

# AT 34, BURKINA'S NEW JUNTA CHIEF IS WORLD'S YOUNGEST LEADER

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Ibrahim Traore VINCENT BADO

Just a week ago, 34-year-old Ibrahim Traore was an unknown, even in his native Burkina Faso. But in the space of a weekend, he catapulted himself from Army captain to the world's youngest leader — an ascent that has stoked hopes but also fears for a poor and chronically troubled country.

Mr. Traore, at the head of a core of disgruntled junior officers, ousted Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had seized power just in January.

The motive for the latest coup — as in January — was anger at failures to stem a seven-year jihadist insurgency that has claimed thousands of lives and driven nearly two million people from their homes.

On Wednesday, Mr. Traore was declared President and “guarantor of national independence, territorial integrity... and continuity of the State”.

At that lofty moment, Mr. Traore became the world's youngest leader, wresting the title from Chilean President Gabriel Boric, a whole two years older.

Mr. Traore's previously unknown face is now plastered on portraits around the capital Ouagadougou.

Mr. Traore was born in Bondokuy, in western Burkina Faso, and studied geology in Ouagadougou before joining the army in 2010.

He graduated as an officer from the Georges Namonao Military School — a second-tier institution compared to the prestigious Kadiogo Military Academy (PMK) of which Damiba and others in the elite are alumni.

## Posting in Mali

He served in the badly-hit north and centre of the country before heading to a posting in neighbouring Mali in 2018 in the UN's MINUSMA peacekeeping mission.

He was appointed captain in 2020.

When Mr. Damiba took power in January, ousting elected president Roch Marc Christian Kabore, Mr. Traore became a member of the Patriotic Movement for Preservation and Restoration (MPSR), as the junta chose to call itself.

In March, Mr. Damiba promoted Mr. Traore to head of artillery in the Kaya regiment in the centre of the country. But it was a move that ironically would sow the seeds of Mr. Damiba's own downfall.

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