

On the road to Burundi's elections: between military tensions and economic collapse

Report on the pre-electoral situation in Burundi 2025-2027

EurAc

Europe-Central
Africa Network



About EurAc

The Europe-Central Africa network (EurAc) was created in 2003 and brings together 32 non-governmental organisations active in Central Africa, with a particular focus on the Great Lakes region. EurAc advocates for a strong, coherent and sustainable commitment from the European Union (EU) and its Member States to help the region build a better future.

As a network, collaborating with both European and African civil society actors, EurAc offers a common platform for exchange between civil society organisations (CSOs) and the institutions of the EU, thus creating a coordinated and holistic approach to addressing the challenges of the region, as well as proposing solutions adapted to the needs and realities on the ground

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The analyses and recommendations presented in this report were developed by EurAc with the support of two researchers, in collaboration with its members. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the member organizations of the network. This document was prepared for informational and analytical purposes and does not claim to represent an official position of the partner organizations.

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Acronyms

ACAT Burundi: Action by Christians for the abolition of torture in Burundi

ACLED: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data

AMISOM: African Union Mission in Somalia

ANAGESCA: National Agency for Agricultural Stock Management

ARCOM: Regulatory authority for audiovisual and digital communication

AU: African Union

CADHP: African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

CECAB: The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi

CENI: Independent National Electoral Commission

CNDD-FDD: The National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy

CNC: National Communication Council

CNIDH: The Independent National Human Rights Commission in Burundi

CNL: National Congress for Liberty

COMESA: Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

CSO: Civil society organization

DRC: Democratic Republic of the Congo

EAC: East African Community

ESDDH: Burundian organization *Ensemble pour le Soutien des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en danger*

EU: European Union

EUSR: European Union Special Representative

Fbu: Burundian franc

FDLR: Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda

FDNB: The Burundi National Defence Force

FIDH: International Federation for Human Rights

FNL: The National Forces of Liberation

FNSS: The National Federation of Health sector Unions

FOCODE: Forum for Conscience and Development

FOMI: Burundian company *Fertilisants organo-minéraux Industries*

FORSC: The Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society

FRODEBU: The Front for Democracy in Burundi

HCR: High Commissioner for Refugees

HRD: Human Rights Defender

ICC: International Criminal Court

ICG: International Crisis Group

IMF: International Monetary Fund

MIP: Multi-annual Indicative Programme

NDICI: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSINT: Open source intelligence

RED Tabara: Resistance for Rule of Law in Burundi

RFI: *Radio France internationale* (International France Radio)

RPA: *Radio publique africaine* (African Public Radio)

RSF: Reporters without borders

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SCA: Sub-Committee on Accreditation

SCM: The Superior Council of Magistracy

TLP Burundi: *Tournons La Page* Burundi

UPR: Universal Periodic Review

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

UNSR: United Nations Special Rapporteur

UPRONA: *Union pour le Progrès national*

Methodology

This report, entitled **“On the road to Burundi's elections: between military tensions and economic collapse”**, is the result of collaboration between the Europe-Central Africa network (EurAc), its members and representatives of Burundian civil society. It was built on the work of two consultants, as well as on individual and group interviews conducted between November 2024 and March 2025 with Burundian and international academics, officials, civil society representatives and analysts. This work has also involved analysis of academic and think tank research, institutional documents, press articles and African and international media, as well as social network monitoring.

EurAc is committed to contributing impartially and independently to the establishment of a peaceful electoral environment in Burundi.

More specifically, the network has organized itself to:

- Analyze the socio-economic, security, political and electoral stakes in view of the 2025 elections and in anticipation of the 2027 elections;
- Take stock of the pre-electoral situation, with a particular focus on the sub-regional security context;
- Highlight the factors that can have a destabilizing effect on the electoral process, but also the favorable factors that can mitigate potential conflicts;
- Propose recommendations and strategies to accompany European decision-makers in their support for a peaceful and secure electoral process, while limiting the violence linked to the pre-electoral context, with a particular focus on the role of the European Union (EU) and its Member States.

