general public, no longer had faith in their independence or capacity to bring about change. The government eventually had to face many interlocutors without representatives. But, having been comfortable in power too long, “some members of the government adopted an arrogant attitude towards the lower sectors of society. All this promoted a lack of trust between the government and the public. Not only did they stop talking to each other, they stopped respecting each other”. Faced with a government losing its authority, “each person felt entitled to settle their scores themselves.”

Another new aspect of the 2011 events was the decentralised nature of the uprising. Demonstrations began in the periphery and not the centre as had generally been the case. That posed an unusual problem for the government: how to cope with the many and dispersed protests that resulted from a profound social and political transformation. For four decades, political life in the former Upper Volta was restricted to a very small segment of the population – workers, small bourgeoisie and

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171 “La version du ministère des enseignements secondaires et supérieur”, L’observateur Paalga, 23 February 2011. In a 24 February 2011 communiqué, the government said that “the police officers who are suspects have been arrested”. “La profonde compassion du gouvernement”, Sidwaya, 25 February 2011.

172 Crisis Group interview, opposition leader, March 2012.

173 Words of Zéphirin Diabré, president of the Union pour le changement (UPC), at a press conference in Ouagadougou on 1 March 2011. L’observateur Paalga, 2 March 2011.

174 Crisis Group interview, journalist, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

175 On 30 April 2011, 34 opposition political parties held a rally in the centre of Ouagadougou calling for Blaise Compaoré’s resignation. Only a few hundred people attended. “L’opposition appelle à de nouvelles actions”, Radio France internationale, 1 May 2011.

176 Crisis Group interview, magistrate, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

177 Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

178 Crisis Group interviews, civil society leader and academics, Ouagadougou, March 2012.

179 Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
intellectuals, school students — and to Ouagadougou, the capital, and Bobo-Dioulasso, the second city. In a country with undeveloped communications, the peasantry had little knowledge of politics and often remained subject to the traditional chiefs and other local authorities.

However, the Burkina population gradually moved to the towns and there were improvements in communications and transport infrastructure. With the comings and goings of a diaspora that has often settled in more open countries, Burkina Faso’s image of itself as a poor country faded away. It is difficult to measure the Arab Spring’s influence on the young people who joined the protests in 2011, but demonstrators and observers often referred to the Arab revolutions when giving their opinions. As in Arab countries, youth is divided into two major sectors: a minority urban and educated segment who demonstrates for more public and political freedoms; and poor rural or neo-urban youths who are rebelling because they are hungry. Unlike several of its neighbours, Burkina is threatened not by ethnic divisions but by the profound social inequalities that prompted violent protests in 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

2. The military in the streets

The second major difference between 1998 and 2011 was the involvement of the military. The 2011 crisis is unprecedented because of the mutinies that took place at the same time as the social uprising. Under Compaoré, the military has only left the barracks to protest twice. In July 1999, soldiers, including Liberia veterans, gathered in Ouagadougou to successfully demand payment of bonuses. In December 2006, a sex scandal involving police officers and soldiers degenerated into armed clashes in Ouagadougou, causing substantial material damage and five deaths.

It was also a sex scandal that sparked the first mutiny in the spring of 2011. In February, soldiers took it upon themselves to punish a civilian who they felt had been too forward with one of “their” women. On 21 March, the courts convicted five of the soldiers to sentences of between fifteen and eighteen months imprisonment. The next day, their colleagues violently protested at the verdict. They stole weapons from the arms depot at the Sangoulé Lamizana base in Ouagadougou and took to the streets, looting bars and shops, attacking passers-by and the home of the defence minister, Yéro Boly.

A further night of violent demonstrations took place in Ouagadougou on 29 March. Soldiers vandalised the homes of the army chief of staff and the city mayor as mutinies spread to the provinces, especially to Gaoua in the south west and Fada N’Gourma in the east, where soldiers fired a rocket at the courthouse. After a short period of calm, the violence resumed and culminated in two incidents. On 14 April,
elements of the RSP rebelled and fired heavy weapons at the presidential palace, forcing the president to briefly leave the capital.\textsuperscript{187}

Then on 1 June, the movement reached Bobo-Dioulasso. For two days and two nights, soldiers from the Daniel Ouezzin Coulibaly base looted shops, blocked streets and raped several women. In response, shopkeepers set the town hall ablaze. The 2 June curfew did not stop the mutineers\textsuperscript{188} and on the following day, RSP units loyal to the government were sent to crackdown on the mutiny. According to the official death toll, six mutineers died and several dozen civilians were wounded. The RSP’s intervention ended the uprising, an unprecedented event in the history of the Burkina military.\textsuperscript{189}

