

Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast: An Overview of 2020 Elections

Burkina Faso, Ghana, Costa d'Avorio: una panoramica sulle elezioni 2020

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Abstract

This paper analyzes and compares three key elections selected among the ones held in 2020 in Africa, namely Ghana, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. The three cases were chosen according to demographic and geographical relevance and the regularity of elections. The Ghana elections confirmed a trend towards democracy and party consolidation, characterized by a two-party system. The trend of incumbent victory is also confirmed, although there is a decline in vote numbers. Both the two other cases under scrutiny shared problems of consolidation. In the case of Burkina, this was mainly due to the recent return to multipartism after the demise of Compaoré's regime. Notwithstanding this, regular elections were held under the threat of terrorism in some regions. Ivory Coast confirms the weaknesses of the democratic process due mainly to the authoritarian inclinations of the power holders. These cases were included because they were considered more interesting and less problematic than those excluded. They too offer interesting hints on regime transition and the problems of consolidation that still affect Africa.

Questo articolo analizza e compara tre elezioni chiave selezionate tra le molte tenutesi in Africa nel 2020, Ghana, Burkina Faso e Costa d'Avorio. I casi sono stati selezionati in base alla loro rilevanza demografica/geografica e al carattere regolare delle elezioni. Le elezioni in Ghana confermano il consolidamento democratico del paese e un sistema bi-partitico. Si conferma inoltre la tendenza alla vittoria del candidato presidente in carica e del suo partito, anche se con percentuali declinanti. Gli altri due casi esaminati presentano dei problemi di consolidamento. Nel caso del Burkina Faso, per il solo fatto che queste elezioni erano le seconde dalla caduta del regime autoritario di Compaoré. Tuttavia l'elezione si è svolta in un contesto di regolarità, nonostante la minaccia terroristica in alcune regioni. La Costa d'Avorio conferma la debolezza del suo processo democratico, condizionato dalle forti tentazioni autoritarie da parte di chi detiene il potere. Questi casi sono stati inclusi per il solo fatto che altri sono stati giudicati meno interessanti o più problematici. Offrono comunque degli spunti interessanti sulle transizioni e sui problemi del consolidamento democratico che ancora si registrano in Africa.

Keywords

Africa, Elections, Cleavages, Party-System, Democratization
Africa, elezioni, fratture, Sistema partitico, democratizzazione

Introduction

In our previous observatory on African elections (Battera 2020), three cases were selected, South Africa (a consolidated democracy), Tunisia and Nigeria (two countries still struggling to consolidate their democracies). Among the three West African countries here selected, only Ghana can be considered a consolidated democracy structured around a stable two-party system, while the other two are still going through their consolidation, although they present different problems. Burkina Faso is a young African democracy and if its commitment to democracy is maintained, as recent elections demonstrate, there is hope that it will soon be possible to count it among the African stable democracies. Ivory Coast, on the contrary, has been copying this basic democratization since the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, and although the peaceful attitude of the Ivorian people raises many expectations, we cannot foresee the final outcome of this process. Other potential cases for this observatory had to be rejected, because many scheduled elections in Africa have been postponed. Moreover, there was a military coup in Mali, the elections were boycotted by the opposition in Guinea, there were then cases of little electoral relevance (Seychelles), and of flawed (Tanzania) or manipulated elections (Egypt). Notwithstanding their many weaknesses, the three cases chosen retain their comparative interest, both synchronically and diachronically (with previous elections). We can rank them therefore according to their democratic standards so as to offer a spectrum of elections this year.

General elections were held in Ghana on 7th December. Electors were called to elect both a President of the Republic and a National Assembly (NA). These were the eighth elections since the re-establishment of multi-party politics in 1992 and the sixth democratic elections since government change in 2000 when the National Democratic Congress (NDC), the party founded by the former autocrat Jerry Rawlings was ousted by the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Since then the two main parties have alternated in power, generally every two electoral cycles, with enough strength to govern alone¹. The perfect bi-party system is such that it can reach the point where the other parties are reduced to irrelevance. The last elections confirmed this format, and also confirmed the incumbents, although with declining numbers.