Burundi's ID card

Capital city: Gitega

Main cities: Bujumbura, Gitega, Ngozi, Rumonge, Muyinga

Surface area : 27,834 Km²

Border countries: Tanzania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Population: 13.6 million

Ethnic composition: Hutus, Tutsis, Twas

Language: Kirundi, French

Religions: Catholic Christians, Protestant Christians, Muslims

Median age: 17,8 ans

Economy:

- GDP: US\$2.64 billion (2023)
- GDP/capita: US\$193 (2023)

Poverty line: between 62% and 87% of the population live below the poverty line

Human Development Index: 187th out of 193 countries

President in office: Évariste Ndayishimiye



Executive summary: Call for renewed cooperation between the EU and Burundi

Burundi ranks among the world's three poorest countries and is considered a fragile state¹ due to its persistent political instability and the succession of crises that have shaken the country since its independence in 1962. This small East African country, situated at the heart of the Great Lakes region between Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, still bears the deep scars of a history marked by ethnic tensions and recurrent violence.

1. [List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations](#), World Bank, 2025

After a devastating civil war in the 1990s and 2000s, the hope of appeasement born of the Arusha Accords signed in 2000 was brutally dashed in 2015. That year, the announcement of Pierre Nkurunziza's candidacy for a controversial third term triggered a historic popular uprising, violently repressed by the authorities. The authoritarian drift that followed, characterized by systematic repression of opponents, civil society and the media, plunged the country into a deep crisis, shattering prospects for reconciliation and democratic openness. The arrival in power in June 2020 of Evariste Ndayishimiye, a member of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), the party in power since 2005, was initially seen as a moment of hope for some Burundians. However, almost five years on, the picture remains largely mixed. **Burundi remains trapped in a deep crisis, facing major political, socio-economic and human rights challenges, while the Great Lakes region is once again plunged into a cycle of violence.**

On the 5th of June 2025, Burundians are voting to renew their deputies and local councillors in legislative elections. Senators are due to be elected on the 23rd of July 2025, followed by town councillors and hill councillors on the 25th of August 2025. The next presidential election is scheduled for 2027. In view of the stakes involved in electoral cycles in fragile countries, EurAc is committed to monitoring and analyzing the pre-electoral environment.

Electoral calendar 2025-2027

- Legislative and town council elections on June 5, 2025;
- Senatorial elections (by local councillors) on July 23, 2025;
- Elections for hill and town councillors on August 25, 2025;
- Presidential elections in 2027.

This report is the result of evidence-based research, including testimonies, interviews and analyses of reports examining in depth the election preparation process, the political and security atmosphere of the pre-campaign period, the state of civic space and the country's socio-economic situation. This analysis takes place in an extremely worrying security context, as the conflict in the east of the DRC in the areas bordering Burundi, intensifies, raising fears of a regional explosion from which the country cannot escape.

Security situation

Faced with the resurgence of the M23 rebellion², since 2021, Burundi has made a firm commitment to the DRC, aggravating already fragile diplomatic tensions with Rwanda. With the intensification of the conflict between late 2024 and early 2025 in the provinces of North and South Kivu, the Burundian regime deployed new troops on Congolese territory to combat both the M23 and the RED Tabara armed group. This situation directly affects the country's internal stability, with humanitarian, economic and security consequences that extend far beyond its borders. The conflict in the east is perceived as a threat to national security, justifying the intensification of repression and control measures targeting opposition parties, civil society organizations or anyone suspected of complicity with the opponent.

By stepping up its commitment to Kinshasa, Burundi has established itself as a key player in the Congolese conflict. It is beginning to be seen by African and Western chancelleries as a strategic lever in diplomatic efforts. **Yet the country remains largely under-estimated by many international decision-makers, despite being an essential player in the regional stabilization process.**

2. The M23 (March 23rd Movement) is an armed rebel group active in the eastern DRC, mainly in the North Kivu region. It was formed in 2012 following a mutiny by former Tutsi rebels of the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP) integrated into the Congolese army, who criticized the Congolese government for not respecting the 2009 agreements.

