

World Watch Research

Burkina Faso: Background Information

September 2024



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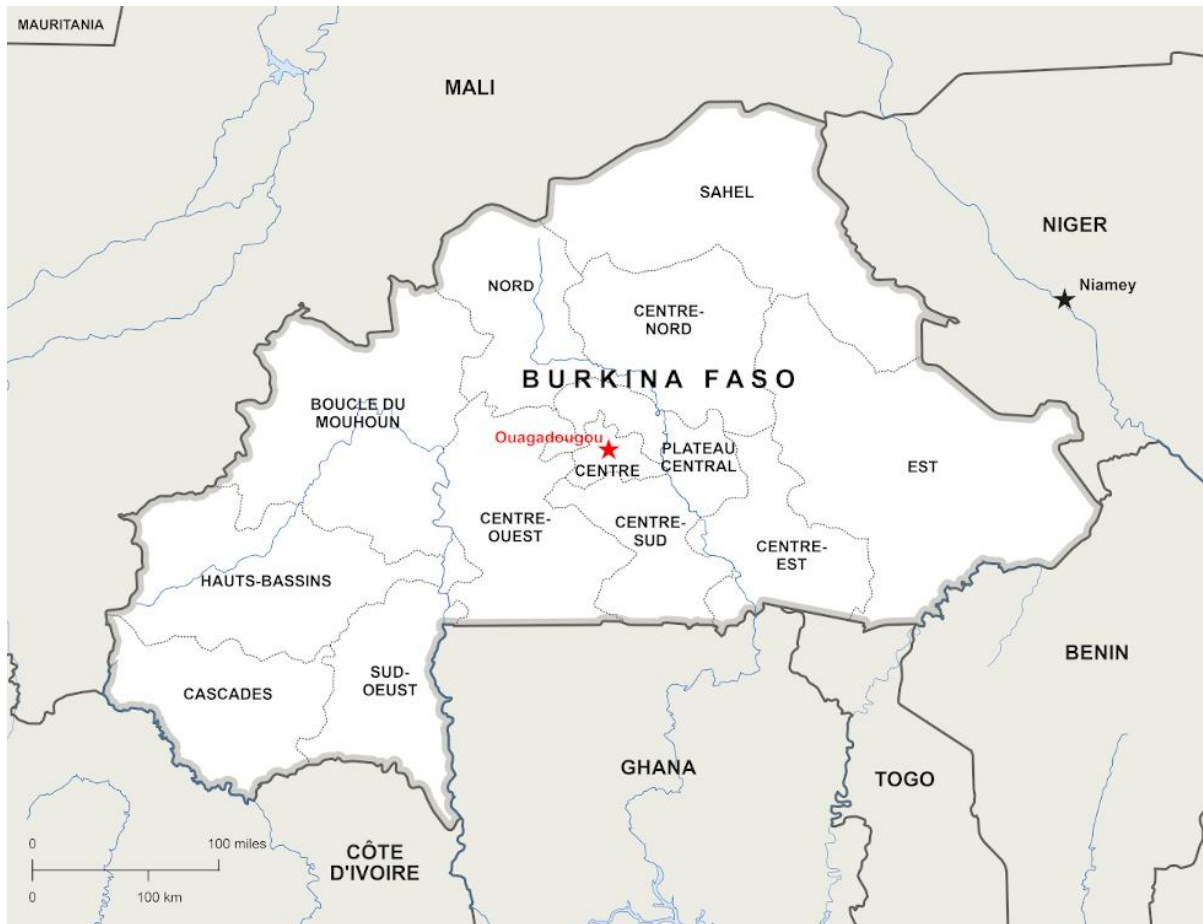
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World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- Background country information (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

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Map of country



Burkina Faso: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
23,840,000	6,169,000	25.9

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Recent history

Burkina Faso is in the Sahel region of West Africa. The country was formerly a French colony known as Upper Volta and gained independence in 1960. Throughout its post-independence history, Burkina Faso has gone through several episodes of political unrest and instability.

Like most African countries, the territorial borders are a product of the 19th-century European colonial demarcation process called the “scramble for Africa”. The independence movement to become free from French control was led by the Voltaic Democratic Union (UDV) party. The leader of the UDV, Maurice Yaméogo, became the country’s first president. After coming to power, President Yaméogo banned all other political parties and declared the country to be a single-party state. The regime favored the policies of the French and other Western powers.

