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By Louisa Brooke-Holland

Burkina Faso: Second coup of 2022

For the second time this year, military officers have seized power in the West African state of Burkina Faso. Captain Ibrahim Traoré says he acted because his predecessor, who ousted his democratically elected predecessor in January, failed to address a growing Islamist insurgency.

This paper discusses recent developments in Burkina Faso.

Has Burkina Faso experienced coups before?

A former French colony (until 1960), Burkina Faso has a [long history of military rule and coups](#).¹ Former President Blaise Compaoré, who took power in 1983, was ousted in a popular uprising in 2014 after attempting to amend the constitution to extend his rule.

Elections were held in 2015 and in 2020, when President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was re-elected in polls that [the NGO Freedom House considered to be fair but marred by ongoing insecurity](#).²

First coup of 2022

On 24 January 2022 the military overthrew Kaboré and seized power. Coup leader Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba became

¹ [Burkina Faso timeline](#), BBC News, 5 March 2018

² [Freedom in the World 2021](#), Freedom House, accessed 7 October 2022

head of the military-led Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) that replaced the Government.

The military blamed [Kaboré's failure to halt an insurgency](#) by jihadist groups in the north.³

[The UK Government condemned the coup](#) and called for an immediate return to democratic civilian and constitutional rule.⁴

However, [Kaboré's ousting was not unexpected](#), according to Beverly Ochieng of BBC Monitoring, discontent among security forces had been growing over the lack of support⁵. She notes this was exacerbated further by reports that security forces at a military base in Inata had [run out of food](#) in the weeks before they were attacked by an armed group in November 2021. Forty-nine military police officers and four civilians were killed in the attack.⁶

A second coup in September

On 30 September 2022, army Captain Ibrahim Traoré and fellow officers forcefully removed Damiba from office. [The MPSR subsequently appointed Traoré as President](#) and head of the armed forces.⁷

Ouézen Louis Oulon, a local journalist, reported ["widespread support" for Traoré](#).⁸ He said because the MPSR remains in charge, [it is more of a "palace revolution"](#) than a military coup, and that Burkinabès simply want security and for the state to regain territory under the control of jihadist groups.

On 14 October a national forum of about 300 delegates named Traoré as interim president until elections are held in July 2024.⁹

What reasons has Traoré given for overthrowing Damiba?

In ousting Damiba, Traoré gave the same reason as his predecessor: the failure to address the Islamist insurgency. In a written statement, Traoré

³ [Burkina Faso army captain announces overthrow of military government](#), France 24, 30 September 2022

⁴ [PQ HL5998 \[Burkina Faso: Politics and Government\], 15 February 2022](#)

⁵ [Burkina Faso coup: Why have soldiers overthrown President Kabore?](#), BBC News, 25 January 2022

⁶ [Burkina Faso: Death toll in security post attack jumps to 53](#), Al Jazeera, 17 November 2021

⁷ [Ibrahim Traoré appointed President of Burkina Faso](#), Africa News, 6 October 2022

⁸ [BBC Africa Daily](#), 4 October 2022

⁹ [Burkina Faso coup leader Ibrahim Traore named transitional president](#), France 24, 15 October 2022

said that, faced with a deteriorating situation, [they had tried to persuade Damiba to refocus the transition on the security question](#). The statement went on to say: “Damiba's actions gradually convinced us that his ambitions were diverting away from what we set out to do. We decided this day to remove Damiba.”¹⁰

How is violence spreading?

UNHCR estimates 1.9 million people are internally displaced.

In recent years, Burkina Faso has replaced Mali as the [epicentre of Islamist violence in the Sahel](#), according to Heni Nsaibia, an analyst for ACLED (the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, an NGO that collates data on political violence worldwide).¹¹ ACLED said in June that 2022 was on track to be the “[deadliest year](#)” for Burkina Faso for more than a decade.¹²

There have been devastating attacks on civilians in recent years. [More than 130 people were killed by armed militants](#) in the northern town of Solhan in June 2021, believed to be the [deadliest attack for years](#).¹³ An attack on Seytenga in June 2022 prompted almost 16,000 people to leave their homes. UNHCR says Burkina’s displacement crisis is “[one of the world’s fastest growing](#)” with an estimated 1.9 million people internally displaced.¹⁴

The Government has also struggled to assert authority, and [controls only 60% of the country](#), according to Mahamadou Issoufou, a former president of Niger and ECOWAS’ mediator to Burkina.¹⁵ Jihadist groups have blockaded northern towns, and just before the latest coup, an Al-Qaeda affiliated group claimed responsibility for an [attack on a supply convoy near Gaskindé](#) that resulted in the deaths of 27 soldiers and 10 civilians.¹⁶ The trucks were heading for Djibo, which has reportedly been [under an effective blockade by jiha.dist groups](#) for months.¹⁷