Civic space situation

Since the political crisis triggered in 2015, the country has been plagued by persistent and systemic repression of dissenting voices. The number of people reported missing has continued to rise, as denounced by the Ndondeza program³ of the Forum for Conscience and Development (FOCODE). This situation has also resulted in a mass exodus, estimated at 405,000 by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and over 500,000 by some NGOs.⁴ Since 2017, around 250,000 refugees from Burundi have returned to their country under programs mainly facilitated by UNHCR.⁵ However, conditions of safety, reintegration and respect for fundamental rights remain insufficient for the time being to enable a truly sustainable and dignified return for all.

The change of president in 2020 seemed to usher in a more relaxed approach to human rights. The tone of speeches has softened and has been paired with various initiatives aimed at appeasing national and international public opinion, as part of a strategic relaunch of foreign relations. Nevertheless, repression persists. **The period 2024-2025 witnessed a further tightening of political control, with civic space remaining highly repressed and restricted.** Exile remains the main alternative for survival for civil society actors, while the organizations still in place struggle to play their role.

Burundian journalists, essential players in the democratic process, keep facing considerable challenges. Recent cases of arbitrary arrest and detention are a reminder of how difficult it is for them to work without fear in a country where civic space is considered “repressed”⁶ by CIVICUS and “locked”⁷ according to Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on the situation of human rights in Burundi. While the release of journalist Floriane Irangabiye in August 2024 following a granted presidential pardon was an encouraging step forward, her trial was deemed unfair and lacking solid evidence. A climate of repression still hangs over independent media in Burundi, as evidenced by the recent conviction of journalist Sandra Muhoza in December 2024.

3. [Website on the Ndondeza program](#), FOCODE

4. [La réintégration des rapatriés, une priorité nationale](#), Libraries Without Borders, 21 September 2023

5. [Burundi Country Profile](#), UNHCR, 2025

6. [Burundi Country Profile](#), CIVICUS, 2025

7. [Les critiques du rapport de Gaétan Zongo sur le Burundi](#), Iwacu, 11 July 2024

Burundi's recent election to the UN Human Rights Council, despite the current President's clear opposition to international human rights mechanisms, is part of a policy of diplomatic re-engagement. Nevertheless, it is essential not to repeat the mistakes of the past. **It is crucial for the international community to place respect for human rights at the heart of its relations with Burundi, while continuing to actively support the work of Burundian civil society in all its plurality.**

Socio-economic situation

The pre-campaign is taking place in a context of a serious and long-lasting socio-economic crisis, which has now reached its apogee. For several years now, the population has been suffering from soaring prices for essential products such as fuel and certain basic foodstuff. This situation has worsened considerably with the resurgence of the M23 in eastern DRC. Indeed, informal trade with this region, long seen as a lifeline for many Burundians, is now compromised. The closure of the border with Rwanda in early 2024 has further isolated the country, while the currency crisis, characterized by a massive gap between the official exchange rate and the black market, is exacerbating the economic deterioration. In the midst of this crisis, only those close to the ruling party seem to benefit from a system they are suspected of controlling.

Faced with this situation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided on 18 January 2025 to close the aid program granted in 2023. Such a decision risks compromising the support of other stakeholders such as the EU, at a time when the financial situation of one of the world's least developed countries continues to deteriorate. In this context, **it is vital that the international community maintains and reinforces its funding for Burundi within the framework of development cooperation.** This support is all the more crucial as regional instability risks aggravating an internal situation already on the brink of collapse.

Election preparation

Burundi's electoral experience has been marked by numerous tensions, political contestations and instability that have profoundly affected the credibility of electoral processes. During the last general elections in 2020, the country once again faced numerous irregularities, including acts of intimidation, arrests of opposition members and restrictions on press freedom. As the 2025 elections approach, many challenges remain. Resolving them is crucial to ensuring the legitimacy of the upcoming polls.

