



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

# **Elections in Burkina Faso**

## *2020 General Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Africa

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

|   |   |
|---|---|
| When is Election Day?.....  | 1 |
| When does campaigning start and end? .....  | 1 |
| Why are these elections important? .....  | 1 |
| What will security be like on Election Day? .....   | 2 |
| Will internally displaced persons be able to vote? .....  | 2 |
| What is the legal framework governing these elections? .....  | 2 |
| What is the electoral system?.....  | 3 |
| Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list? .....       | 3 |
| What is the structure of the government? .....  | 3 |
| What is the election management body? What are its powers and responsibilities? .....                 | 4 |
| How are election commissioners appointed? .....   | 4 |
| Who are voters voting for on Election Day?.....   | 5 |
| Who can vote in the elections? .....  | 5 |
| How many registered voters are there? How was voter registration conducted? .....                     | 5 |
| Where will votes be cast on Election Day? .....   | 6 |
| Will there be out-of-country voting?.....   | 6 |
| What COVID-19 prevention measures will be taken on Election Day? .....                                | 6 |
| What provisions for accessibility will be provided to voters with disabilities on Election Day? ..... | 7 |
| Who will observe the elections?.....  | 7 |
| How and when will the results be transmitted and published? .....                                     | 7 |
| How will election disputes be adjudicated? .....  | 8 |
| Resources.....  | 9 |
| About IFES in Burkina Faso .....  | 9 |
| Disclosure.....   | 9 |

*Please note that these FAQs were originally published on November 17. They were updated on November 19 after more information became available about where voting would not take place due to insecurity.*

## **When is Election Day?**

Elections will occur in Burkina Faso on Sunday, November 22, 2020. Elections announced for this date are the first round of the election of the president of Burkina Faso and the election of members of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso.

If none of the candidates for president obtains an absolute majority of votes in the first round, a second round will be held within 15 days after the Constitutional Council's announcement of the final results.

## **When does campaigning start and end?**

According to the official calendar published by the Independent National Electoral Commission (*Commission électorale nationale indépendante*, or CENI), election campaigning began on October 31 and will end on November 20.<sup>1</sup>

## **Why are these elections important?**

The November 22 general elections, along with municipal elections scheduled for May 2021, have the potential to reinforce the positive precedents of the credible, competitive 2015-16 elections – considered by many observers to be the country's first in almost 30 years. If well managed, inclusive and credible, these elections could open the door to greater citizen engagement in the political process, improved government accountability and strengthened precedents and norms that will be essential for the long-term health of Burkinabè democracy. Therefore, these elections constitute a rare window of opportunity for democratic consolidation and progress in Burkina Faso.

Alongside this opportunity, however, democratic progress in Burkina Faso also faces great risks. The rapid escalation in insecurity is of particular concern, as it endangers a large portion of the populace while making some regions of the country inaccessible to government officials and security forces and limiting safe civic engagement. In 2019, over 2,000 people were killed, a sixfold increase from 2018 per Crisis Group estimates.<sup>2</sup> This trend has continued with more than 2,100 also killed by end of October 2020 according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.<sup>3</sup> These challenges are exacerbated by the risks and restrictions imposed by the current novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), which – for the sake of public health – constrains public assembly, freedom of movement, economic opportunity and safe access to political participation.

This combination of heightened opportunity and risk factors – in a country of critical importance in the fight against violent extremism – makes credible and inclusive elections in Burkina Faso a vital priority.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article99301>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-safeguarding-elections-amid-crisis>

<sup>3</sup> <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard>

The Constitutional Council has noted that voting would likely not take place in nearly one-fifth of the country's territory due to the presence of terrorist groups.<sup>4</sup> Per the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante's* latest communication, about 9 percent of all villages (or 860 villages out of 9,284) and about 4 percent of all communes (or 15 out of 351) will not be included in this year's polls.

## **What will security be like on Election Day?**

Mounting insecurity in significant portions of Burkina Faso pose a significant threat to the November 2020 elections. Due to the current situation, it is likely that elections will not be held at a number of polling stations in the affected areas. The *Commission électorale nationale indépendante*, in collaboration with the security sector, will inform the Constitutional Council of areas where they believe it is unsafe to hold the election prior to Election Day.

Several actors will enforce electoral security. These will include the national police, the *gendarmerie*, the army and other security sector agencies. The army will not be present near polling stations but will instead be deployed to high-risk areas to carry out patrols and ensure the overall environment is conducive to the conduct of elections.

An estimated 40,000 to 50,000 personnel (police, *gendarmes* and other agencies) will be required to provide security to polling stations and other critical electoral infrastructure.

Per the Electoral Code, security inside polling stations is the responsibility of the polling station's presiding officer.