As the military had a good reputation, the mutinies came as a surprise to the rest of the world and helped to further demystify the supposedly all-powerful nature of the presidency in the eyes of the public.\textsuperscript{190} The violent turmoil in the military indicated parallels with the situation in society at large – there was inequality in the military as well, due to the widespread corruption of its elite. Senior officers are no longer in step with the rank and file. Suspicions of corruption among some of them undermined the credibility of the moral guidance they purported to offer to the rank and file.\textsuperscript{191} Many appointments were allegedly made on the basis of personal affiliations rather than on merit.\textsuperscript{192} Non-commissioned officers and soldiers felt that senior officers were ordering them to carry out poorly-defined missions or duties that had nothing to do with military operations, such as working for the family of their superior.\textsuperscript{193} Senior officers reportedly by-passed legal procedures to recruit their friends.\textsuperscript{194}

In addition, the military suffered from poor recruitment. From 2008 to 2011, the military authorities recruited many young people who “joined the army for want of anything better” without having the required skills. Integrating them proved difficult because of their “civilian culture” and “social problems”. “The military has become a kind of reformatory for young men with problems”.\textsuperscript{195} The number of new recruits was also too high in relation to the capacity to train them. The average ratio was one officer and two non-commissioned officers to train 200 men. It was these young soldiers and non-commissioned officers who were at the forefront of the mutinies.\textsuperscript{196}

2,000 men were recruited in three years to respond to two urgent problems. First, the military is an ageing force. Given the difficulties of reintegration into civilian life, military personnel tend to avoid early retirement and remain in post for as long as possible.\textsuperscript{197} The creation of the Office for Assistance with Civilian Reintegration (Bureaux d’aide à la reconversion civile, BARC) at the end of the 2000s did not succeed in reversing this trend. Second, Burkina Faso’s foreign policy has deployed many troops abroad and it was necessary to replace them. The Burkina contingent in

\textsuperscript{188}“La mutinerie de Bobo Dioulasso se poursuit malgré le couvre-feu”, Jeune Afrique, 3 June 2011.
\textsuperscript{190}Crisis Group interview, political leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{191}Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{192}Crisis Group interview, lawyer, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{193}Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{194}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{195}Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{196}Crisis Group interview, international military official, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
\textsuperscript{197}Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
Darfur alone is 800, renewed every year. That is around 10 per cent of the military’s total active force, which is 7,000-8,000 men.  

Two other problems certainly contributed to the violence in the spring of 2011. The military’s culture of secrecy means that it is handicapped by non-existent internal communications between the different levels of the hierarchy. The rank and file rarely voice their day-to-day problems or express their discontent and so the administration never deals with even the most trivial issues, such as food quality. This situation fuelled frustration among the troops and promoted a culture of permanent rumours. Finally, as in many countries in the region, the armed forces are not involved in the country’s development initiatives. Soldiers get bored in their barracks and tend to feel undervalued because they are totally cut off from the rest of the population.

3. Responses and silence

Military reform under way

In response to the 2011 crisis, Blaise Compaoré first undertook a meaningful reform of the military, which is still under way. He undertook responsibility for the reform by becoming defence minister on 20 April 2011. During the first hours of the mutinies, he wisely opted for dialogue, receiving representatives of all the different military units. He then took a harder line by sending the RSP to Bobo-Dioulasso. He dismissed most of the senior officers at the head of the military and 566 members of the army and air force and 136 police officers suspected of participating in the unrest. After an internal military investigation, 346 of the 566 were imprisoned at the Ouagadougou jail. On 27 November 2012, the Ouagadougou court convicted five of them to between five and ten years imprisonment. All the others are still awaiting trial, which was due to take place in December 2012 but has been postponed sine die.

The government is in the process of completely reviewing military organisation. Some units have been moved and others abolished; working groups have been established to assess the situation and make recommendations; and study trips abroad have been undertaken to draw lessons from other countries. An effort has been made to improve communication, particularly inspired by the French model. It has been decided to create more combined forces to improve regional mobility. Many soldiers deployed in special units because of their particular skills complain they are stationed far from their hometown for several years.

