On December 2, 2012, the people of Burkina Faso elected 127 members of parliament together with 18,584 municipal officials in the first concurrent elections to be held in the small West African nation. Some 4.4 million Burkinabés cast their votes at 14,687 polling places. The elections the first to be held since the introduction of a new biometric voter registration system.

Burkina Faso’s biometric voter registration project

Much more than an election in the balance.
Fast Facts on Burkina Faso’s Biometric Voter Registration

More than 4.4 million citizens enrolled
3,500 biometric enrollment stations deployed in 10 weeks
3,800 operators trained

The next step toward democratic consolidation
Located in the heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso has a population of just over 17 million. Although eighty percent of the labor force relies on subsistence agriculture, efforts to develop mineral resources are slowly improving the economy. The country became Africa’s fourth-largest producer of gold in 2012 and is projected to undergo increased growth driven by mining, cotton exports and food production. Burkina Faso has worked steadily to expand political freedoms and consolidate democracy since the institution of multiparty elections in the 1990s. The integrity of the national electoral registry remained a topic of controversy and dispute, however. Seeking to restore the credibility of the electoral process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) made a commitment to establish a list of qualified voters free of multiple registrations. Implementing the safeguards of tamper-proof biometric technology would enable the unique identification of each voter, ensuring a reliable and accurate registry.

Building a biometric voter registry in a matter of months
The objective was to complete the CENI project in time for the parliamentary and municipal elections in December 2012. Awarded to Gemalto in January 2012 following a public bidding process, the contract presented the immediate challenge of delivering an end-to-end solution and instructing trainers in fewer than three months. This would allow for adequate time to capture citizens’ biometric data in remote rural areas. Enrollment operations in the extreme southeast and southwest territories would have to be conducted before the rainy season to ensure unfettered access to field agents.

Gemalto’s solution
The self-contained Coesys mobile enrollment station forms the heart of the decentralized voter registration solution supplied by Gemalto. Stowed neatly in a rugged transit case, each unit incorporates all devices necessary to capture citizens’ demographic data, digital photograph, fingerprints and signature directly in the field. The 3,500 mobile enrollment stations supplied are designed for the technical teams to quickly reach out to large numbers of citizens, eliminating the need for rural populations to travel long distances.
Expertise and training provided by Gemalto were crucial to quickly start up operations and ensure the CENI’s autonomy in charge of Burkina Faso’s biometric voter registration project:

- A team seasoned, experienced professionals stationed long-term in Burkina Faso
- A logistics team with a proven track record delivering high volumes in short lead time
- Cascade training in March and April: Gemalto team trained 60 instructors who in turn prepared 3,800 operators

**Benefits of the solution**

The newly introduced mobile enrollment solution enabled CENI to achieve its goal of building a trusted, secure biometric voter list in time for the next elections. The technical support and operational guidance of local partner Softnet proved instrumental to enabling technical teams managed by CENI to carry out most enrollment before the end of the rainy season and according to the electoral calendar.

The campaign enrolled close to 4.5 million citizens—nearly half of them women— and significantly increased the number of registered voters. Most importantly, the new list created from the biometric voter registration master file has succeeded in restoring the credibility sought by political stakeholders and citizens for their electoral system. By preventing fraud in all future elections, biometric authentication will enable Burkinabés to fully embrace democracy and shape their own future.

**CHIEF COMPONENTS OF THE GEMALTO SOLUTION**

- 3,500 Coesys mobile enrollment stations enabling registration of up to 100 voters a day
- User-friendly enrollment software for fully-automated data capture and processing
- Secure cards designed to store the bearer’s biographical data and photo
- Establishment of regional sites equipped with servers for data control and consolidation
- Centrally located AFIS solution to eliminate multiple registrations by the same individual
- A delivery and training schedule designed to commence enrollment in June 2012

**Unique identification for fairness and inclusion**

The intrinsic properties of biometric identifiers make them impossible to transfer or misplace, forming a highly reliable basis for positive identification. The Gemalto solution incorporates Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) fingerprint matching to guarantee the uniqueness of each entry in the registry.

“The biometric enrollment operation marks a first in Burkina Faso. Our aim was to register all 7,500,000 Burkinabés of voting age, as well as the 500,000 foreigners eligible to vote under the electoral code. Participation in elections in our country is done on a voluntary basis and according to the voter’s sovereign freedom. With 4,426,051 citizens now enrolled, with the above mentioned principles and the guarantee that no one is registered twice on the voter list, we can proceed with elections with serenity.”

Barthélemy Kéré, CENI chairman