Numerous signals indicate that the authorities have set up a tailor-made electoral framework designed to silence any form of expression or competition. The voter registration process has been marked by acts of intimidation by the State and representatives of the ruling party, with the support of its Imbonerakure youth league. Several cases of political violence were also reported, targeting members of the CNL and FRODEBU opposition parties, as well as the ruling CNDD-FDD party, against a backdrop of heightened internal tensions. The electoral law was amended several times between June and December 2024 by presidential decrees, - an act non-compliant with practices set by international standards that recommend to not modify the electoral framework less than a year ahead of elections, as to prevent any loss of trust and credibility in the electoral process. These decisions have hampered candidacies and led to the notable exclusion of Agathon Rwasa, the country's last remaining major political opponent. **In this climate of political tension, the war in the east of the DRC and the destabilization caused by Burundi's involvement accentuate the risk of a postponement of the elections scheduled for June-August 2025.**

Burundi: a forgotten crisis in Europe's political agenda?

The EU and its Member States remain key players in terms of official development assistance to Burundi. The country's strategic role for its European partners has also been confirmed by the appointment of Johan Borgstam as the new EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Great Lakes in September 2024. **Nevertheless, the EurAc network notes with concern the growing disinterest of the EU and its Member States in Burundi's future.**

The case of Burundi has gradually disappeared from Europe's radar in favor of other questions presented as being more in line with the EU's priorities. Against the backdrop of an upsurge in violence in the eastern DRC, Burundi's essential role in regional stabilization is also being sidelined, as evidenced by the absence of any mention of the country in the European Parliament resolution voted on February 11, 2025.⁸ For civil society, such a decision testifies to a certain lack of understanding on the part of European decision-makers of **the importance of regional dynamics and interdependencies between countries in the Great Lakes region, and more particularly of Burundi's determining role in the regional balance.**

8. [*Résolution sur l'escalade de la violence dans l'est de la RDC*](#), European Parliament, 13 February 2025

9. [*EU Renewed Great Lakes Strategy*](#), Council of the EU, 20 February 2023

In view of the many internal challenges that Burundi is facing, and the rapid regionalization of the conflict which is further weakening the country, **it is crucial that European decision-makers place the Burundi case back on the political agenda.** The EU has both a moral and a strategic interest in taking concrete steps to support the stability and sustainable development of the country. **This vision is all the more relevant in the light of the EU's renewed strategy for the Great Lakes, which stresses the importance of an integrated regional approach promoting active cooperation with all the countries in the region.**⁹

This report, supported by the voices of Burundian and European civil society, aims to alert the EU and its Member States to the risks associated with a lack of concrete engagement in Burundi. The Great Lakes region is going through a decisive period which requires the EU to mobilize its diplomatic resources in favor of a proactive approach focused on human rights, good governance and peace. Such an approach is essential to accompany Burundi on the road to peace, reconciliation and democratic stability.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings presented in this report, the EurAc network has drawn a series of recommendations for policymakers in the EU and its Member States.

In light of the crisis in eastern DRC, and in anticipation of future electoral cycles, the EU must use its diplomatic levers to re-establish dialogue and cooperation with Burundi. To achieve this objective, it is important to underline the essential role endorsed by both the EUSR for Human Rights and the EUSR for the Great Lakes Region. These two complementary mandates are crucial to the implementation of the recommendations set out below.

In terms of regional security:

- **Anticipate the release and delivery of large-scale humanitarian assistance, in coordination with UN agencies,** to support the Burundian government in managing refugee resettlement from the DRC. Particular attention must be placed on civil society actors under threat need to be given appropriate protection.
- **Support diplomatic efforts to find a regional, political and peaceful solution to the war in eastern DRC.** It is essential to work towards an inclusive, multi-level dialogue with all regional players involved in the conflict, including armed groups, representatives of civil society and local communities.
- **Urge the Burundian government to withdraw its troops from Congolese territory.** More broadly, the EU must continue to demand the immediate cessation of all financial, logistical, military and/or strategic support, whether direct or indirect, from all countries in the region to armed groups in the eastern DRC.