However, despite the serious nature of the reform, there is still discontent in the military. In March 2012, anonymous pamphlets circulated in the barracks. One of them, written by men on duty, called for the release and reintegration of “all dismissed

198 Crisis Group interview, international military leader, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
199 Ibid.
200 Crisis Group interview, journalist, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
201 Crisis Group interview, international military official, Ouagadougou, September 2011.
202 On 15 April 2011, Blaise Compaoré appointed Colonel-Major Honoré Naberé Traoré to the post of chief of staff of the army and Colonel-Major Boureima Kéré to lead the RSP. These two men have been loyal supporters of the president since the October 1987 coup. “Au Burkina, la mutinerie gagne la province”, Libération, 16 April 2011. “La liste exhaustive des 566 militaires radiés”, L’Observateur Paalga, 15 July 2011 and “La liste des 136 policiers révoqués”, Kibaré.info, 11 March 2012.
205 Crisis Group interviews, international military officials, diplomats, Ouagadougou, September 2011 and March 2012.
soldiers”. Another denounced arbitrary dismissals and said that several soldiers were not even on Burkina territory when the event for which they were punished occurred. The imprisoned soldiers expressed their dissatisfaction in prison in March 2012. Some dismissed soldiers, who have not been imprisoned but are barred from rejoining the military, have become mercenaries, for example, working for the Islamist movements in northern Mali.

The military remains troubled by rumours of further dismissals. Although these are groundless, they indicate the persistence of communications problems and the inadequacies of a justice system that many, including in the military, still see as politicised and biased. The RSP’s role in the repression of the Bobo-Dioulasso mutiny has widened the gap between the presidential guard and the rest of the military, all the more so because RSP personnel who participated in the mutinies have not been punished, increasing the sense of injustice. The dismissed senior officers are “frustrated, depressed and excluded”.

To avoid further mutinies, the government has disarmed a large number of soldiers based in Ouagadougou and left only a minimum of equipment and ammunition in the capital, considering that fewer arms mean fewer means of revolt. However, this move has not been welcomed in the barracks, where soldiers “mount guard with empty magazines” and feel “isolated”. The RSP is now the only effective military unit. “At the moment, the army is down to this regiment”, said an interlocutor of Crisis Group.

Limited democratisation
As in the aftermath of the 1998 crisis, Blaise Compaoré undertook to reform political life and institutions. He established a Consultative Council for Political Reform (Conseil consultatif des réformes politiques, CCRP) in Ouagadougou in June 2011. However, this national consultation, which was meant to be inclusive, failed to ease tensions as it was expected to. Some sectors of the opposition and civil society refused to participate, citing the lack of implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee of Wisemen in 1999 and arguing that the new body would produce nothing new. Many opposition politicians and civil society representatives believed that the CCRP was “another diversion to allow Blaise Compaoré to stay in power” within the framework of a “limited dialogue”. The many empty promises made since 1999 have considerably weakened the government’s capacity to promote compromise.

The CCRP certainly produced some political reforms, including the very important and imminent creation of a senate. A biometric electoral roll was created to avoid...
fraud and challenges to election results, but only included 4.4 million voters out of an estimated total of more than eight million, as calculated by the CENI. The CCRP was more “institutional therapy” and did not provide solutions for the longstanding problems revealed by the 2011 crisis, particularly the social problems. Moreover, local social conflicts, fuelled by high prices for basic goods and the unequal distribution of income, have increased since the CCRP finished its work on 14 July 2011.214

Repercussions of the conflict in Mali
Conflict in Mali is a threat to stability in Burkina Faso even though the former Upper Volta has never been directly confronted by the Tuareg issue and radical Islam.215 Introduced in the fifteenth century, Islam began to spread in the seventeenth century. A Hamallist current appeared in Upper Volta in the 1930s, followed by a Wahhabi “reformist” current in the 1940s and 1950s.216 These two currents remained a very small minority and were concentrated in the northern regions of Yatenga and Liptako. On the eve of independence, Muslims made up 20 per cent of the population; in 2006, 60 per cent of Burkina citizens were Muslims.217

Burkina has enjoyed a great degree of religious tolerance, strengthened by the attachment to secularism shown by all governments since independence and the existence of many inter-religious families. Radical groups inspired by Hammalism or Wahhabism, though they existed or still exist, have remained extremely marginal and localised in the extreme north, which has recently experienced a very slow spread of Islam but never suffered from religious conflicts.218 Consequently, it is unlikely that the emergence of Burkina religious extremist movements will pose a serious security threat in the near future.