Great expectations surrounded the Ivorian elections. Re-established as a multi-party system after one low intensity civil conflict and a military coup which marked the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, Ivory Coast was plunged again into a short civil conflict after the 2010 presidential elections. This was resolved, thanks to international intervention. The elected President, Alassane Ouattara, was finally

¹ This particularity of the Ghanaian political system is widely discussed and analyzed by Lindberg.

sworn in in 2011, and his rival – Gbagbo – was arrested. Ouattara was re-elected in 2015 by a big coalition – *Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix*, RHDP – with an overwhelming majority (83.7%) and expected to leave in 2020. However, when his replacement unexpectedly passed away, Ouattara interpreted the constitution and decided to run again against the will of the opposition. A presidential election was held on 31st October (parliamentary elections are expected in 2021). Ouattara ran almost unopposed and obtained a landslide victory. Generally, elections of this kind are of little interest unless they confirm important cleavages, in this case ethno-regional. This is the case here, and will be analyzed by using voters turn out (VTO) rather than existing votes.

Burkina held general elections for the second time on 22nd November 2020. Both a President and a NA were elected with very few surprises for the incumbent President and his party. Incumbents were confirmed, but the party composition of the opposition changed. As in the 2019 Nigerian elections, these also alarmed observers because of risks of terrorism acts in some areas, notably in the North and the East. As we will see, the impact, as in Nigeria, has been less than expected. It is however early to assess the arrangement of the Burkina party system, whether it is a dominant, two- or multi-party system, because only two electoral cycles are not enough. This will depend on the ability of opposition parties to penetrate rural areas, as the incumbent party has succeeded in doing in the last few years. Avoiding one-party dominance will be a decisive test on the quality of the transition in Burkina in the near future.

Electoral participation (VTO) in the three cases was quite different. There were far greater numbers in the case of Ghana, well above its usual trends, but very low in the other two cases. However, as the Ivorian elections were boycotted by the main opposition parties, the low levels here were much more to be expected than in Burkina (see Tab. 1).

TABLE 1 – Trends (%) in Voter Turnout (VTO)¹ in the selected countries (since the introduction of multipartism)

	I election	II election	III election	IV election	V election	VI election	average
Ghana	62 (2000)	85 (2004)	69 (2008)	79 (2012)	69 (2016)	79 (2020)	74
Ivory Coast	84 (2010)	53 (2015)	54 (2020)				64
Burkina Faso	60 (2015)	51 (2020)					55

¹ Presidential elections first round data (first elections considered in Ghana: 2000)

The Democratic Trailblazer: Ghana and the two-party system

Ghana is not the only two-party system in Africa. Nigeria and Zambia are possibly going to achieve the same condition, but Ghana has long been alone in a continent characterized by flawed legislatures or unmovable parties in power. There are no established reasons for this, from its transition to multiparty politics in 1992, to the 2000 general elections, the party system has become firmly founded on two main parties which alternate in power.

In Ghana, elections are held every four years. Since 2000, six electoral cycles have been held and elections have been regular, free and with good standards of fairness. Preliminary statements by the EU have pointed this time to a well-conducted process but also to a certain misuse of state resources in favor of incumbents, a situation which is widespread in Africa. However, as elsewhere, it is also common that incumbents can lose elections in spite of the advantages they enjoy. These elections are no exception, as we will see by analyzing the NA vote.

Elections are held both for a President, who is also the Head of Government and a Parliament (NA). Usually the main opposition party does recognize the result, however when differences are very narrow, the defeated party files an appeal to the Supreme Court. VTO is generally high if compared to a continental and regional scale (see Tab. 1). The electoral system is a single-member districts system (commonly referred to as first-past-the-post; FPTP) for the NA. A two-round system is in force in the event that presidential candidates win a simple majority. This condition occurred only twice in 2000 when John Kufuor (NPP) defeated John Atta-Mills (NDC) and in 2008 when John Atta-Mills defeated the current president, Nana Akufo-Addo (NPP). The latter finally became president in 2016 defeating Mahama (NDC), who won in 2012 against the same Akufo-Addo. Notice that, Mahama was still the opponent of Akufo-Addo this time (2020), which confirmed the incumbent with a difference of half a million votes (51.3% vs. 47.4). Since candidates are selected through primaries, we can conclude that a problem of change of the political leadership in the two parties does exist. There is however, little effect on the quality of participation, which is generous.