## **Will internally displaced persons be able to vote?**

As a result of ongoing security concerns, Burkina Faso currently has 1,034,609 internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>5</sup> Like other Burkinabès, they were given up to one month prior to Election Day to transfer their official residence to where they temporarily reside to enable them to participate in the presidential and legislative elections. However, IDPs will not be able to vote in their constituencies of origin. Citizens who lost their voter cards as a result of fleeing their homes were also able to request new cards up to 30 days prior to the election.

## **What is the legal framework governing these elections?**

The primary documents constituting the legal framework governing Burkina Faso's elections are the Constitution of Burkina Faso (adopted in 1991, as amended in 2015) and the 2001 Electoral Code, last amended in August 2020.

The Constitution establishes parameters for the timing of elections, limits presidential terms to two mandates and establishes the Constitutional Council as "the institution competent in constitutional and electoral matters." Other details of the electoral process are left to the laws, such as the Electoral Code. These details include eligibility requirements for candidates, the conduct of the election, the counting of

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.macaubusiness.com/burkina-faso-president-launches-campaign-for-second-term/>

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR data as of September 8, 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/bfa>

ballots and the proclamation of results. For legislative elections, they also specify electoral district boundaries, the number of seats per electoral district, voting procedures and the conditions for electing a replacement in the case of an unforeseen vacancy of a seat.<sup>6</sup>

On August 25, 2020, the National Assembly enacted a revision to the Electoral Code. Modifications relate to the branches of the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante*, situations of force majeure in the organization of elections, the revision of the voter list and the harmonization of the duration of electoral campaigns for presidential and legislative elections.<sup>7</sup> Should insecurity prevent voting in some polling stations, the force majeure allows for results from polling stations that are able to function in a given constituency to be valid for the entire constituency.

## What is the electoral system?

Per the Electoral Code, the president of Burkina Faso is elected according to a majority voting system in two rounds. If a candidate receives an absolute majority of votes in the first round, he or she is elected; otherwise, a second round is held between the two candidates who won the most votes in the first round.

The National Assembly is made up of 127 deputies. Of those, 111 deputies are elected in 45 multimember provincial constituencies, with each having two to nine seats depending on the size of the constituency. The remaining 16 deputies are elected through a proportional representation closed-list system.

## Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?

According to the 2020 Law on Gender Quota, lists of candidates for parliamentary and municipal elections must include at least 30 percent of people of each gender. In addition, the first two-thirds of names on each party list must alternate between men and women. Those who meet these requirements benefit from 20 percent additional state funding. There are, thus, financial incentives to include women candidates.<sup>8</sup> Despite these measures, out of a total of 1,565 lists, only 267 women (17 percent) headline party lists in national and provincial lists.

## What is the structure of the government?

According to the Constitution, executive functions are shared between the president of the Republic, who is the head of state, and the prime minister, who is the head of government. As the head of state, the president guarantees respect for the Constitution; establishes the policy of the state; assures national unity; and is the guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity, the permanence and continuity of the state, and respect for agreements and treaties. The prime minister directs and

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina\\_Faso\\_2015.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2015.pdf?lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article98899>

<sup>8</sup> *Loi n°003-2020/AN du 22 janvier 2020 portant fixation de quota et modalités de positionnement des candidates et candidates aux élections législatives et aux élections municipales au Burkina Faso.*

coordinates government action. This includes directing national defense, exercising regulatory power and assuring the implementation of laws.

The legislature consists of one chamber, the National Assembly, which votes on legislation and oversees the actions of the government. The National Assembly is elected through direct, universal suffrage.

An independent judiciary acts as the guardian of the individual and collective liberties and ensures respect for the rights and freedoms defined in the Constitution. The Constitutional Council is the competent institution in constitutional and electoral matters.<sup>9</sup>

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers and responsibilities?**

The *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI) is the main election management body in Burkina Faso. This body is established by the Electoral Code, according to which its responsibilities are the creation, management and conservation of a voter register and the organization and supervision of electoral and referendum operations.

The CENI has several branches, including Independent Provincial Electoral Commissions at the provincial level; Independent Municipal Electoral Commissions at the local level; Independent District Electoral Commissions at the communal district level; and the Embassy Independent Electoral Commissions or Consulate Independent Electoral Commissions overseas.<sup>10</sup>

## **How are election commissioners appointed?**

Per the Electoral Code, the minister responsible for public liberties – the minister of territorial administration, decentralization and social cohesion<sup>11</sup> – convenes the relevant parties to designate or replace members of the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI). The CENI is composed of five individuals designated by the majority party or coalition, five designated by the opposition and five representing civil society (three representatives of religious communities, one representative of traditional leadership and one representative of human rights organizations). Representatives are designated for a term of five years, renewable once.