In terms of human rights and civic space:

- **Assert forcefully and clearly its commitment to human rights for the entire Burundian population.** To this end, the EU must fully support the work of its EUSR for Human Rights, whose mission is to encourage the promotion and protection of democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Burundi. More specifically, the EU must:
 - Openly condemn the policies of harassment, arrest and arbitrary detention of political opponents, human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists and other members of civil society, as well as all acts of violence and other human rights violations committed by the security forces, the Imbonerakure and armed groups.

- Ensure the presence of European diplomats at the trials of journalists, HRDs and political prisoners to send a strong message in favor of fundamental freedoms.
 - Call on the Burundian authorities to take concrete steps to promote civic space by rehabilitating suspended associations and overturning the convictions of HRDs.
 - Use political dialogue with the Burundian authorities to raise emblematic cases such as that of Sandra Muhoza or any other civil society figure who has suffered repression.
- **Support the work of Burundian civil society in all its diversity by providing it with sufficient technical and financial support to help it accomplish its missions of awareness-raising, election monitoring and alert of violence resurgence.** The organization of regular consultation sessions is necessary to promote information sharing. It is also crucial to take all measures to guarantee the safety of these actors, notably by facilitating their transfer to safe countries, with simplified admission procedures for the most vulnerable groups, while supporting the voluntary and safe return to the country for those who wish to do so.
 - **Urge the Burundian government to cooperate with international mechanisms dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights.** To this end, the EU should actively support the UNSR in its reporting on the human rights situation in Burundi. This implies the provision of adequate financial and technical resources, as well as increased pressure on the Burundian government to cooperate fully, including unrestricted access to the territory and the transmission of information essential to the fulfillment of the mandate.

In terms of domestic policy:

- **Urge the Burundian government to organize fair, transparent and credible elections, in line with international best practice, in order to prevent any resurgence of violence.** This implies in particular the repeal of recent amendments to the electoral code, which discriminate against the opposition, and an end to all political maneuvering aimed at influencing future elections.
- **Re-establish regular cycles of exchange with the Burundian authorities to promote the establishment of an inclusive political dialogue in the spirit of the Arusha Accords, integrating opposition movements and civil society,** both within the country and in exile. This process must begin with the release of opponents and the return of political figures in exile.

In terms of economics and finance:

- **At the level of EU institutions, guarantee the continuity of funding for Burundi under the Multiannual Indicative Program (MIP) and ensure that it is maintained during negotiations for the next EU budget.** In this respect, an increase in the amounts allocated to the “good governance and rule of law” priority area is essential, particularly in the pre- and post-electoral context.
- **At Member State level, guarantee continuity of funding for Burundi in the framework of development cooperation,** with particular attention paid to issues of governance, human rights and the strengthening of civil society.
- **Encourage the IMF to re-establish its cooperation with Burundi on exchange rates and relaunch its reform program in this area.** The IMF's support is an essential lever not only for turning around Burundi's economy, but also for regaining the confidence of major international donors.



Security situation: pre-election violence and the spiral of war in the DRC

Key points:

- With the next electoral cycle approaching, the mechanisms of systemic repression deployed during the 2015 political crisis are still in place.
- Electoral violence and acts of intimidation against the population, diplomats and political activists are intensifying in a climate fraught with suspicion, fueled by rivalries within the ruling party and the war in eastern DRC.
- In this context, Burundi's significant yet opaque involvement in the conflict in eastern DRC considerably increases the risk of open warfare on its own territory.
- The humanitarian (war victims, tens of thousands of refugees) and economic consequences of this conflict extend far beyond Burundi.

A retrospective on the political crisis of 2015 and massive systemic repression

For several decades, Burundi has been plagued by chronic instability, characterized by persistent ethnic and political tensions. In this turbulent tale, April 2015 marked a critical turning point for the country. President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to pursue a third term in office is perceived as a violation of the Arusha Accords and the Constitution, triggering a wave of public demonstrations, massively repressed by the forces of law and order. This period, dominated by devastating post-election violence, led to a humanitarian crisis of considerable proportions and accelerated the implementation of large-scale repression. In May 2015, a new stage was reached with the failed coup attempt led by General Niyombare and several military officers.