The two parties have different ideological references and in the 2000s have developed divergent agendas and electoral manifestos. The NPP looks back to the Busia-Danquah liberal tradition, while the NDC, which was founded by Jerry Rawlings, stays at the center-left of the political spectrum. In so doing the latter has inherited part of the constituencies of the Nkrumahist tradition, while true Nkrumahist parties today are irrelevant. Notwithstanding this, a certain ethno-regional anchoring is evident for both. Since its foundation in 1992, the NPP has always won in the Ashanti region, home of the same ethnic group, in the same region where the predecessors NLM (National

Liberation Movement) also won most of the seats in 1956, as the PP (Progress Party) did in the 1969 NA election, the last multiparty elections before 1992. Symmetrically, the Volta region, now reduced, to its southern part, after the Oti ‘secession’, has always been a Nkrumahist region. Since 1992 it has plebiscited the NDC with overwhelming majorities (an average of 71.7% in the NA elections). Ethno-regional cleavages however couple with developmental cleavages. The great North – Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper West and Upper East regions, what was once the Northern Territories – has developmental indexes (HDI) below the national average, and generally speaking support the NDC, with some exceptions due to local circumstances. With this regional anchorage, elections are therefore won over the ability to mobilize voters (VTO) and work on local dissatisfaction. If regional attachment is true for some voters, others’ votes regionally swing.

TABLE 2 – Regional split in Presidential elections in Ghana (II round)

REGION	YEAR						
	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Upper W.	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Upper E.	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
Northern	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
<i>North East¹</i>							NPP
<i>Savannah</i>							NDC
Volta	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC	NDC
<i>Oti</i>							NDC
<i>Brong Ahafo²</i>	NDC	NPP	NPP	NDC	NDC	NPP	NPP
<i>Bono</i>							NPP
<i>Bono East</i>							NDC
Ashanti	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
Eastern	NDC	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
Western	NDC	NPP	NPP	NDC	NDC	NPP	NPP
<i>Western N.</i>							NDC
Central	NDC	NPP	NPP	NDC	NDC	NPP	NPP
Greater Accra	NDC	NPP	NPP	NDC	NDC	NPP	NDC

¹ New regions created as a result of the 2018 referendum in *italics*. They were created by splitting regions in the upper row in the table.

² Brong Ahafo no longer exists as a result of the 2018 referendum and was split into three: Ahafo, Bono and Bono East.

With a stable two-party system, the correlation between the NA and Presidential elections is strict. For example, in 2016 (2020 data are not yet available), Akufo-Addo managed to obtain 53.7% of the national vote and his party 52.5%. However, changes in performances of the parties locally and the electoral system (FPTP) had an impact on the number of MPs elected. For example, this election produced a hung parliament, while generally in the past, more stable majorities were achieved. This will force the NPP to co-opt the only independent MP elected in the NA to nuance the veto power of the opposition². A condition that is similar to that of 2000 when the NPP failed to achieve an absolute majority in the NA.

TABLE 3 – MPs by party in Ghana (since 2000)

PARTY	YEAR					
	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
NPP	99	128	107	122	169	137
NDC	92	94	116	148	106	137
others/vacant	9	8	7	5	0	1
Total	200	230	230	275	275	275

Given the electoral system which rules NA's elections, winning at the constituency level is therefore crucial. If Ashanti and Eastern (since 2000) are regionally stable in the hands of the NPP, with some differences at the constituency level, and the Great North and the Volta in those of the NDC, much of the battle revolves around those constituencies which swing. They concentrate in great numbers in Brong Ahafo, Western, Central and Greater Accra. In particular, the latter counts for about 2.6 millions of votes out of a total of 13.5 million. However, in the Greater Accra votes are highly contested and generally split perfectly. In 2020, more than 1.2 million of votes went to the NPP and 1.3 to the NDC. The latter obtained 20 MPs against 14 for the NPP. Changes in the composition of the NA are provided in Tab. 4.

² The independent MP was elected in the Ashanti region where the NPP managed to elect 42 out of 47 candidates.