The CENI is administered by an executive team consisting of one president, two vice presidents and two rapporteurs. The president is chosen from the civil society representatives. The other team members are chosen from majority and opposition political parties in a manner that ensures parity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina\\_Faso\\_2015.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2015.pdf?lang=en)

<sup>10</sup> *Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*

<sup>11</sup> <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article78665>

<sup>12</sup> *Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*

## Who are voters voting for on Election Day?

On November 22, Burkinabè voters will elect the president of Burkina Faso and the deputies who will represent them in the National Assembly.

According to the list validated by the Constitutional Council, 13 candidates will compete for the presidency, including incumbent Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who will be seeking his second presidential term under the banner of the People's Movement for Progress. Other prominent candidates include Zéphirin Diabré, runner-up in the 2015 elections; Eddie Komboïgo of former President Blaise Compaoré's Congress for Democracy and Progress; Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, a former prime minister; Yacouba Isaac Zida, a retired military officer who briefly served as head of state following the 2014 military coup; and Yeli Monique Kam, the sole female candidate.<sup>13</sup>

A full list of presidential candidates can be found at [Lefaso.net](http://Lefaso.net).

For the legislative elections, the national list comprises 58 political party lists featuring 1,846 candidates and alternates.

For the legislative elections in multimember provincial constituencies, there are 1,507 party lists across the 45 provincial constituencies with a total of 8,700 candidates and alternates.

## Who can vote in the elections?

According to the Electoral Code, the electorate consists of all Burkinabè of both genders who are 18 years or older on Election Day, enjoy their civil and political rights, are registered on electoral lists and have legal capacity. Naturalized foreigners, including those who acquired Burkinabè nationality by marriage, are eligible to vote.

Due to the current security situation, it is unlikely that the election will take place in every polling station. During the revision of the voter lists, more than 1,600 villages in 22 communes were excluded from the voter registration process due to security-related challenges. Given the dynamic security situation, the election may take place in some areas where voter registration did not occur. Similarly, the elections may not take place even in some areas where voter registration was possible. The *Commission électorale nationale indépendante's* latest information indicates that 860 villages out of 9,284 and 15 communes out of 351 will not be participating in the polls. This exclusion affects 1,334 polling stations (or 6.32 percent of all polling stations) and represents 374,712 voters (or 5.79 percent of all registered voters).

## How many registered voters are there? How was voter registration conducted?

The *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI) conducted an ad hoc revision of the voter roll from January 1 to July 17, 2020. As a result of this revision, the CENI was able to enroll 2,377,601

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/evenements/presidentielle-burkina-faso-2020/>

additional voters and expunged 1,425,725 double entries. Following this operation, the total number of registered voters was 6,490,926.

The CENI faced difficulties related to the security situation and the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the revision. It estimates that this prevented approximately 166,885 eligible voters from registering.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the CENI was able to reach 329 out of 351 communes and 7,694 out of 9,299 villages through the registration exercise. An audit conducted by the African Union and the *Organization internationale de la francophonie* found the resulting voter roll to be free of duplicates and acceptable, notwithstanding the unreachable locales.<sup>15</sup>

## **Where will votes be cast on Election Day?**

Voters will be casting their ballots in 21,155 polling stations. There will be 21,087 polling stations in Burkina Faso and 68 polling stations in embassies and consulates in 22 countries. In Burkina Faso, every sector (the smallest urban administrative subdivision) and every village has at least one polling station. According to the Electoral Code, a maximum of 800 voters can be assigned to each polling station. However, in practice for the 2020 elections, most polling stations will serve fewer than 500 registered voters.

## **Will there be out-of-country voting?**

For the first time in the country's history, members of the Burkinabè diaspora will be able to participate in the elections. Per the Electoral Code, polling will be organized in countries with diplomatic or consular representation and at least 500 members of the Burkinabè diaspora.<sup>16</sup> There will be 68 polling stations located in 22 countries (Africa: 15 countries; Asia: one country; Europe: four countries; and North America: two countries) serving 23,108 registered voters.

## **What COVID-19 prevention measures will be taken on Election Day?**

The *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* has put in place several measures in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the 105,775 poll workers (five poll workers per each of the 21,155 polling stations) will be provided with cloth face masks, and hand sanitizer will be made available for all voters upon entry to the polling stations. In April 2020, the Government of Burkina Faso mandated the wearing of face coverings in public spaces.<sup>17</sup> In line with this, voters are encouraged to come to polling stations wearing face masks, but those who do not wear a face mask will still be allowed to cast their vote.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1027664/politique/presidentielle-au-burkina-faso-plus-de-deux-millions-de-nouveaux-electeurs-inscrits/>

<sup>15</sup> *Rapport Final, Audit international du fichier électoral du Burkina Faso, 7-21 octobre 2020*

<sup>16</sup> *Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*

<sup>17</sup> <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article96248>

## **What provisions for accessibility will be provided to voters with disabilities on Election Day?**

Per the Electoral Code, any eligible voter with a disability is authorized to be assisted by an eligible voter of his or her choice or by a worker at the polling station.