The UDV regime became unpopular, which led to an outbreak of political unrest in 1966 and Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana orchestrated a successful military coup. Lamizana took control and ruled the country for the next fourteen years first with a full military government and then with a military

government including some civilians holding limited power. Political protests led by the country's trade unions forced the regime to introduce a democratic constitution in 1977. The country held an open election in 1978 which Lamizana won. This election, like most earlier elections, was not free and fair.

The country then experienced a second military coup when the Lamizana regime was overthrown by Colonel Saye Zerbo in 1980. The Zerbo regime was unpopular, faced considerable opposition and lasted only two years. A military council called the Council of Popular Salvation (CSP), led by Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo, [overthrew](#) the Zerbo regime in 1982 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed 30 January 2023). Following political unrest and infighting, on 4 August 1983 the Ouedraogo regime was overthrown by the CSP faction led by Thomas Sankara and Blaise Compaoré. Sankara was installed as the president of the republic.

In 1984 President Sankara changed the name of the country to Burkina Faso ("land of honest men"). Sankara was one of the most popular leaders in Africa. He introduced numerous political and social reforms that included more rights for women and workers. However, it seems that his Socialist economic policies were unpopular among Western powers and he was killed in a coup led by Blaise Compaoré in October 1987.

Blaise Compaoré's military government was dictatorial and unpopular among the people. Opposition to the regime was met with violent reprisals and many opposition leaders were arrested, tortured, killed or forced to leave the country. Opposition came to a height in the 2014 uprising which forced Compaoré to leave the country in October 2014 after 27 years of rule. After a brief transitional period, there was another military coup in September 2015. However, the coup leaders agreed to transfer power to a civilian government through elections. A democratic election was held in November 2015 and Roch Kaboré became the first democratically elected president of Burkina Faso.

General elections were held in Burkina Faso on 22 November 2020 to elect the president and National Assembly. The elections were held in the shadow of jihadist violence, which [claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone](#) (France24, 26 November 2020). In the presidential elections, incumbent President Kaboré of the People's Movement for Progress was re-elected in the first round with 57.7% of the vote.

Two military coups in 2022

On 24 January 2022 a [military coup](#) overthrew Burkina Faso's President Kaboré amid a deepening security crisis in the country. Both civilians and security forces had long been voicing their discontent (ISS, 3 February 2022). The coup was orchestrated by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had just been promoted to head the country's third military region. A Transition Government was set up under Damiba as president, but a further coup took place in October 2022: Damiba was ousted by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who set up his own military government. In May 2024, the military junta led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré [indefinitely postponed the elections](#) initially scheduled for July 2024, which were intended to restore a democratic civilian government. The junta also announced that it will extend its rule for another five years with effect from 2 July.

French forces leave

Taking advantage of the political chaos, jihadist groups have been growing stronger and expanding beyond the peripheries they used to control. Jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso have resulted in devastating consequences, including loss of life, destruction, and significant social and economic

challenges. As of 9 November 2022, the French government formally concluded Operation Barkhane, a significant anti-insurgent operation launched on 1 August 2014, aimed at combating violent Islamic militants in the Sahel region of Africa.

After cutting military relations with France, the government said it would develop links with Russia. However, the government has denied hiring Wagner mercenaries - who are operating in Mali and the Central African Republic - but says it will use "Russian instructors" to train its soldiers

The conclusion of Operation Barkhane poses new challenges and concerns for the region's security. With the departure of French soldiers, there is a potential void in the efforts to counter the ongoing threat posed by militant groups. The absence of this crucial international support may leave Burkina Faso vulnerable to further attacks and hinder efforts to stabilize the volatile Sahel region.

Christians in the country have made significant contributions, for instance, in leading the country to independence and in all other efforts to stabilize the country. At the same time, especially in recent years, Christians have been targeted by jihadists (particularly JNIM) who are growing in influence in the Sahel (see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*).

Political and legal landscape

According to the [Constitution of 2012](#), Burkina Faso is a secular state and guarantees the right of individuals to choose, practice and change their religion at will. The laws allow all organizations, religious or otherwise to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Internal Security. The current Constitution was first approved in 1991 and has been amended multiple times since then. The last amendment in 2012 established a semi-presidential system. The president is elected every fifth year and selects the prime minister with the approval of the parliament. The country's legislature is a bicameral body with the National Assembly as the lower house and the Senate as the upper house. The national assembly consists of 111 elected members.