The influx of refugees caused by the Mali crisis aggravated a precarious food supply system at the beginning of 2012.219 Thousands of Malian refugees moved from their homes with their cattle, arousing fears of a renewed outbreak of micro-conflicts between farmers and shepherds. NGOs and UN agencies have been able to respond to this situation thanks to logistical support from the Burkina military.220

members, including 39 senators representing local authorities/regions and 31 senators representing the traditional chiefdoms, the religious world and civil society. The president appoints 29 additional senators and the others are elected indirectly. The Senate has a consultative role. Although the legal text is identical to that regulating the National Assembly, the law was sent to the president for enactment. In the event of disagreement with the assembly or if the Senate cannot reach a vote before the deadline, the assembly’s decision is final. The date of the first session of the Senate has yet to be announced. See “Le Sénat burkinabè: mode d’emploi”, L’Opinion, 31 May 2003.


215 About 200,000 Tuaregs live in Burkina Faso.

216 Founded by the mystical Malian Chérif Cheikh Hamallah in the first half of the twentieth century, Hammalism is a Muslim and African brotherhood movement that preaches resistance to modernism. It spread to Niger, Mali and Senegal in the 1930s and 1940s. See Ousmane Koné and Jean-Louis Traïaud, Islam et islamismes au sud du Sahara (Paris, 1998), p. 93.

217 The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency.

218 Archives of the National Institute for Statistics and Demography, Burkina finance ministry.


220 On 14 January 2013, there were 38,800 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso. Crisis Group telephone interview, NGO official in charge of refugees, January 2013.
The January 2013 military intervention in Mali has raised fears not only of a new wave of refugees but also that war would spread to northern Burkina Faso and even to Ouagadougou.221 The Burkina authorities fear Islamist infiltration into the refugee camps; the use of these camps as bases; and, more generally, “vengeance” by the rebel Malian groups against the deployment by Burkina Faso of 650 soldiers as part of the African-led International Support Mission for Mali (AFISMA) and the use of its territory by the French air force.222 1,000 Burkina soldiers were deployed on or after 10 January 2013 in northern Burkina to monitor the border with Mali and Niger.223 These troops were sent to the border or near the border, with at least one advanced post about 50km from the border, and others farther away in the centre-north region.224

Burkina has two mining sites located a few dozen kilometres from the Malian border – at Inata and Essakane – and two others in the north – at Kalsaka and Taparko, about 100km from the Malian border. These gold mines, in which Western companies work in partnership with local operators, are potential targets for Mali’s armed groups. To escape the French intervention and continue their struggle, these groups had no choice other than dispersal, decentralisation and the multiplication of hotspots throughout the Sahel-Sahara region. This possible strategy of “regional harassment” by the rebel groups means the mines in northern Burkina Faso, where many Westerners are employed, have become potential targets.

The result of the mining boom that has taken place in Burkina since the late 2000s, operations have recently started in these mines. For the moment, the development of the mining sector is focused on gold, with 32.5 tonnes produced in 2011.225 Seven gold mines have been started since 2007. In addition to the four mines in the north, three other large mines are located in the centre and south of the country – at Mana, Youga and Sabcé.226 The high price of gold means it has become an important source of foreign currency in addition to cotton revenues, which are on the decline.227 However, gold production has its downside, particularly on the social front. Revenues are unequally distributed and mining operators have often made only a very minor contribution to local development.228 Gold production has disrupted rural activities and stirred up rivalries within many villages. The gold mines are yet another source of social tension and have triggered several strikes and protests since 2011.229

221 A spokesman for the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) said: “Bamako, Ouagadougou and Niamey are still targets for our suicide bombers”. See “Le Mujao annonce de prochains attentats à Bamako, Ouagadougou et Niamey”, Agence France-presse, 23 February 2013.
222 Ibid.
224 Crisis Group telephone interview, NGO official in charge of refugees, January 2013.
225 Burkina Manganèse is currently the only mining company producing anything other than gold in Burkina Faso. Since 2008, it has mined manganese at Kiéré, 200km to the west of Ouagadougou. “Exploitation minière: Salif Kaboré découvre le manganèse de Kiéré”, Sidwaya, 6 July 2011.
226 There are more than 200 artisan mines and several other sites with proven reserves but which are not yet being operated. The Burkinabe authorities have issued more than 600 exploration licences. Crisis Group interview, Burkina engineer, July 2012.
228 See the study conducted by the researcher Mathieu Thune on the Kalsaka mine, “L’industrialisation de l’exploitation de l’or à Kalsaka, Burkina Faso: une chance pour une population rurale pauvre ?”, EchoGéo, no. 17 (June-August 2011).
229 “Société minière de Kalsaka mining; une grève illimitée déclenchée par les travailleurs”, Sidwaya, 24 May 2010; “Grogne à la mine d’Essakane – des travailleurs protestent contre les heures
C. 2015: Danger Ahead