## **Who will observe the elections?**

There will be a combination of international and national election observation missions. The main international observation missions will be those of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The largest national domestic observation will be led by *La Convention des Organisations de la société civile pour l'Observation Domestique des Elections* (CODEL), which is a coalition of over 30 civil society organizations working on governance in Burkina Faso.<sup>18</sup> They will deploy a total of 3,800 observers across the country.

## **How and when will the results be transmitted and published?**

Results are compiled at each polling station and delivered, under the responsibility of the president of the polling station, to decentralized Communal Results Compilation Centers (CCCRs) established by the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI). The CENI is directly responsible for the centralization and tabulation of the voting results from this point. Upon receipt, the CENI is responsible for electronically transmitting the data from each compilation center to the relevant candidates or their representatives. Candidates or their representatives can consult the records from the polling stations at CENI headquarters upon request to the president of the CENI.

Per the Electoral Code, the CENI is required to announce provisional results within seven days of the date of the election. If needed, the CENI may request from the Constitutional Council an extension of no more than three days. In 2015, the CENI was able to announce provisional results for the presidential election within 24 hours. It is expected, although not required, that results for the 2020 presidential elections will be announced within a similar timeframe.

For the presidential election, the CENI will announce results commune by commune before announcing the combined provisional results.

Disputes must be received by the Constitutional Council within seven days of the announcement of the provisional results. The Constitutional Council will proclaim the final results within 15 days of the expiration of the time limit for appeals.

The CENI organizes the centralization of all votes at the national level at its headquarters from secure data sent through the mobile phone network from each of the 368 CCCRs.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.codel.bf/>

The candidate delegates and the candidates themselves may attend the compilation of results in the CCCRs and are invited to sign the results compilation report.<sup>19</sup>

## **How will election disputes be adjudicated?**

In the context of the presidential election, the Constitutional Council deals with disputes regarding the candidates, electoral operations and the counting and resolution of disputes of results. The Constitutional Council also has jurisdiction over the legislative elections, except disputes regarding the list of candidates established by the National Independent Electoral Commission, which candidates can contest before the Administrative Tribunal up to three days following its publication.

Disputes related to election results must be received by the Constitutional Council within seven days of the announcement of the provisional results. The Constitutional Council proclaims the final results within 15 days of the expiration of the time limit for appeals.

In the event that the Constitutional Council finds irregularities serious enough to taint the fairness of the balloting and affect the overall result thereof, it declares the election to be canceled. The government then fixes by decree the date of the new election, which takes place, at the latest, in the month following the date of the decision of the Constitutional Council in the case of the presidential election, and within two months following the date of the decision in the case of the legislative election.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*

<sup>20</sup> *Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*

## Resources

- [Constitution of Burkina Faso](#)
- Electoral Code of Burkina Faso (*Loi n°034-2020/AN du 25 août 2020 portant code électoral et ses lois modificatives.*)
- [Commission électorale nationale indépendante](#) (CENI)
- [Loi n°003-2020/AN du 22 janvier 2020 portant fixation de quota et modalités de positionnement des candidates et candidats aux élections législatives et aux élections municipales au Burkina Faso.](#)
- [Audit Indépendant du Fichier Electoral du Burkina Faso, 7-21 octobre 2020](#)

## About IFES in Burkina Faso

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is co-implementing the “Promoting Peaceful, Democratic, Transparent and Inclusive Elections in Burkina Faso” program, which supports Burkina Faso in holding general and local elections, planned for November 2020 and May 2021, respectively. Under this United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded program, IFES is strengthening electoral administration and providing targeted technical assistance to the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI). Post-elections, IFES will work with the CENI to institutionalize training and prepare the institution to sustainably meet future capacity-building needs.

From 2015-17, IFES worked with the CENI in Burkina Faso to hold free, fair and credible elections that address the needs of Burkinabès. Based on an in-depth needs assessment of the CENI’s capacities and subsequent technical assistance plan, IFES conducted targeted trainings and capacity development for the CENI. To increase the CENI’s effectiveness in electoral administration, IFES assisted the CENI to identify, procure and set up an electronic system for election results transmission. IFES trained CENI personnel on the new system and provided technical assistance to determine a sustainable solution for the validation of electoral counting protocols. In addition, IFES supported the dissemination of CENI’s public information messages across the country calling for peaceful participation in the electoral process.

## Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the *Commission électorale nationale indépendante* (CENI) as of November 17, 2020, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.

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