The country made significant progress towards democracy after the transfer of power in 2015. Political freedom and the situation of human rights also greatly improved. A general election was held in Burkina Faso in November 2015, the first national elections since the uprising and [departure](#) of President Blaise Compaoré who had ruled Burkina Faso for 27 years (The Guardian, 1 November 2014). Fourteen different political parties held National Assembly seats in the 2015 election. The country's constitutional court approved a law preventing anyone associated with the previous regime to run for office. President Kaboré won the [presidential election in November 2020](#) with an outright majority (Vanguard, 26 November 2020). Despite increased Islamic militant activity, nationwide elections proved possible.

Large parts of the country remain contested between jihadist groups, ethnic militias and security forces. [In July 2021](#), due to Islamic militants creating enormous challenges to the country, the president reshuffled his cabinet and assumed the role of defense minister in addition to the presidency (Reuters, 1 July 2021). On 23 February 2022, Reuters reported that the ruling junta that came to power in a coup on 24 January 2022 was considering a 30-month transitional period until new elections could take place. However, the October 2022 coup brought a new military leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore, to the fore and it became unclear whether this 30-month transitional period would be respected. In May 2024, the military government announced that it will extend its rule for another five years. When

Captain Ibrahim Traoré seized power in September 2022, he had originally pledged to restore the civilian government by 1 July 2024.

According to [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW 2024, Burkina Faso country chapter), [Amnesty International](#) (AI, Burkina Faso 2023) and the [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG, Watch List 2023 - Spring update, 12 May 2023), Burkina Faso's human rights situation has severely deteriorated since 2022 and continued to worsen in 2023. The armed groups, reportedly controlling about 40 percent of the country, intensified their attacks on civilians and military targets, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. As a result, internal displacement reached a staggering figure of around 2 million people, approximately 10 percent of the population, forced to flee their homes since 2016 due to the escalating violence (see below: *Social and cultural landscape*). In response to the escalating situation, international organizations, including the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union, France, the United Nations and USA expressed condemnation of both the two recent coups and the abuses perpetrated by the jihadist groups. However, there was a noted reluctance to denounce or push for investigations into allegations of abuse by the armed forces and pro-government militias. In January 2024, Burkina Faso, along with Mali and Niger, announced their withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This decision was made by the military juntas governing these countries. The three countries have formed the “Alliance of Sahel States” which aims to address security challenges, but the effectiveness of this new alliance remains uncertain.

With a background of political instability and mounting evidence of human rights violations, the prospects for justice has remained bleak as rule-of-law institutions in Burkina Faso continued to face challenges. While the government took some measures to address social media posts inciting violence against minority groups and reduce the number of suspects in pre-trial detention, there was little progress in holding accountable those responsible for past abuses.

Gender perspective

In relation to gender, by law both men and women have equal rights to enter marriage and must freely consent to the union (Constitution, Article 23). The legal framework does not cover customary or religious marriages however. This contributes to Burkina Faso having one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with 52% of girls marrying before 18 ([Girls Not Brides Burkina Faso](#), accessed 5 August 2024). By law, the minimum age for marriage is 17 for girls, although they can marry at 15 if authorized by civil courts. This legislative loophole and widespread societal acceptance of child marriage can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution, particularly against female converts. [Legislation](#) introduced in 2015 was viewed as a positive step towards securing support and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence (Refworld, 6 September 2015), but effective implementation has been slow and few care centers have been established.

Religious landscape

Burkina Faso: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	6,169,000	25.9
Muslim	13,362,000	56.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	4,158,000	17.4
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	5,000	0.0
Atheist	870	0.0
Agnostic	145,000	0.6
Other	1,000	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Burkina Faso is a Muslim majority country in the Sahel region of Africa. Muslims are dominant in the northern and eastern parts of the country, whereas the Christian communities are concentrated in the central and southern parts of the country. Followers of indigenous traditional African religions dominate the southern part of the country. Historically, the country has experienced a harmonious coexistence among the different religious groups.

The 2012 Constitution [guarantees](#) freedom of religion and the principle of separation of church and state. The pre-coup government required all religious groups to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization to operate in the country. There has been no state-funding of religious schools, which thus operate independently. However, in past years, there have been anti-Christian campaigns and sentiment propagated by Islamic militants.

According to WCD 2024 estimates, 17.4% of the population follow traditional African religions. Many Christians and Muslims in the country also mix their faiths with various forms of traditional beliefs and practices. For instance, some Christians continue to embrace polygamy.