1. A new political charter

The year 2012 witnessed a significant upheaval in the political landscape. The CDP’s fifth congress in March completely changed its leadership, but it also sanctioned the rise of François Compaoré. Although Assimi Kouanda, a close adviser of Blaise Compaoré, was appointed leader of the CDP, it is now the president’s younger brother who holds power in the party. 12 members of the CDP’s new executive committee – out of 38 – are members of the Fédération associative pour la paix avec Blaise Compaoré (FEDAP-BC), which has long been the party’s financial arm and in which François Compaoré holds considerable sway. All the leaders who helped to build the CDP were sidelined and appointed to honorary posts as political advisers, including Salif Diallo, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and Simon Compaoré.

Blaise Compaoré decided to entrust the party to a relative, who is one of his most loyal advisers, in order to retain control of it whatever the future course of events. This decision strengthened the influence of the president’s family over the executive power. Convinced that the demonstrations in 2011 were more directed against the system than against himself, he removed the regime’s most emblematic figures in an attempt to regenerate it. This was a risky move with the 2 December legislative and municipal elections just a few months away.

The replacement of the party’s senior figures by relatively inexperienced people with limited grassroots support was not in itself a guarantee that the CDP would maintain control over voters. Moreover, many citizens associate François Compaoré with the Zongo case, while some CDP militants view several younger candidates close to him with suspicion. The composition of the lists of candidates for the legislative elections gave rise to arguments among the presidential party’s activists in several places. A few months before the elections, the feeling among activists interviewed...
by Crisis Group was that they expected a “very difficult election” and regretted a lack of support from the president who was, “too focused on resolving the crises of others”.  

Blaise Compaoré’s supporters were also wondering whether they would go so far as to create their own party. None of them has done so thus far, out of respect for the president or because they are afraid he might hold information that could harm their reputation.  

Regional leaders also remain respectful of Blaise Compaoré and have so far politely rebuffed approaches by national politicians. The former key CDP figures are faced with an acute dilemma: an abrupt exit from the CDP would rule out any chance of them being chosen as a candidate in the 2015 presidential elections if Blaise Compaoré does not contest the election himself, while remaining a party member carries the risk of early political retirement. For the moment, they have only barely protested their dismissal while, more importantly, distancing themselves from the campaign for the 2 December elections.

These elections provided a few answers to the questions posed by the 2011 crisis. First, they showed the CDP’s resilience and the robustness of its local structures. The ruling party won in a landslide, with 70 parliamentary seats out of 127 and 66 per cent of municipal councillor positions. The election confirmed two other trends. First, Burkina Faso has the capacity to organise relatively peaceful and transparent elections: in spite of a few incidents and protests, voting went smoothly. Second, it confirmed the president’s desire to concentrate power in the hands of the most loyal men in his entourage. A former secretary general of the presidency, Sangoulo Apollinaire Ouattara, was elected president of the National Assembly. Blaise Compaoré can therefore govern for two years with a parliament under control and a party led by a handful of loyal supporters.

Finally, these elections marked the emergence of a new political opposition, the Union pour le progrès et le changement (UPC), which became the largest opposition party with nineteen seats. It did much better than the traditional Sankarist parties and is even slightly ahead of the ADF-RDA, which obtained eighteen parliamentary seats. The UPC was founded in 2010 by a regime insider, Zéphirin Diabré, Compaoré’s former finance minister. Thanks to his successful international career, the party has the financial resources and international contacts that the other opposition parties lack. His policies are better articulated than those of the other opposition

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235 Crisis Group interviews, Ouagadougou, July 2012.
236 Crisis Group interviews, civil society leaders and CDP members, March 2012.
237 Crisis Group interviews, CDP members, July 2012.
238 “Les caciques de Blaise se rebiffent”, La lettre du continent, 9 January 2013.
239 The CDP held 73 out of a total of 111 seats in the previous assembly. Sixteen additional seats were created for the 2012 legislative elections.
241 The Union pour la renaisssance/Parti sankariste (UNIR/PS) won four seats, becoming the leading Sankarist party in terms of voters. The UNIR/PS is a union of two Sankarist parties: the Convention panafricaine sankariste (CPS) and the UNIR/MS.
242 Zéphirin Diabré received a PhD in management science from Bordeaux University in 1987, the year he returned to Burkina Faso. He was a university professor in Ouagadougou and assistant director of the Brakina breweries. After holding ministerial posts between 1994 and 1996, he held various international positions, such as UNDP assistant director general, associate researcher at Harvard University and manager of operations in Africa and the Middle East for the French company Areva. Diabré already has experience in politics. In 1992, he joined the ODP/MT and was chosen to head...
groups and he also has good experience in the management of public affairs. Another party, also produced by the system, won one seat in the assembly: Le Faso au- 

trement, founded by Blaise Compaoré’s former foreign minister, Ablassé Ouédraogo, in September 2011.