TABLE 4 – MPs by party and region in Ghana (2016-20)

REGION	2016		2020		NPP +/-	NDC +/-
	NPP	NDC	NPP	NDC		
Upper W.	5	6	3	8	2	+2
Upper E.	3	12	1	14	2	+2
Northern	9	9	9	9	=	=
North East	3	3	4	2	+1	1
Savannah	1	6	3	4	+2	2
Volta	0	18	0	17	=	-1
Oti	1	7	0	8	1	+1
Brong Ahafo	4	2	4	2	=	=
Bono	11	1	6	6	5	+5
Bono East	5	6	3	8	2	+2
Ashanti	44	3	42	4	2	+1
Eastern	27	6	25	8	2	+2
Western	13	4	9	8	4	+4
Western N.	3	6	3	6	=	=
Central	19	4	10	13	9	+9
Greater Accra	21	13	14	20	7	+7
Total	169	106	137	137	32	+31

As the table shows, the NPP lost weight everywhere with marginal exception in North East and Savannah. It is interesting to note that although Akufo-Addo (NPP) managed to obtain 75,000 votes more than his rival, Mahama, in Central, and 90,000 in Bono, his party lost respectively 9 and 5 seats, in those regions. This stresses the importance of campaigning locally as well as nationally. Nationally, 2.3 million of new electors were called to cast their votes in 2020. Since VTO increased by 10% that means that actually 2.5 million of valid votes were recorded. 1.5 million were captured by the NDC, the remainder went to the incumbent NPP. The relative decrease impacted badly on the numbers of the NPP in the NA but was not enough to impede Akufo-Addo from being sworn in again. Economic uncertainty owing to the pandemic probably had an effect although the government managed to implement a num-

ber of relief measures, included provisions for vulnerable people and small-medium enterprises, but these elections probably show that the tide is changing again, this time in favor of the NDC. Much of this however will depend on the ability of parties to rejuvenate their political personnel.

Ivory Coast: The Unending Story of Democratic Transition

Since the return to multipartism in 1990, Ivory Coast have held six Presidential elections and five Parliamentary ones. None of these has been fully free or to say the least, fair. Furthermore, the decade between 2000 and 2010 was electorally suspended. The country was divided in two, following the first civil war that broke out in 2002.

Since the death of the charismatic and all-powerful Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, politics have always been monopolized by three main leaders and their respective parties, with the exception of the short interlude of General Robert Guéï (1999-2002): Henry Konan Bédié (PDCI-RDA, *Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire – Rassemblement démocratique africain*), Laurent Gbagbo (FPI, *Front populaire ivoirien*) and Alassane Ouattara (RDR, *Rassemblement des républicains*). These ageing leaders (none of them are under 75 years) still control their respective parties, even if Laurent Gbagbo is banned from returning to Ivory Coast pending the appeal of prosecutors against the International Criminal Court dismissal of his crimes against humanity which were filed following his arrest after the violence that marked the December 2010 presidential elections. These three leaders and parties show an important geographical anchoring, which deserves to be explored.

Ivory Coast does not hold general elections, although the president is head of the government as in the neighboring Ghana. Following a 'French model', presidential election is held before parliamentary elections. Changes in the constitution have however altered the electoral timing and since 2010 parliamentary election for a NA³ is held the year following presidential election. The 2020 electoral year was therefore marked only by the presidential election.

Although the political scene turns around these three actors, the 2020 elections were marked by the absence of one or more among the main contenders. Alassane Ouattara interpreted the 2016 constitutional changes as a reset of the two term limits and decided to run for the third time. He ran practically unopposed since

³ A Senate was also created in 2016 following a referendum. The Senate has 99 indirectly elected members who represent regions, 1/3 of them appointed by the President. Given its poor democratic profile – it is today monopolized by the party in power – much will depend on its concrete powers.

the major opponents rejected the move and decided to boycott⁴. Ouattara's decision came after the unexpected death (July 2020) of his successor, Amadou Gon Coulibaly. The ascension of Gon Coulibaly had already marked the collapse of the RHDP (*Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix*) as an alliance (created in 2005) between the RDR and PDCI. The RHDP is therefore today a party dominated by the RDR cadres. Since then, the PDCI has regained its autonomy, and the two-year period before 2020 election was marked by the rapprochement between the PDCI and the FPI, even though they had actually been staunch rivals since the 1980s. To these developments must be added the invalidation by the Constitutional Council of the candidature of former Prime Minister (2007-2012), Guillaume Soro, whose new political group, the GPS (*Génération et peuples solidaires*), had a good chance to challenge the RHDP in the Northern areas. Soro had to face a corruption charge and another related to war crimes.