Economic landscape

According to the [World Bank Burkina Faso overview](#) (last updated 27 March 2024):

- **GDP growth:** " GDP growth rebounded slightly in 2023 to 3.2% (corresponding to GDP per capita growth of 0.6%) but the security crisis continued to weigh on the economy. With a successful agricultural season, inflation trended down in the first half of 2023 and turned negative from May to October 2023. Over the year, average inflation was 0.7%."
- **Inflation:** "Inflation surged to a record high of 14.1% in 2022 but fell to 0.7% in 2023 as local product prices declined."
- **Fiscal deficit:** "The country started fiscal consolidation in 2023 with the deficit falling to 6.4 percent of GDP, while public debt is estimated to have crossed the 60 percent of GDP mark.."
- **Projections for 2024:** "If the security situation does not deteriorate further, growth could slowly pick up and average 4 percent (1.5 percent per capita) over 2024-26, driven by recovering mining and agricultural production and service sector growth. ... While inflation has come down dramatically and is expected to remain below 3 percent over the medium-term, growth, particularly in agriculture, is expected to be too weak for substantial poverty reduction."

Overall, Burkina Faso is one of the least developed countries in the world. Nearly 80% of the people practice subsistence farming for their survival. Cotton remains the leading export followed by gold. Rises in gold prices have increased the country's export income. Despite the progress made in the past two decades, the country still faces many development challenges, particularly in terms of health and education. It ranks 144th among 157 countries in World Bank's Human Capital Index and about 40.1% of the population still lives below the national poverty line. Burkina Faso remains vulnerable to climatic shocks related to changes in rainfall patterns and to fluctuations in the prices of its export commodities on world markets. Its economic and social development will depend on political stability in the country and the sub-region, its openness to international trade and export diversification.

Gender perspective

Within this fragile context, women are particularly economically vulnerable due to low education rates and limited employment opportunities. The female labor force participation rate stands at 58.3%, compared to 74.8% for men ([UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso](#), updates as of 13 March 2024). Making it additionally challenging for women to attain financial independence, customary and religious practices deny women their due inheritance, despite equal rights being enshrined in law.

Social and cultural landscape

According to [UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso](#) (updates as of 13 March 2024) and [World Factbook Burkina Faso](#) (accessed 5 August 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Mossi 52%, Fulani 8.4%, Gurma 7%, Bobo 4.9%, Gurunsi 4.6 %, Senufo 4.5 %, Bissa 3.7%, Lobi 2.4 %, Dagara 2.4%, Tuareg/Bella 1.9%, other 7.2% (2010 est.)
- **Main languages:** French is the official language and other native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population
- **Urbanization:** About 32.5% of the total population make up the Urban population. (2023 est) The rate of urbanization is 4.75% annual rate of change (2020-2025 est.)
- **Population growth rate:** 2.58% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 18.7 years (2024 estimate)
- **Life expectancy:** 64.2 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 46%

- **Expected years of schooling:** 9 years for both male and female
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 62.3%
- **Employment in agriculture:** 25.2% of total employment
- **Employment in services sector:** 41.1% of total employment
- **Unemployment:** 6.3% of labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 7.7% (2021 estimate)

According to the [UNHCR Factsheet](#) (published 25 March 2024):

Refugees/IDPs: "The humanitarian situation is concerning. As of 29 February 2024, Burkina Faso has welcomed 39,174 refugees and asylum seekers in search of international protection in the country. Additionally, as of the same date, 2,062,534 persons are internally displaced."

According to [UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso](#) (updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **Human Development Index:** Burkina Faso is ranked 185 out of 193 countries and territories with the value of 0.438.
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.881
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII):** 0.577. This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. Providing an indication of how it performs, Burkina Faso ranks 146th out of 166 countries in 2022.

Poverty, displacement and food insecurity

In general, Burkina Faso is facing a multifaceted crisis driven by a complex interplay of factors such as jihadist insurgency, widespread poverty, ineffective governance, and a lack of rule of law. The presence of jihadist groups in the country has led to escalating violence and insecurity, resulting in numerous civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure. This has disrupted social cohesion, causing fear and trauma among communities and hindering economic activities. The violence and instability have also severely impacted education and healthcare systems, limiting access to basic services and further exacerbating poverty and social inequalities.