However, it will take time for the opposition, even renewed and organised by politicians with experience of the system, to create a structure capable of competing with the CDP. The latter has solid grassroots support, a strong grip on society and extensive financial resources. The December elections showed the resilience of the presidential party and indicated that the opposition has a long way to go to beat a party that has twenty years’ experience of being virtually the only party. Even with its new look and improved political program, it is by no means certain that two and a half years will be enough for the opposition to acquire the capacity to defeat the CDP’s candidate in the presidential elections. However, as Zéphirin Diabré main-
tains, “anything is possible if Blaise Compaoré does not contest the election”. It is certainly a possibility that the ruling party would break up if this were to be the case.

2. A difficult succession

There is no doubt that the CDP’s victory has reinforced a government that was shaken by the 2011 crisis. However, it has not dissipated the uncertainty over Burkina Faso’s future stability. In addition to the long-term impact of the Malian conflict, a crucial internal political issue remains unresolved. Article 37 of the constitution stipulates that “the president of Faso is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage in a secret ballot. He can only be re-elected once”. Elected in 2005 and again in 2010, Blaise Compaoré cannot stand for re-election without amending this article. The succession question that Burkina Faso now faces has often led to crises in other countries when leaders have been in power for several decades.

Compaoré’s margin for manoeuvre is very narrow. If he announces that he will not contest the November 2015 presidential election, this will open a succession battle that will destabilise the CDP, which forms the basis of his government. If he waits to make an announcement, he will fuel doubts that will increase social and political tension and promote a climate of uncertainty. It is also possible that he will never make an announcement or, as one of his former ministers stated, “that he will give a response through a third party”. At the moment, nobody is in a position to guess his intentions; the president likes secrecy and often makes decisions based on circumstances and opportunities. The succession question may remain unresolved through 2015, which will increase socio-political tensions.

After the shock of 2011, the government will have to tread carefully and it will be difficult to unilaterally amend Article 37 or adopt a new constitution lest it cause renewed protests. It is more likely that it will seek a consensual and democratic

the party’s list of candidates in the central Zoundwéogo province. He was elected to parliament in June 1992. Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabe journalists and politicians, September 2011.

243 Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Ouagadougou, September 2011 and March 2012.

244 Crisis Group interview, Ouagadougou, September 2011.

245 Crisis Group interview, Abidjan, October 2011.

246 Ibid.

247 The adoption of a new constitution would allow the country to start from scratch and authorise President Compaoré to seek re-election twice if Article 37 was maintained. In 2005, the Constitutional Council referred to the revision of the constitution in 2000 to reject several petitions for the canellation of Blaise Compaoré’s candidacy. The council argued that the revision, which reduced
procedure, at least in appearance, if it wants to amend this article. One option is a referendum that would give the amendment a measure of popular legitimacy. In 2005, when the issue of the constitutionality of his candidacy arose, Compaoré appealed to the people to support him. There was no referendum but the networks of associations loyal to the president organised a campaign and demanded he stand as a candidate.248

If the conflict in Mali becomes more acute, the need for continuity in government – to preserve the security and stability of the country in a troubled environment – will give him a strong argument to push for a referendum. However, this option could be risky. Although the CDP did well in the December 2012 elections, there is no certainty that Compaoré would win a referendum. Many voters would see it as an opportunity to vote on whether the man who has governed for more than a quarter of a century should remain in power rather than a question about the constitution.

With 70 out of the 127 seats in the National Assembly, Blaise Compaoré does not have the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution. This explains the creation of the Senate, which would create the possibility of a parliamentary majority to amend the constitution without holding a referendum. Since the adoption of the law creating the Senate, the president can convene the Congress, composed of both chambers of parliament, in four circumstances, one of which is a proposal to amend the constitution.249 The opposition, and particularly Zéphirin Diabré, has denounced the government’s intention to amend Article 37 through Congress, and indicated that “more than three quarters of the parliamentarians support the government”. A three-quarters majority is required in Congress to amend the constitution.250 These concerns have been strengthened by pro-CDP demonstrations on 7 July 2013 in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Many supporters of the president demonstrated calling for the amendment of Article 37.251

President Compaoré’s third option is to abide by the constitution. The June 2012 amnesty law, which prevents any legal proceedings against all heads of state since independence, is sometimes perceived as a sign of the president’s wish to secure his departure. Such a decision would have the advantage of avoiding another cycle of more or less violent protests, but it does not guarantee stability in the medium term. For the moment, Blaise Compaoré has no designated successor in the CDP, as the party’s key figures were replaced at the March 2012 Congress. As occurred with the succession to Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d’Ivoire, senior figures of the regime could enter into a destructive battle to replace the president. Faced with an opposition that is still too inexperienced, the CDP-backed candidate would have a great chance of winning.