This episode triggered a new spiral of violence, forcing thousands of Burundians to flee and plunging the country into a prolonged crisis. According to the NGO Human Rights Watch, during this period: *"The Burundian government intensified its crackdown on suspected opponents and suspended most of the country's independent radio stations. By mid-2015, almost all Burundian opposition party leaders, independent journalists and civil society activists had fled the country after receiving repeated threats. Those who remained did so at the risk of their lives."*¹⁰

10. Avril 2015 – juin 2020 : Chronologie de la répression des médias et de la société civile au Burundi, HRW, 26 May 2021

11. La réintégration des rapatrié.e.s, une priorité nationale, Libraries Without Borders, 21 September 2023

12. Burundi situation, UNHCR, 28 February 2025

Indeed, in April 2015, "only" 25,000 Burundians had the status of refugees. This figure rose to 405,000 in 2017 according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is even estimated at over 500,000 people, according to some NGOs.¹¹ Many of the scars of this period are still visible, and today Burundi is considered to be in a situation of "violent peace". Indeed, while tens of thousands of people have returned home, 255,000 Burundians were still living in neighboring countries as refugees and asylum seekers on 31 January 2025.

Early 2025, according to the UNHCR,¹² Burundian refugees benefiting from UNHCR's regional program break down as follows:

- Tanzania: 104,095 (40.7%)
- DR Congo: 50,716 (19.8%)
- Rwanda: 49,597 (19.4%)
- Uganda: 41,756 (16.3%)
- Kenya: 9,599 (3.8%)

The other populations of Burundian refugees and asylum seekers benefiting from national aid programs are dispersed as follows:

- 16,000 in Kenya
- 8,700 in Mozambique
- 10,800 in Malawi
- 9,900 in South Africa
- 8,100 in Zambia

Apart from those who have fled since 2015, a further 42,200 Burundian refugees have been living in Tanzania for several decades. They no longer benefit from regional or national assistance.

It is also worth noting that Burundi is host to almost 85,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom are from the DRC, according to the UNHCR (99%).¹³ To these figures must now be added the 45,000 or so additional Congolese¹⁴ who have crossed the border since the end of January 2025 in response to the M23's advance into North and then South Kivu.



Collective advocacy document
from 19 Burundian civil society
organizations

Since 2021, a plan for the return and reintegration of refugees from Burundi has been put in place by UNHCR¹⁵ in cooperation with regional States, with the aim of formulating and implementing solutions for a consensual and sustainable return. However, despite these efforts, current conditions do not allow for dignified and safe repatriation, as evidenced by a collective advocacy document published in August 2024¹⁶ by nineteen Burundian civil society organizations (including FORSC, Ligue Iteka and ACAT-Burundi). In particular, they mention several cases of returnees who were victims of racketeering, killed or disappeared, and also denounce the absence of impartial justice regarding the events that triggered their flight. Indeed, Burundi's Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹⁷ is not working on the repression and violence of 2015, or on their consequences, even though these traumas add to decades of individual and collective suffering. This situation feeds an environment where memories clash rather than building a collective national narrative.

The fear that accompanies this memory is very present and maintained by the security services and the youth wing of the CNDD-FDD, the *Imbonerakure*.¹⁸ **In the absence of serious guarantees for a safe return, the majority of civil society figures and political personalities in exile prefer not to return**, despite the many gestures of openness and attempts at rapprochement initiated by the central government. Indeed, the latter seeks to present certain returns as victories in order to deconstruct the image of a risky country for returnees.

13. [Burundi Country Profile](#), UNHCR, 2025

14. [RDC : environ 42 000 réfugiés ont trouvé refuge au Burundi](#), Libération, 21 February 2025

15. [2021 Burundi Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan](#), UNHCR, 15 February 2025

16. [Au secours des réfugiés Burundais contraints au rapatriement forcé par la Tanzanie](#), 19 Burundian civil society organizations, August 2025

17. Burundi's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up by the Arusha Accords in 2000 and implemented from 2014, is tasked with investigating and establishing the truth about serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed between 4 February 26 1885 and 4 December 2008.