The high levels of poverty in Burkina Faso have left a significant portion of the population vulnerable to extremist ideologies and recruitment by jihadist groups, as they may offer alternative means of survival and a sense of belonging. This cycle of poverty and radicalization perpetuates the violence and instability in the country, creating a vicious circle that hinders social progress and economic development.

Ineffective governance and corruption have also contributed to the crisis, as they weaken state institutions and erode public trust in the government's ability to address the root causes of the conflict and implement effective policies. The lack of rule of law allows jihadist groups to operate with impunity, further undermining security and hindering economic growth and foreign investment.

The combined impact of these factors has led to a dire humanitarian situation, with millions of people facing food insecurity, displacement, and limited access to essential services. The ongoing conflict and instability have disrupted agriculture, trade, and investment, stifling economic growth and development prospects for the population. As reported by the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) in March 2023:

- "Burkina Faso home to almost half of closed schools in Central and West Africa. ... Over a million children in Burkina Faso are currently affected by school closures with 6,134 academic institutions shut as of February 2023, an increase of over 40 per cent since the end of the last school year. Nearly one out of four schools country-wide are now out of service due to rampant insecurity and violence, which has forced close to two million people into displacement."

As reported by the US State Department ([IRFR 2023 Burkina Faso](#)):

- "According to the Ministry of Education, 6,149 schools were closed as of May 2023 due to militant attacks, depriving more than one million students of access to education. The Boucle du Mouhoun, Sahel, and East Regions, where more than 1,000 schools were closed, were most affected. In response, the ministry re-opened more than 500 schools during the year and relocated approximately 400 schools as of May."

Christian minorities in Burkina Faso bear a disproportionate brunt of the ongoing crisis, as they are often targeted by militant groups due to their religious identity.

Gender perspective

Domestic violence, child marriage and the practice of Female Genital Mutation remains prevalent. Several government policies have been introduced to combat child marriage, but the widespread societal acceptance of this practice makes it challenging to combat. According to a survey in 2020, around half of women aged 15–24 thought that it was normal for a man to beat his wife in certain circumstances ([Equipop, July 2020, p.5](#)). Domestic violence reportedly rose due to the additional pressures and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic ([Equipop, July 2020, p.8](#)). Urban settings are recognized as more favorable environments for women's empowerment compared to rural settings, although political and economic opportunities have remained limited countrywide ([OECD Maps and Facts, January 2018](#)).

Technological landscape

According to [Datareportal Digital 2024: Burkina Faso](#) (21 February 2024) / survey date: January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 19.9% penetration
- **Social media usage:** 12.1% of the total population
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 115.1% of the total population

Digital Infrastructure and challenges: Burkina Faso faces challenges such as limited infrastructure in rural areas and economic constraints that impact broader internet access.

According to [BuddeComm research](#) (publication date: July 2024):

- Burkina Faso has improved its telecom infrastructure with the completion of the first phase of the national fiber backbone, linking the capital to 145 municipalities. The project has enhanced connectivity, enabling initiatives like telemedicine to address healthcare service gaps.

- Despite infrastructure gains, security issues and the global pandemic have disrupted telecom operations. Militant activities threaten network stability, while the pandemic has affected device production and infrastructure maintenance. Economic constraints have pressured consumer spending, but telecom services remain crucial for communication and remote work.

Christians are among the most educated in the country and tend to have better access to the latest advances in technology in government use.

Security situation

In the context of the ongoing war against Islamic insurgents, Christians in the country find themselves a primary target for attack. Although there had been significant progress in democracy and human rights after Kaboré came to office, his presidency was overshadowed by the numerous attacks carried out by Islamic militants operating in the region. Militant Islamic groups operating in the country include: *Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram. These groups have been responsible for waves of attacks and are gaining ground, especially following the political instability in neighboring Mali. Frustration over the continuing insecurity was one of the main factors behind the military coups of January and October 2022. In January 2023, France agreed to [end its deployment](#) of around 400 troops, which is likely to considerably weaken counterterrorism operations (DW, 25 January 2023).

According to [International Crisis Group](#) (24 February 2020), in 2019 Burkina Faso suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country. In April 2019, Protestant worshippers and a pastor were killed as Islamic militants launched what is regarded as the country's [first attack on a church](#) since the sectarian violence erupted (Al-Jazeera, 29 April 2019). This was followed by deadly attacks on two consecutive days in May 2019 targeting Catholic Christians in two different parts of the country. These attacks forced more than half a million people to flee their homes. Since then, there have been numerous attacks on churches and Christians - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*.