A last option consists of preparing the ground for his brother François Compaoré to succeed him. The way he took control of the CDP and his election to the National Assembly indicate this is a possibility. François Compaoré was elected to parliament

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248 Ibid.
249 In addition to amending the constitution, Congress can be convened to discuss the president’s emergency powers of exception; a state of siege; and to hear the presidential address to parliament.
250 See “Les cinq raisons avancées par l’opposition pour dire ‘non’ au Sénat”, communiqué issued by the opposition parties and signed by the opposition leader, Zéphirin Diabré, 14 May 2013.
251 “Mauvais présage pour la démocratie”, Le Pays, 8 July 2013.
for Kadiogo, the province in which Ouagadougou is located. Further fuelling rumours, last October, a sector of the Burkina community in New York launched an appeal for François Compaoré to contest the 2015 presidential election.252 This hypothesis, if confirmed, is dangerous for Burkina Faso. Rightly or wrongly, the most radical fringe of the opposition associates François Compaoré with the Norbert Zongo case. It could respond to an announcement of his candidacy with a violent protest movement. Raising the spectre of a dynastic succession would create the basis for a strong mobilisation. François Compaoré might also be rejected by a significant sector of the CDP, a party that is far from unanimous about him.253

A final scenario, mentioned in private by the opposition,254 involves the appointment of François Compaoré to the presidency of the new Senate, which would allow him to replace his brother should the latter resign. Before the creation of the Senate, in the event of a vacancy, the president of the National Assembly would replace the president of the country. But with the creation of the second chamber, “if the office of president of Faso falls vacant for whatever reason, whether because of absolute and definitive impediment established by the constitutional council after referral by the government, the office of president of Faso shall be exercised by the president of the senate”. For the moment, this scenario appears unlikely because a president of the Senate acting as “the president of Faso cannot be a candidate in the presidential election that shall take place between 60 and 90 days after official declaration of the vacancy and the definitive nature of the impediment”. The president of the Senate would only become head of state for a short interim period.255

Burkina Faso’s situation is uncertain rather than weak. The future could see a steady deterioration of the situation, but with the government overcoming occasional crises similar to the one that occurred in 2011. If it fails to reduce social inequalities and combat large-scale corruption, it may face a popular revolt. On the other hand, it could experience a peaceful transition conducted by a president who would prepare his departure carefully and impose an heir apparent from within the CDP. As the military operates silently and secretly, nobody knows exactly where it stands, the intentions of its officers or the impact that sending 650 soldiers to Mali will have on the soldiers.

If Blaise Compaoré steps down, the consequences for West Africa are also uncertain. It would create a vacuum in the region, which has got used to calling the Burkina president to resolve, or at least contain, almost all of its crises. Without this point of reference that centralises its diplomatic initiatives, West Africa risks finding itself, for several months or several years, more divided than it is at present, particularly if ECOWAS does not do more to consolidate its own institutional mechanisms and if Nigerian diplomacy fails to assert itself. Western countries will lose an important political and military ally. Part of this vacuum could certainly be filled and its harmful effects minimised if Burkina experiences a peaceful transition that will allow it to preserve part of the diplomatic architecture constructed by Blaise Compaoré. His absence from the regional scene might not necessarily be a problem. It could provide an opportunity for one or several other

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252 “Des jeunes Burkinabè de la diaspora soutiennent la candidature de François Compaoré à la présidentielle de 2015”, LeFaso.net, 7 October 2012.
253 Crisis Group interviews, CDP militants, Ouagadougou, March 2012.
254 Crisis Group telephone interview, opposition member, May 2013.
255 If the government really wants and thinks it can obtain enough political support, it could propose an amendment to this provision at a later date. However, this is only speculation.
presidents to play the role of mediator or facilitator, while upholding in their country the democratic principles defined by ECOWAS, and to renew and improve the regional mechanisms for crisis resolution inherited from the president of Burkina Faso.
VII. Conclusion

Burkina Faso oscillates between democratic aspirations and authoritarian temptations. There is a pattern to its history. Each time a government has acted too strongly to impose its authority and control the country’s resources, it has been overthrown, either as a result of popular protests or by the military. Until now, Blaise Compaoré’s government has succeeded in retaining power thanks to its subtle but violent alternation of democratisation and repression, its refusal to countenance any alternatives and promotion of economic policies that have generated wealth without distributing it equitably. This combination of compromise and illusions as a method of retaining power is becoming less and less effective, as shown by the 2011 turmoil.