This was not the first election characterized by the absence of one of the three contenders. Since the death of Houphouët-Boigny this has been the rule and the three have never had the opportunity to challenge one another fairly, with the exception of the 2010 presidential election, when Bedié (PDCI) rallied behind Ouattara, during the run-off. The following table summarizes this situation. Boycotts or legal provisions that precluded the participation of Ouattara (as in the 1990s) created this abnormal condition which was at the root of the two civil conflicts/post electoral turmoil by the beginning of 2000s and in 2010.

This same condition makes comparison hard. However, it must be noted that elections if generally unfair, with the possible exception of the 2010 Presidential election, are not completely unfree, so some comparison could be attempted.

The three main parties have different ideological references. The FPI, founded in the 1980s by Laurent Gbagbo when in exile, considers itself as a leftist party (it was part of the Socialist International up to 2011). The other two belong to the same political centrist tradition marked by the thirty years long in power of Houphouët-Boigny and his PDCI-RDA, which had already acquired dominance in Ivorian politics under late French colonialism. The party split after the death of Houphouët-Boigny before the 1995 elections over the leadership struggle. Since Bédié was a Baoulé as Houphouët-Boigny, the PDCI maintained its grip on the party structures of most of the South and the East, while since Ouattara was a northerner (of the Dioula ethnic group) and, supposedly, a Muslim, the RDR, the new party, was able to control most of

⁴ Actually, Kouadio Konan Bertin (KKB) ran as independent, obtaining a meagre 2.0%. KKB was a member of the PDCI who defected from the party, when the party decided to remove him from the primary campaign.

TABLE 5 – Main parties/candidates and their participation in elections in Ivory Coast (since 1995)

PARTY	YEAR								
	1995P ¹	1995A	2000P	2000A	2010P	2011A	2015P	2016A	2020P
PDCI	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
RDR	NO	<i>NO</i> ²	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
FPI	NO	<i>NO</i> ²	YES	YES	YES	NO	<i>NO</i> ³	NO	NO

¹ Presidential elections are labelled with a “P”; NA elections with an “A”.

² Actually, the RDR and the FPI both participated in a united front, but the results were not representing the real weight of those parties because they started campaigning only few days before the election day and with incomplete lists after lifting an initial boycott.

³ During 2015 presidential election, the FPI actually split between hard-liners and soft-liners. The former decided to boycott in protest against Gbagbo’s trial. Pascal Affi N’Guessan decided to run, obtaining 9.3% nationally. This result does not correspond to the real weight of the party.

the PDCI structures in the North. The Coast and the South-West corner of the country, where Gbagbo hails from, went mostly into the hands of the FPI. This triple cleavage was confirmed during all the elections even if the three opponents, with the exception of the first round of the 2010 presidential election, never fully competed one against the other, either because one was excluded or because the other two coalesced, as happened during the second round of the same 2010 election. This regional/ethnic divide coupled with a developmental one; most of the north is still poorer than the south, and for a long time was a labor basin for the central/southern cocoa plantation system (Woods 1988: 106).

The latest election confirmed this cleavage as is shown in the following table (tab. 6) which compares the 2020 election with the first round of the 2010 election. Similar to Ghana, presidential elections are held with a two-round system in the event that none of the candidates are able to win an absolute majority in the first round. Presidents are elected for a five-year term. In order to describe the regional anchoring of parties, electoral data are disaggregated according to regions. Regions are ‘assigned’ to a party (candidate) wherever it (he) obtained an absolute majority (‘X’; strongholds) as far as 2010 election is concerned, and assigned to Ouattara or the opposition – this time made of Gbagbo plus Bédié supporters – according to VTO, as far as the 2020 election is concerned. Since the 2020 election was marked by a Ouattara solo, and a national VTO average of about 54% was recorded, Ouattara’s strongholds are marked with a ‘X’ only when more than 80% of VTO was recorded in a given region. Those regions

were VTO was below 40% were considered opposition strongholds. The regions, which numbered 19 in 2010, are now 31. These new administrative borders were generally obtained by splitting old regions, elevating some departments to regional status. Since

