

Options for Burkina Faso in Democratic Transition

By: Andrew Osiany

The democratic transition in Burkina Faso is an interesting moment for Africa's state of governance. In SOTU, this is an experience of interest due to its implication on the role of African Union in managing continental affairs. The continent is keen on the policy steps the AU and other stakeholders will take to help the Burkinabes get their governance back on track.

But two points are worth noting.

First, Burkina Faso was one of the countries to foremost ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG), a legal instrument that provides guidelines of socio-economic and political governance of state parties. Second, the country has been a key player and determinant of political stability in the region. Blaise Compaore has been an active and revered mediator in various peace processes in the Sahel region – including brokering peace agreements in Mali, Ivory Coast, and Togo.

Burkina Faso's political profile is therefore not a brush-over and its transition will not only turn focus to the African Union, but also to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as the Burkinabe military that has stepped in to assume power and suspended the country's constitution.

In light of this state of events, the following **five recommendations** remain on the table for all the political, social, and business stakeholders to think about.

- Of immediate priority is to ensure constitutional order prevails. According to the constitution, the President of the Senate – and not the military - should take over leadership of the country on resignation of the President. The Senate President then immediately arranges for Presidential elections within sixty days. The AU should therefore invoke the provisions of ACDEG to ensure that civilian rule prevails in Faso.
- The transition presents a learning test on compliance to AU instruments (in this case ACDEG) beyond ratification. Would the situation have been different had Burkina Faso done more to implement the charter? The 2011 *Burkinabe Spring* that called for change amidst a stagnant economy and a non-responsive state should have pushed the Compaore Administration to set mechanisms for fully implementing Chapter 9

(Political, Economic, and Social Governance) of the Charter. Would the situation have been different if such policy prescriptions were considered?

- This is not a coup! It is a popular uprising against a regime – the President and Parliament - that wanted to change the constitution to match their political pursuits. This is therefore an opportunity for the interim leadership to, first, set up a mechanism for strengthening the role of the constitution in administering governance of the state and country by putting up mechanisms for returning to civilian rule. The vision of this team should be to seek national consensus to reassure the Burkinabes of the effectiveness of their constitution. Such a commitment will also present an opportunity to jumpstart structural reforms that will set Burkina Faso on a locus of socio-economic growth.
- The AU, ECOWAS, and neighbouring states in the Sahel must keep an eye on the probability of transnationalization of Faso transition into other states. The faster these stakeholders find ways of handling the ‘power vacuum’ in Faso, the lower the risk of anarchy in any future cases.
- Now is the time for the civil society, transitional government, and the private sector to form stable partnerships and push for post-transition socio-economic and political reconstruction of Burkina Faso. ECOWAS should in the interim prioritize infrastructural development support to Faso to spur economic growth as the AU puts up mechanisms for ensuring a stable and smooth political transition. The civil society must also work with the state and private sector to suggest ways of driving the democratic change and economic prosperity agenda.