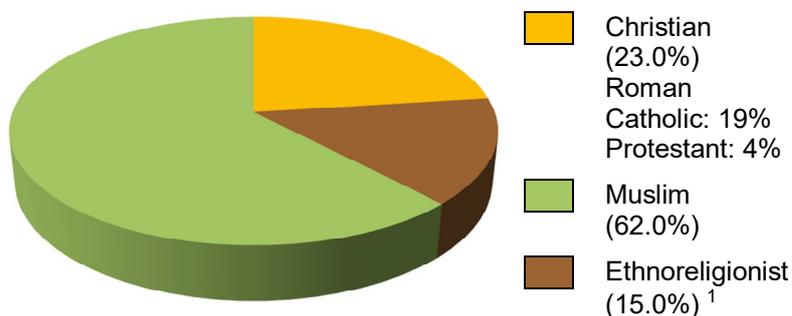
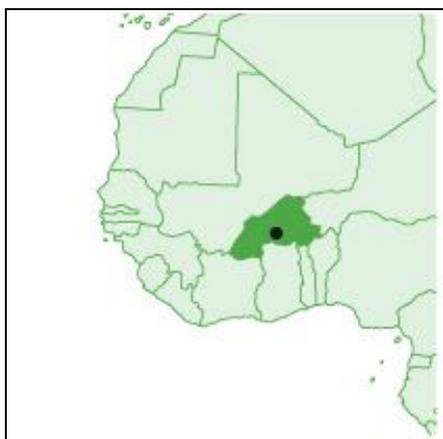


BURKINO FASO



Area: 274,190 km ²	Population²: 18,931,686	Political system: Democracy ³	Major Language(s): French ⁴
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Burkina Faso has hitherto witnessed few incidents of Islamic violence but during the period of this report it was targeted by jihadists. On 16th January 2016, 30 people were killed in an Islamist terrorist attack on a restaurant and hotel in the capital, Ouagadougou. For several hours the attackers were trapped in the Splendid Hotel with a number of hostages, until local security forces and French troops finally stormed the building.⁵ Terror organisation Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.⁶ There are many indications that the terrorists deliberately intended to make a show of strength in a country otherwise recognised and respected worldwide for the level of peaceful coexistence between its various ethnic and religious communities.

It remains to be seen whether these violent Islamist groups will gain a permanent foothold in Burkina Faso. A country whose laws grant no special privileges to any religion, Burkina Faso is a secular state whose constitution acknowledges the right to religious freedom.⁷ Like many other nations in the region, Burkina Faso is characterised by a wide religious pluralism, although Islam is clearly dominant.

Traditionally, the various religious communities have maintained good relations with one another. Religious groups, like all other organisations, are required to register with the state. Those who fail to register can face a fine. All organisations are treated on the same footing. Muslims, Catholics and Protestants all maintain primary and secondary schools. The schools are free to plan their own staffing, though the authorities must be notified about the appointment of school directors.

Burkina Faso's previous government under President Compaore (who resigned in October 2014) provided an annual subsidy equivalent to approximately US\$140,000 each to the Muslim, Catholic and Protestant communities.⁸ In addition, it provided support for various individual schemes and projects deemed to promote the common good or to be in the national interest, for example, in the educational field. In 2014 financial subsidies were also given to around 5,500 Muslims undertaking the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

Over the past two years, the political and social life of Burkina Faso has been marked by a high degree of political unrest, which escalated towards the end of 2014 and led to the toppling of

President Blaise Compaoré, who had ruled the country for the past 27 years. President Compaoré came to power in 1987 following a bloody coup and maintained political control through a system which, while formally democratised in 1991, was in practice repressive. Compaoré was forced to resign on 31st October 2014, following mass protests.⁹ Since then, the transitional government has promised reforms in the political, economic and institutional fields. However, it has not proposed any changes in regard to religious freedom.¹⁰

However, the new democracy was soon in trouble. On 16th September 2015, a month before planned new elections, members of the presidential guard, led by Gilbert Diendéré, the former chief of staff of Compaoré, stormed the parliament building and seized the transitional President Michel Kafando, the Prime Minister Isaac Zida and almost the entire cabinet. At the time, the parliament was debating precisely over the dissolution of this 1,300-man-strong presidential guard, widely held responsible for many of the human rights abuses under the Compaoré regime. Protests against the putsch were put down violently, with at least 10 people killed and hundreds injured. However, two days later, on 18th September 2015, Kafando and his cabinet were released again, under international pressure, and reinstated on 23rd September. Following the putsch, Gilbert Diendéré, after seeking refuge in the Vatican nunciature in Ouagadougou, was taken into custody by the government on 1st October 2015.¹¹

Burkina Faso shares borders with six other countries: Mali, Niger, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo. Hence there is a grave danger that crises and political instability in Burkina Faso can spill over and affect the entire region. In addition, violent jihadist groups are increasingly operating across international frontiers in West Africa; among these is Boko Haram, which operates mainly in Nigeria but launches attacks in Niger and Cameroon as well. There is also a threat from the north as the terrorist group Daesh (ISIS) has now established a firm base in Libya. To the west, Mali is also facing a crisis, with Islamist terror groups acting there. Hence Islamic jihadism is a looming threat on all sides of this small country.

The Catholic Church in Burkina Faso has long campaigned for peace and reconciliation. So it was that, following the resignation of President Compaoré, Cardinal Philippe Ouedraogo, Archbishop of Ouagadougou, called on the people to confront the political crisis in Burkina Faso.¹² He said: "All the citizens of the country were responsible for its future in this situation." At the same time, he announced a novena of prayer for reconciliation, justice and peace in Burkina Faso. Ahead of this, at the invitation of the international community of Sant Egidio, Christian, Muslim and animist groups in Burkina Faso prayed together for a peaceful transition of power in the country. Many people now see signs of hope for the future in the election of the new President, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, a Catholic with wide international experience.¹³ The electoral process passed off peacefully and fairly, and President Kaboré formally took up office on 29th December 2015.¹⁴

Incidents

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Prospects for freedom of religion

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¹ *ibid.*

² CIA, *The World Factbook 2016*, estimate, July 2015

³ Marc Kabore, who served as prime minister and speaker of parliament under veteran President Blaise Compaore, won the November 2015 presidential election, easily beating his main rival. The intervening year before Mr Kabore's election saw considerable turmoil, including an attempted coup by troops loyal to the ousted president in September 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13072774>

⁴ Languages: French (official language); other major vehicular languages are Mooré (the language of the Mossi tribe), Dioula (which is also widely spoken in Ivory Coast) and Fulfuldé (Fulbe); Munzinger Archiv 2016

⁵ dpa, AFP, AP

⁶ <http://www.dw.com/de/burkina-faso-hoffen-auf-sicherheit-nach-dem-terror/a-18988042>

⁷ U.S. State Department 2016: *International Religious Freedom Report for 2014*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Munzinger Archiv 2016

¹⁰ U.S. State Department 2016: *International Religious Freedom Report for 2014*

¹¹ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/30/burkina_faso_putsch-f%C3%BChrer_fieht_in_die_nuntiatur/1175826

¹² http://de.radiovaticana.va/storico/2014/11/03/burkina_faso_kardinal_ruft_zur_ordnung/ted-834481

¹³ *Die Tagespost*, 24.12.15

¹⁴ Munzinger 2016

¹⁵ dpa, AFP, AP

¹⁶ <http://www.dw.com/de/burkina-faso-hoffen-auf-sicherheit-nach-dem-terror/a-18988042>

¹⁷ U.S. State Department 2016: *International Religious Freedom Report for 2014*