TABLE 6 – Parties regional anchorage in Ivory Coast (by region) 2010-2020

	RDR/RHDP (Ouattara) 2010	RDR/RHDP (Ouattara) 2020	PDCI (Bédié) 2010	FPI (Gbagbo) 2010	PDCI+FPI 2020
Agnéby				X	
<i>Agnéby-Tiassa</i>					X
Bafing	X	X			
Bas-Sassandra					
<i>Nawa</i>					X
<i>San Pedro</i>					X
Denguélé	X				
<i>Folon</i>		X			
<i>Kabadougou</i>		X			
Fromager/ <i>Goh</i>				X	X
Lacs			X		
Moyen-Cavally				X	
<i>Cavally</i>					X
M-Comoé/ <i>Indénié-D.</i>					X
N'zi-Comoé			X		
<i>Moronou</i>					X
<i>N'zi</i>					X
Savanes	X				
<i>Bagoué</i>		X			
<i>Poro</i>		X			
<i>Tchologo</i>		X			
Sud-Comoé				X	X
V. du Bandama					
<i>Béré</i>		X			
Worodougou	X	X			
Zanzan					
<i>Boukani</i>		X			

the list is long, in order to limit the comparison between strongholds it was decided to include in the table only those regions labelled as such. New ones are found in the first column in *italics* under the name of the larger region before the split.

During the first round of presidential elections in 2010, Gbagbo obtained 38.0% of the national vote. Ouattara, who obtained 32.1%, came in at second place. Bédié came third with 25.2%. The latter two converged and Ouattara was elected with 54.1% after controversy and an eruption of political violence which took a toll of 3,000 people killed after the second run. VTO dropped very slightly during the second round (81.1 against 83.7% in the first round). This was a much contested election. Around 2/3 of Bédié voters followed his re-alignment towards Ouattara while the others opted for not voting or decided to vote for Gbagbo. Most of the latter were southerner voters. If we analyze vote trends during the first round, we can notice that Ouattara's (RDR) most important strongholds were all in the North during both elections; Denguélé, where he recorded 93.4% in 2010, and Worodougou (87.1%). Bédié's strongholds lie in the Centre-West – Lacs (69.0%) and N'zi-Comoé (65.5%) – home of his Baoulé ethnic group. While Gbagbo's most important strongholds are found in Agnéby (74.1%) and Sud-Comoé (55.1%), all situated in the South⁵. There is a long history of opposition in certain southern areas towards the PDCI policies during the one-party regime, especially against uncontrolled immigration from Northern areas and from northern neighboring countries (a quarter of the entire Ivorian population is estimated to be made of immigrants, half of them of burkinabé origins), as well as between Bété and Baoulé. Immigration completely changed the country's outlook especially in the Centre-South and today about two thirds of the Muslims, who are for the most of Northern origin, are found in the South (Miran-Guyon 2017). This polarization increased during the late 1980s, due to the economic crisis, which exploded after the death of Houphouët-Boigny (1993), and was fueled by the main three parties. The issue of *Ivrité* (i.e. citizenship), which means the right of voting and access to land in mixed areas, has never been fully addressed. It became an issue of contention between the RDR on one side opposed to FPI and the PDCI, with the latter recently accusing the party in power of inflating the electoral lists of non-citizens, as the same PDCI did under the late Houphouët-Boigny regime in the south-west areas, in order to limit the FPI chances of success. It was the same issue that controversially prevented Ouattara from running in 1995 and disqualified him again in 2000, after having been Prime minister under Houphouët-Boigny, between 1990 and 1993. The issue re-emerges before each election and leads to frequent ethnic clashes. In 2014, a new law was enacted allowing thousands of first generation immigrants to claim citizenship.

⁵ For more details on FPI electoral strongholds see Crook (1997: 221-222).

Given this polarization we expected to find correlation between the votes cast in 2010 (first round) and those cast in 2020. This expectation was generally confirmed. The most outstanding results in VTO were found in Folon (99.1%), Kabadougou (98.0%) and Worodougou (97.8%). Folon and Kabadougou were formerly part of the Denguélé region, which no longer exists as such. Worodougou was also split into two, one part retaining its older name, the other now Béré. Certainly, such percentages are dubious, and manipulation of votes was undeniable but it is also true that such manipulations were more common in areas strictly controlled by the RDR/RHDP. The most meagre results in participation were all recorded in the Centre-South and, most interestingly in the areas where PDCI partisanship is stronger, such as in N’zi (16.8%), Moronou (18.7%), while generally, in areas that supported Gbagbo in 2010, VTO was under 40% but above 30. If we overlap such a map with that of the ZDC (*zone de confiance*), the buffer zone, which during the tenure of Gbagbo divided the country into two parts, one ruled by the FN (*Forces Nouvelles*) and one ruled by Gbagbo there is almost a perfect coincidence, with the exception of the central areas, those inhabited by the Baoulé.