As OCHA reported in its [Burkina Faso Humanitarian Snapshot](#) (as of 23 May 2024), the ongoing violence in the country has caused:

- 2.6 million IDPs 1.7 - million food insecure people
- 5,319 closed schools
- 347 health centers closed, affecting 3.6 million people.

According to [Refugees international](#) reporting on 11 February 2020:

- "Unfortunately, in its efforts to stop armed incursions, the army has increasingly begun to violate human rights, often with impunity. There are numerous accounts of Burkinabé forces indiscriminately killing civilians. In some cases, the government has initiated investigations of these abuses. However, aid workers report that violations continue and that there have been no consequences for the perpetrators."

- Further, the government also changed the national penal code to prohibit criticism of the military and block any contact with armed groups: "The new law, whose provisions on contact are too broad, has prevented human rights organizations from verifying the numerous claims of abuses committed by Burkinabé forces and forbids humanitarian organizations from negotiating with armed groups to secure access to populations in need."

In an attempt to bolster the army, the The National Assembly in Burkina Faso adopted a bill on 21 January 2020 establishing Volunteers for Homeland Defence (VDP) with the aim of dealing with the multiple acts of terrorism that have been blighting the country since 2016. Volunteer groups receive 14 days of training and are then sent out on patrols and surveillance missions, equipped with light arms. These volunteers have proved to be a particular target for jihadist attack, with more than 100 being [killed in combat](#) within the year 2020 alone (The Defense Post, 26 November 2020). Allegations of human rights abuses by volunteers have also been "rampant - from stealing cattle to attacking those accused of collaborating with the jihadist militants". This law was supposed to bring security and stability; however, the volunteers are [both perpetrators and victims](#) of violence, and civilians are trapped between attacks from all sides (The New Humanitarian, 12 October 2020).

The situation has remained challenging in the years 2022 - 2024. The jihadist activities in the country have forced the government to launch [numerous operations](#) and increase the efforts of the security forces against groups such as JNIM (Critical Threats, 7 June 2023). Burkinabe forces significantly stepped up their operations near the southern border of Burkina Faso in May 2023 to disrupt the support zones of JNIM. After the government declared a "[General Mobilization](#)" in April 2023 (France24, 14 April 2023), 12 operations were conducted by Burkinabe security forces in the Centre-Est region during May 2023 alone, surpassing the monthly average observed in the preceding months. The escalation in the frequency of security operations follows a positive trend that began in the last quarter of 2022 when the security forces began to intensify their efforts.

Almost 2,000 people were killed in terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso from 258 incidents, accounting for nearly a quarter of all terrorist deaths globally. The impact of terrorism in Burkina Faso has increased every year since 2014, with terrorism also surging in neighboring countries, Mali and Niger. In Burkina Faso in 2023, deaths from terrorism were up 68 per cent, even though attacks decreased by 17 per cent. Civilians were the most targeted group for the fifth consecutive year, accounting for 1,132 deaths or over 59 per cent of all terror-related deaths in the country. This is an increase of more than 56 per cent when compared to 2022, when 725 civilians were killed. ([Global Terrorism Index 2024](#))

According to the [US State Department \(IRFR 2023 Burkina Faso\)](#):

- "Domestic and transnational terrorist groups conducted increased attacks and inflicted more violence against civilians than in 2022, including numerous targeted killings based on religious identity, according to NGOs. They stated that the country experienced 67 percent of the militant Islamist-related fatalities in the Sahel region (8,800 deaths in Burkina Faso alone) in 2023. This was more than double the number of deaths in the country recorded in 2022, according to the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). Militant Islamist groups, primarily Ansaroul Islam and other groups associated with Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), laid siege to at least 36 towns and took control of more than half the country's territory. Terrorist groups, armed

insurgents, and militant jihadists killed imams, other clergy, and worshippers while attacking and destroying mosques, churches, and animists' places of worship."

According to ICG's [Crisis Watch - March alerts and February trends 2023](#):

- **Sahel region's Oudalan province:** Alleged Islamic State in the Sahel (IS-Sahel) ambushed military convoy between Oursi and Déou localities on 17 February 2023. The attack resulted in at least 51 and possibly up to 80 soldiers dead. IS-Sahel attacked a military detachment camp in Tin Akoff town on 20 February 2023 in the same province, taking control of the town. Dozens of soldiers, volunteers fighting alongside security forces (VDPs), and civilians were killed during the attack.
- **Sahel region's Seno province:** IS-Sahel attacked Bani town on 4 February 2023, resulting in the deaths of 22 civilians and three police officers.
- **Centre-North region's Namentenga province:** Alleged al-Qaeda-affiliated JNIM fighters killed seven police officers and one VDP in Boala village on 7 February 2023.
- **East region's Tapoa province:** Unidentified jihadists killed an as yet unknown number of individuals in Partiaga town on 26 February 2023.