18. The *Imbonerakure* are the youth wing of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. Sometimes compared to a "militia", they are a group of young people aged between 18 and 35, most of them demobilized former rebels.

Burundi caught in the spiral of the war in the DRC

The conflict in the east of the DRC has sharply intensified from December 2024, with major repercussions for the region and Burundi in particular. Faced with the advance of the M23 rebel movement, backed by Rwanda, the DRC has sought help from its neighbors, notably Burundi, which has stepped up its military involvement in the region. This increased presence has exacerbated diplomatic tensions with Rwanda, leading to mutual accusations, a rise in nationalist rhetoric and tighter security control in Burundi. The M23's capture of Goma and Bukavu in respectively in January and in February 2025 have led to a humanitarian crisis, with a massive influx of Congolese refugees into Burundian territory. **The complex and opaque situation of military and diplomatic alliances makes Burundi's future uncertain in the context of a regional war that could overflow its territory.**

Burundi's military commitment in the DRC (2023-2025)

Burundi has been an active participant in the conflict in eastern DRC for several years, but its involvement intensified significantly between 2024 and 2025. This escalation takes place against in the context of flare-ups in the eastern provinces, which intensified after the failure of Angolan mediation in late 2024. Indeed, the summit planned in Luanda in mid-December, which Rwandan President Paul Kagame did not attend, failed, aggravating tensions. For his part, Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi has embarked on a regional tour to seek support, notably from Burundi,¹⁹ where he discreetly met with Evariste Ndayishimiye. Shortly after this visit, Burundi announced its withdrawal from the new African Union (AU) mission in Somalia²⁰ where it had planned to deploy 3,000 soldiers,²¹ fuelling speculation about increased military support for its Congolese neighbor. This period also marks a change in Burundi's strategy, moving from a supervised participation in the East-African Community (EAC) force in 2023 to a more discreet and opaque bilateral involvement in 2024-2025, amplifying its role in the clashes against the M23 and its Rwandan allies.

19. *RDC : le président Tshisekedi en visite éclair au Burundi après l'échec des négociations de Luanda*, RFI, 23 December 2024

20. Successor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

21. *Le Burundi peut-il se permettre de retirer ses troupes de la Somalie ?*, Institute for Security Studies, 14 January 2025

Numerous reports attest to the involvement of several thousand Burundian soldiers alongside the Congolese government and its allies against the Rwandan-backed M23 movement and its Burundian anti-government allies the RED Tabara,²² mainly in South Kivu. These include clashes between the RED Tabara and the Burundian army, documented on Congolese soil by the UN group of independent experts between December 2024 and January 2025. A report published on 27 December 2024²³ mentions *"clashes between the RED Tabara and a Mai-Mai-Burundi National Defense Force coalition"* as early as the end of September 2024. It also adds that *"on 23 October 2024, FDNB soldiers and Mai-Mai Yakutumba combatants attacked positions of Twirwaneho and RED Tabara in Kipupu, Itombwe sector, Mwenga territory. Several civilians were killed and wounded during the fighting."*

The resumption of offensives by the M23 and its allies between December 2024 and January 2025 led to a swift victory, raising further concerns on the Burundian side. The town of Goma fell to the M23 on 27 and 28 January 2025. The movement then headed for South Kivu and the military airport of Kavumu, near the city of Bukavu, an area considered strategic for Burundi's security.

On 31 January 2025, in his greetings to the diplomatic corps, Burundian President Évariste Ndayishimiye warned of the risk of a regional conflagration in the Congolese conflict. He also accused Rwanda of *"preparing something against Burundi"*, declaring that *"Today, Rwanda is advancing into the DRC. Tomorrow, it will come to Burundi"*, and Burundi could not *"allow itself to be pushed around."*²⁴

In early February 2025, the Burundian army stepped up its deployment at Kavumu and Bukavu military airports to confront the M23, as well as in the Moyens and Hauts-Plateaux of Fizi and Uvira, home to the Burundian rebel movement RED Tabara. The number of Burundian soldiers involved in the DRC was estimated at between 8,000 and 10,000 before this reinforcement, which could involve around 2,000 additional soldiers, according to the UN.²⁵ On 7 February, RFI estimated the number of battalions now deployed on Congolese soil at sixteen. The capture of Kavumu airport and the town of Bukavu around the 20th of February²⁶ resulted in heavy losses on the Burundian side. The Burundian army then began a partial withdrawal, while many soldiers found themselves isolated,

22. RED-Tabara (Resistance for Rule of Law in Burundi) are an armed rebel group from Burundi formed in 2016 by former Burundian military and opposition members, mainly Burundian refugees living in neighboring countries such as the DRC and Rwanda. They position themselves as an opposition movement to the administration of Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza.