¹⁰ [Burkina Faso soldiers announce overthrow of military government](#), Reuters, 1 October 2022

¹¹ [How has Burkina Faso changed since the ‘insurrection’?](#), AL Jazeera, 21 November 2020

¹² [The Sahel: Mid-year update](#), ACLED, accessed 7 October 2022

¹³ [Thousands flee after massacre in northern Burkina Faso](#), Al Jazeera, 8 June 2021

¹⁴ [UNHCR calls for urgent support to assist almost 16,000 newly displaced in Burkina Faso who fled massacre](#), UNHCR, 17 June 2022

¹⁵ [State controls just 60% of Burkina Faso: ECOWAS mediator](#), Al Jazeera, 18 June 2022

¹⁶ [Burkina Faso: 37 dead in September attack on Gaskinde – army](#), Africa News, 5 October 2022

¹⁷ [Burkina Faso: Northern blockade cuts food supply to thousands of people](#), Africa News, 28 May 2022

What has been the reaction to the coup?

ECOWAS, the regional grouping of West African countries, condemned “in the strongest terms” the seizure of power and reaffirmed its “[unreserved condemnation of any seizure or retention of power by unconstitutional means](#).”¹⁸

The African Union chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, condemned the “[unconstitutional change of government](#)”. He called on the military to refrain from any acts of violence to the civilian population, and for strict compliance with the electoral timetable for the restoration of constitutional order by 1 July 2024.¹⁹

Responding on behalf of the EU’s High Representative and Vice-President, Josep Borrell, the Commissioner for International Partnerships, [Jutta Urpilainen described the coup as “particularly regrettable”](#).²⁰ The EU had been supporting ECOWAS’ mediation efforts with the Damiba-led authorities.

Lyn Brown, the Shadow Minister for Africa, has tabled a written question asking for the UK Government’s assessment of the implications of the coup: [PQ59570](#).

Is the planned transition to civilian rule in 2024 in doubt?

In July 2022, the Damiba-led transitional authorities [reportedly agreed with ECOWAS](#) a two-year timeline for a return to civilian rule.²¹

However, Traoré’s seizure of power may throw that timeframe in doubt. In its initial response to the coup, ECOWAS said it demanded “the scrupulous respect of the timetable already agreed upon with the Transitional Authorities for a rapid return to constitutional order by 1 July 2024.”²²

¹⁸ [Communiqué of The ECOWAS Commission on The Socio-Political Situation in Burkina Faso](#), ECOWAS, 1 October 2022

¹⁹ [The Chairperson of the African Union Commission unequivocally condemns the second takeover of power by force in Burkina Faso](#), African Union, 30 September 2022

²⁰ [Burkina Faso: Remarks on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP debate following the coup de force](#), EU, 4 October 2022

²¹ [FM says two-year civilian rule timeline Burkina Faso’s proposal](#), Africa News, 7 July 2022

²² [Communiqué of The ECOWAS Commission on The Socio-Political Situation in Burkina Faso](#), ECOWAS, 1 October 2022

Moussa Faki Mahamat similarly called for [strict compliance with the previously agreed](#) timetable for the transition to end by July 2024.²³

Their comments are partly a reflection of events in neighbouring Mali, which has also experienced two military-led coups since 2020. ECOWAS has had lengthy negotiations with the transitional authorities over the duration of the transition.

What's the potential for further unrest?

Ebenezer Obadare, of the Council on Foreign Relations think tank, worries this won't be the last coup, and questions whether Burkina will survive as a country, saying "[all the indices point to a country that is gradually coming apart and arguably shedding some of the key attributes of statehood.](#)"²⁴

Obadare questions whether the country is governable without substantial external financial and military support.

Where that support comes from is another question. The BBC's Natasha Booty says [Russia and France are engaged in a battle for influence](#) in several former French colonies in West and Central Africa.²⁵ Rinaldo Depagne, the West Africa project director at the International Crisis Group, told Foreign Policy magazine that "[Russia is certainly closer to now cut a deal with Burkina than ever, certainly than they were with Damiba.](#)"²⁶

A more detailed discussion of insecurity and the drivers of conflict in the Sahel, focusing on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, can be found in Library paper [UK military in the Sahel: Developments in 2022](#).

²³ [The Chairperson of the African Union Commission unequivocally condemns the second takeover of power by force in Burkina Faso](#), African Union, 30 September 2022

²⁴ [A country in freefall](#), Council on Foreign Relations, 3 October 2022

²⁵ [Burkina Faso coup: ousted military ruler Damiba in Togo](#), BBC News, accessed 7 October 2022

²⁶ [Burkina Faso's Junta looks to Russia for support](#), Foreign Policy, 5 October 2022

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