According to ICG's [Crisis Watch – September 2023 alerts to May 2024 trends](#)

- **North Region's Yatenga province:** JNIM fighters attacked a military position in Koumbri town, killing at least 17 soldiers and 36 civilian auxiliaries on 4 September 2023. On 2 October 2023, suspected JNIM militants killed around ten civilians in Pogoro-Silmimossi village, Yatenga province, and next day killed unknown number of VDPs and lost ten of their own fighters in an attack on Tibou village, Loroum province. Suspected army and VDPs allegedly attacked three villages with provisional toll of around 170 people killed on 25 February 2024.
- **North region's Tapoa province:** JNIM also clashed with government forces and VDPs in Tapoa-Barrage village leading to deaths of three JNIM militants, two soldiers and eighteen civilians on 5 May 2024
- **North Region:** JNIM militants launched an attack on Séguénéma town that killed 30 civilians
- **Sahel Region:** JNIM attacked gendarmerie post in Gorgadji town. Security forces allegedly repelled the attack with a dozen assailants killed on 24 December 2023
- **Sahel region's Oudalan province:** The army reportedly killed a prominent leader of Islamic State Sahel Province, Harouna Oulel, near Oueldi village on 21 January 2024. An attack on a Catholic church in Essakane village, Oudalan province, killed at least 15 people.
- **Sahel, Centre-East and Centre-North Region:** The Burkinabe government launched a series of airstrikes resulting in at least 30 JNIM fighters being killed between 11 to 14 September 2023.

Major jihadist attack on 24 August 2024

As reported by [Al-Jazeera on 26 August 2024](#): "Around 200 people have been killed and 140 injured in the Burkinabe town of Barsalogo, the latest in a long line of deadly attacks by an al-Qaeda-linked armed group, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). ... Barsalogo lies near the town of Kaya, a strategic point in north-central Burkina Faso that houses the last standing military force between JNIM fighters and the capital, Ouagadougou. Several soldiers are missing after the attack, which was carried out as JNIM continues to advance and seize swaths of territory in the troubled West African country."

Gender perspective

Christians in the country suffer from the lack of security and many have been targeted and killed. Christian women and girls risk being abducted, raped and forcibly married. Instances of sexual assault have reportedly increased as insurgency groups exploited the insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to expand control. Christian boys on the other hand are often recruited into militant forces, which also serves to weaken the Christian church. In light of such pressure, many Christians are forced to flee their homes altogether.

Christian origins

Throughout recent centuries, the Sahel region has been dominated by Islamic states like the empire of Mali and the Mossi kingdom. Although Muslim rulers controlled these kingdoms, most of the population kept their traditional beliefs. For example, as recently as the 19th century, most people in the Mossi kingdom were not Muslim. Christianity was introduced during the French colonial period, and most Christians today are the ancestors of followers of traditional African religion (ATR).

Christianity came to the country in 1896 with the French. The Roman Catholic White Fathers entered the country in 1900 and opened their first mission at Ouagadougou in 1901. In 1922, an indigenous Catholic order called the Black Sisters of the Immaculate Conception was formed. The Catholic Church decided to make Ouagadougou an archdiocese in 1955. (For further details, see: *Rupley L and Bangali L, Historical Dictionary of Burkina Faso, 2013, third edition p. 36ff.*)

Protestants first came to the country in the early 1920s. Missionaries from the Assemblies of God became active in Ouagadougou in 1921 and opened a Bible school in 1933. In 1923 the Christian and Missionary Alliance started working in Dioulasso. (For further details, see: *Melton J G and Baumann M, Religions of The World - 2nd edition: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia Of Beliefs And Practices, 2010, pp. 444-445.*)

From the middle of the 20th century onwards, many indigenous churches and new denominations emerged. Temple Apostolic was the first independent indigenous church congregation in the capital city. The Federation of Evangelical Churches and Missions, the country’s primary Christian cooperative association, was created in 1961 by conservative Evangelicals.