Blaise Compaoré has less than three years to prepare his departure, as laid down in the constitution. There are not many options for his democratic replacement, because the opposition is too divided and inexperienced and members of the ruling party do not seem to have the courage to challenge him. However, it is first and foremost by abiding by the constitution and democratic principles that the president will be able to prolong the main achievement of his long presidency – stability. Blaise Compaoré is the only one to hold the keys to continued stability, because of the personal nature of his regime and his longstanding, unchallenged domination of political life.

Dakar/Brussels, 22 July 2013
Appendix A: Map of Burkina Faso
Appendix B: List of acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Alliance pour la démocratie et la fédération (Alliance for Democracy and Federation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADF/RDA</td>
<td>Alliance pour la démocratie et la fédération/Rassemblement démocratique africain (ADF/African Democratic Rally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIB</td>
<td>Agence d'informations du Burkina Faso (Burkina Faso News Agency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda In the Islamic Maghreb</td>
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<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARC</td>
<td>Bureaux d’aide à la reconversion civile (Office for Assistance with Civilian Reintegration)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCEAO</td>
<td>Banque centrale des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (Central Bank of West African States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRP</td>
<td>Conseil consultatif des réformes politiques (Consultative Council for Political Reform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDP</td>
<td>Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès (Congress for Democracy and Progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDR</td>
<td>Comités de défense de la révolution (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEI</td>
<td>Commission d’enquête indépendante (Independent Commission of Inquiry)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNEC</td>
<td>Centre national d’entraînement commando (National Commando Training Centre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENI</td>
<td>Commission électorale nationale indépendante (National Independent Electoral Commission)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNR</td>
<td>Conseil national de la révolution (National Council of the Revolution)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Convention panafricaine sankariste (Sankarist Pan African Convention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Conseil du salut du peuple (Council for the Salvation of the People)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAN</td>
<td>Forces armées nationales (National Armed Forces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEDAP-BC</td>
<td>Fédération associative pour la paix avec Blaise Compaoré (Federation of Associations for Peace with Blaise Compaoré)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Forces nouvelles (New Forces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Front populaire (Popular Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCB</td>
<td>Groupe communiste burkinabè (Burkina Communist Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMO</td>
<td>Genetically Modified Organism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBDHP</td>
<td>Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l’homme et des peuples (Burkina Human Rights Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCV</td>
<td>Organisation communiste voltaïque (Volta Communist Organisation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODP/MT</td>
<td>Organisation pour la démocratie/Mouvement du travail (Organisation for Democracy/Labour Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMR</td>
<td>Organisation militaire révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Military Organisation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPA</td>
<td>Ouagadougou Peace Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCRV</td>
<td>Parti communiste révolutionnaire voltaïque (Volta Revolutionary Communist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>Parti pour la démocratie et le progrès (Democracy and Progress Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRA Parti du regroupement africain (African Unity Party)
PRL Parti républicain de la liberté (Republican Freedom Party)
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
RDA Rassemblement démocratique africain (African Democratic Rally)
RSP Régiment de sécurité présidentielle (Presidential Security Regiment)
SNEAVH Syndicat national des enseignants africains de la Haute-Volta (Upper Volta African Teachers’ National Union)
TPR Tribunaux populaires révolutionnaires (Popular Revolutionary Tribunals)
UCB Union des communistes burkinabé (Union of Burkina Communists)
UCOBAM Union des coopératives agricoles et maraîchères du Burkina (Burkina Union of Agricultural and Market Gardening Cooperatives)
UDPCI Union pour la démocratie et la paix en Côte d’Ivoire (Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d’Ivoire)
UDV-RDA Union démocratique voltaïque (Volta Democratic Union)
ULC Union des luttes communistes (Union of Communist Struggles)
UNDD Union nationale pour la démocratie et le développement (National Union for Democracy and Development)
UNIR/MS Union pour la renaissance/Mouvement sankariste (Union for Revival/Sankarist Movement)
UNIR/PS Union pour la renaissance/Parti sankariste (Union for Revival/ Sankarist Party)
UPC Union pour le changement (Union for Change)