We can, therefore, consider this election as a missed opportunity to move forward along the democratization path and a failure of the political class, still divided on the same issues and unable to rejuvenate. The inability to move on poses serious doubt on the ability of the country to stabilize, notwithstanding the good record of its administration. The country under Ouattara’s leadership recorded an impressive boost in the economy and infrastructure – access to water and sanitation, roads, etc. – improving well above regional standards, but the year before election was also marked by an increase in political tensions and ambiguous laws on media freedom. However, also the electoral boycott by the opposition proved to be a weak strategy. Ouattara, indeed was sworn in with a stable majority in the NA⁶.

Burkina Faso: A Transition under Threat?

Burkina completed the transition towards democracy after a pro-democratic military coup, following a popular uprising in 2014. The first General elections were held in 2015 followed by the 22nd November 2020 elections. The 2015 elections ended the twenty-seven years in power of Blaise Compaoré and of his once dominant party, the CDP (*Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès*). Actually, the 2014 political crisis was

⁶ Data available on the net put the RHDP at 167 MPs out of a total of 255 in the NA. However, 77 of these should be part of the PDCI, putting the total of MPs controlled by Ouattara under the absolute majority, unless we include the great part of the independent MPs (76), part of whom must be of FPI affiliation.

anticipated in January 2014 by the defection from the CDP of the founders of the MPP (*Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès*, MPP), which now rules the country. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, the current president of the Republic is the leader of the party. He was first elected in 2015 with a generous 53.5%. Presidential election is held with a two-round system, as in Ivory Coast and Ghana. However, during both 2015 and 2020 a run-off was not needed and again Kaboré was re-elected, this time with 57.9% of the votes cast (see Tab. 7).

TABLE 7 – Electoral results and trends in Presidential elections (Burkina Faso)

Candidate %	Year of Election	
	2015	2020
Kaboré (MPP)	53.5	57.9
Komboïgo (CDP)		15.5
Diabré (UPC)	29.6	12.5
Others	16.9	14.1
Candidate Votes	2015	2020
Kaboré (MPP)	1,669,000	1,655,000
Komboïgo (CDP)		443,000
Diabré (UPC)	925,000	357,000
Others	716,000	405,000
Total valid votes	3,310,000	2,994,000

The landslide victory of the incumbent came with an important drop of the VTO (from about 60% to a certified 50.8%), which remains, however, a respectable result considering the very low literacy rate (38%) if compared to that of the other two cases under analysis (literacy rate in Ghana is put around 79%; 47% in Ivory Coast). Another important change with the 2015 election is the rank of the main opposition party, which is reflected in the NA election (see table below). The former dominant party under the authoritarian regime, the CDP, which was not disbanded after the 2014 revolution was, indeed, able to recover lost ground, coming second in

the general elections. The 2020 elections marked also the collapse of the most vocal opponent, Diabré, and his party, the UPC (*Union pour le Progrès et le Changement*), founded in 2010, under the previous regime, and the emergence of a new one, the NTD (*Nouveau Temps pour la Démocratie*), founded in 2015, by Vincent Dabilgou, who was close to the Compaoré regime before his demise.

TABLE 8 – Electoral results in NA elections (Burkina Faso)

Parties (MPs)	Year of Election		
	2015	2020	+/-
MPP	55	56	+1
CDP	18	20	+2
UPC	33	12	-21
NTD	3	13	+10
Others	18	26	+8
Total	127	127	

Both the 2015 and 2020 NA elections did not result in one-party majorities. The NA is elected through a proportional representational system, where 111 MPs are elected in 45 electoral provinces (each elects between two and nine MPs) and 16 on a national list. This enhanced the chances of smaller parties to be represented and the formation of coalitional governments. The MPP secured less than the absolute majority to rule alone, forcing it to co-opt other parties in order to enlarge the presidential majority. Following the 2020 election, the majoritarian party was able to co-opt into the government Diabré and his party, the UPC, which in 2010 was formed on an anti-regime platform and campaigned for a radical change. That was a clear departure from CDP politics and its heirs, as it is the MPP. Together with the NTD of Vincent Dabilgou, the presidential coalition – *mouvance présidentielle* – could then count on a stable majority. Burkina is a semi-presidential republic and the Prime Minister is the head of the government. Christophe Dabiré, a member of the MPP and a technocrat, has been holding the position since 2019 and was reconfirmed with a new government after 2020.