Church spectrum today

Burkina Faso: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	4,045,000	65.6
Protestant	2,049,000	33.2
Independent	97,000	1.6
Unaffiliated	8,000	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-29,500	-0.5
Total	6,169,500	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,247,000	36.4
Pentecostal-Charismatic	2,452,000	39.7

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., *World Christian Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Pentecostal-Charismatic:** Church members involved in renewal in the Holy Spirit, sometimes known collectively as "Renewalists".

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- [https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burkina Faso](https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burkina+Faso)
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.
- [Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023](#)

External Links

- Recent history: overthrow - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burkina-Faso>
- Recent history: claimed more than 2,000 lives in 2020 alone - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201126-burkina-s-kabor%C3%A9-wins-re-election-according-to-full-preliminary-results>
- Recent history: military coup - <https://issafrika.org/iss-today/what-caused-the-coup-in-burkina-faso>
- Recent history: indefinitely postponed the elections - <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5117d8kz16o>
- Political and legal landscape: Constitution of 2012, - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012?lang=en
- Political and legal landscape: departure - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/31/burkina-faso-president-blaise-compaore-ousted-says-army>
- Political and legal landscape: presidential election in November 2020 - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/11/burkina-faso-incumbent-kabore-wins-presidential-election/>
- Political and legal landscape: In July 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/burkina-faso-president-takes-defence-role-amid-security-crisis-2021-06-30/>
- Political and legal landscape: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/burkina-faso>
- Political and legal landscape: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/burkina-faso/report-burkina-faso/>
- Political and legal landscape: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/watch-list-2023-spring-update>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides Burkina Faso - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/burkina-faso/>
- Political and legal landscape: Legislation - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5d42bdfd4.html>
- Religious landscape description: guarantees - https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burkina_Faso_2012.pdf
- Economic landscape: World Bank Burkina Faso overview - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burkinafaso/overview>
- Economic landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/BFA>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/BFA>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook Burkina Faso - <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/>

- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR Factsheet - <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/unhcr-burkina-faso-fact-sheet-1-january-29-february2024>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP Human Development Report Burkina Faso - <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/BFA>
- Social and cultural landscape: Norwegian Refugee Council - <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/march/burkina-faso-home-to-almost-half-of-closed-schools-in-central-and-west-africa>
- Social and cultural landscape: IRFR 2023 Burkina Faso - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burkina-faso/>
- Social and cultural landscape: Equipop, July 2020, p.5 - <https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: Equipop, July 2020, p.8 - <https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf>
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- Technological landscape: Datareportal Digital 2024: Burkina Faso - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-burkina-faso>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm research - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Burkina-Faso-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses>
- Security situation: end its deployment - <https://www.dw.com/en/france-agrees-to-pull-troops-from-burkina-faso/a-64513392>
- Security situation: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>
- Security situation: first attack on a church - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/killed-burkina-faso-church-attack-190429103434033.html>
- Security situation: Burkina Faso Humanitarian Snapshot - <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-31-october-2023>
- Security situation: Refugees international - https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/2/11/burkina-faso-and-the-sahels-new-frontline?gclid=CjwKCAjwp-X0BRAFEiwAheRui6jatVvqnweKRqXtNwM_SCW-tUJM-dAoTtB0FFyfiK3R8hUUL7aYtRoCp7sQAvD_BwE
- Security situation: killed in combat - <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/11/26/volunteer-militia-killed-burkina-faso/>
- Security situation: both perpetrators and victims - <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2020/10/12/victims-or-villains-volunteer-fighters-burkina-faso-s-front-line>
- Security situation: numerous operations - <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/salafi-jihadi-movement-weekly-update-june-7-2023>
- Security situation: General Mobilization - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230413-general-mobilisation-declared-in-burkina-faso-after-series-of-jihadist-attacks>
- Security situation: Global Terrorism Index 2024 - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>
- Security situation: US State Department (IRFR 2023 Burkina Faso - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burkina-faso/>
- Security situation: Crisis Watch - March alerts and February trends 2023 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/march-alerts-and-february-trends-2023>
- Security situation: Crisis Watch – September 2023 alerts to May 2024 trends - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/march-alerts-and-february-trends-2023>
- Security situation: Al-Jazeera on 26 August 2024 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/26/nearly-200-people-dead-whats-behind-armed-attacks-in-burkina-faso>
- Further useful reports: Africa - Recent upsurge in military coups - September 2023 - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups>.