Although a multi-ethnic country, contrary to the other two cases here analyzed, Burkina Faso is not characterized by an important ethnic polarization at the national

level with few impacts during presidential election. Ethnicity does count, however, for NA elections, in the meaning that chances to be elected by would-be MP lies in their connection with local constituents. Kaboré is a Christian and a Moagha (the Mossi ethnic group) – the most important ethnic group in the country – but he was able to secure his election in all the electoral provinces except for two (one, the Boulgou province is the home of the Bissa and voted in large part for Diabré who is from the Bissa ethnic group, and his party).

Burkina is also multiconfessional as Ivory Coast, with a Muslim majority of about 60%. With the exception of the north-eastern corner of the country, where Islam took stronger roots in the past, Islam, Christianity and Traditional religions all coexist among the same ethnic groups, mixed families are common, and religious mobility is high. However, also Burkina became vulnerable to the religious radicalization which hit Islam in the Sahel area in the last few decades. It must be noted that nationally a certain dissatisfaction among Muslims does exist because of an alleged dominance of Christians in the public administration. Since 2015, areas bordering Mali and Niger were home to religious violence. The government responded militarily but with poor results. About a million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were recorded. Such violence could have contributed to the drop in VTO, although participation in the areas under terrorist threat was not different to the average in rest of the country.

As mentioned above, the CDP was able to regain some positions in 2020. In 2015, after the revolution, the CDP elected as its President Eddie Komboïgo. In July 2015, he was designated as the CDP's candidate for the October 2015 presidential election, but was thereafter barred from standing. The CDP had no presidential candidate at that time; however, it won 18 out of 127 seats in the concurrent parliamentary election. After these elections the party leaders formed a coalition which stood in opposition to the MPP. Also Diabré (UPC), formed an opposition coalition and refused to join the coalition led by the CDP, asking for real change.

It must be noted that the ruling party – the MPP – with the demise of Compaoré was able to realign most of the CDP cadres, especially in rural areas. The secession of the MPP from the CDP did not come from programmatic or ideological differences but over the struggle for succession in the CDP, Compaoré having the intention to promote his brother François to the top. Since we consider that Burkina is a mainly rural country and the rural vote counts much more than the urban, this explains the declining performances in 2020 of the UPC, which has poor roots in the countryside. From 2015 to 2020, both the MPP and the CDP, which are in opposition to the MPP, were able to strengthen their grip on rural areas, counting on durable patronage networks that developed during the former regime. Municipal elections which were held in May 2016 contributed to strengthening these networks. The MPP obtained 10,749 seats

out of a total of 18,552, the UPC 2,974, and the CDP 2,053 (it held previously 12,340). Elected municipal governments are important because they provide local-level public services. However, they remain dependent on the center and therefore on those who hold the financial resources. The same resources allowed the MPP to activate its machinery for the 2020 national campaign. The UPC was not endowed with similar resources, while the CDP maintained and was able to nourish a network of local cadres who were unsatisfied by the delivery of central resources locally. The MPP performed well almost everywhere, with the exception of three out of a total of 45 provinces and probably with a different electoral system it could have sweeping the MPs' posts.

Chances for the consolidation of democracy will reside on the ability of the government to counter political destabilization in the areas affected by terrorism together with improvements in economic and developmental performances. Burkina remains a poor country much dependent on international aid. In this case, the formation of a bloated government after elections sustained by a large coalition will probably contribute to defuse the impact of growing cleavages and the feelings of abandonment by the state, much more than a government and a NA dominated again by a single party as in the other two cases. The strong legacy of civil activism, the vocal role of trade unions, the Sankarist tradition of much of the smaller parties,⁷ even if concentrated in the small urban areas, should keep the government on the right path avoiding the temptations to rule as before.

⁷ The most robust among them is the *Union pour la Renaissance/Parti Sankariste*, which obtained five seats in the NA.

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