23. [Rapport du 27 décembre 2024 du Groupe d'experts sur la RDC](#), UNSC, 27 December 2024

24. [RDC : l'armée burundaise, un « soutien militaire très important » pour le gouvernement congolais](#), RFI, 2 February 2025

25. [Hundreds of women raped and burn to death after Goma prison set on fire](#), The Guardian, 5 February 2025

26. [RDC : à Bukavu pris par le M23, ce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas voler, ils l'ont brûlé](#), Libération, 20 February 2025

cut off from the bulk of the withdrawing troops.²⁷ At the end of February, the front moved to the Hauts-Plateaux region, in the hinterland of Uvira, a strategic town for Burundi due to its geographical position.²⁸

Climate of war and security paranoia in Burundi

On the domestic level, there are several signs of the gradual emergence of a climate of war and paranoia in many of the country's provinces. The civil society organization *Ensemble pour le Soutien des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Danger* (ESDDH), which operates in exile, reported the public recruitment of 500 future Burundian soldiers in Cibitoke, a province bordering Rwanda and the DRC, in early February 2025. This type of recruitment would also be organized in other provinces. The recruits are sent to training centers in the various military camps of Ngozi, Cankuzo, Bururi and Muramvya.

In early and mid-January 2025, there were several rumors of the existence of a pro-Rwandan “proxy” force in the border provinces, even though the border between Rwanda and Burundi has been closed since January 2024. Various sources also speculate on the presence of members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)²⁹ in the provinces bordering Rwanda, further fueling this atmosphere of suspicion. At the end of January, several messages circulating on the mail loops of members of the ruling party and its Imbonerakure youth league warned of the presence of Toyota Voxy vehicles, mini-vans, on the border with Tanzania. These vehicles were accused of potentially transporting “*Rwandan spies and infiltrators*”.

This renewed tension with Rwanda also raises fears of targeting, intimidation and repression of recent visitors to the country, as well as members of opposition parties and civil society organizations, both inside and outside the country. Tutsi Burundians are a particularly high-risk group, especially in the regions of Bubanza, Cibitoke, Kayanza, Ngozi, Kirundo, Muyinga and Bujumbura, where ethnic tensions can lead to acts of targeted violence.

27. *Le Burundi accélère le retrait de ses troupes déployées dans l'est de la RDC*, Le Monde, 21 February 2025

28. *RDC : des affrontements dans les Hauts-Plateaux du Sud-Kivu entre un groupe allié au M23 et l'armée*, RFI, 27 February 2025

29. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) is a political and armed group formed after 1994 in Zaire / the DRC from among the Rwandan genocidaires of 1994.

There is a certain degree of restlessness among the Burundian authorities. Official casualty and death figures are not being made public. There are reports of pressure being put on families and doctors to prevent them from divulging information. Others mention refusals to enlist without official media coverage. In June 2024, almost 300 Burundian soldiers were sentenced to long prison terms for refusing to fight on Congolese territory,³⁰ demonstrating the internal tensions that military involvement in the DRC can provoke.

The rise of “patriotic” mobilization and the hunt for possible traitors in Burundi, observed in early 2025, is worrisome. It may be perceived as a strategy aimed at strengthening the CNDD-FDD's internal unity around an external enemy presented as an existential threat, at a time when tensions were emerging between the President, the Prime Minister, the party's Secretary General and the President of the Assembly. More generally, this threat consolidated the mobilization of the Burundian regime against what was perceived as the expansionist project of a Tutsi regime in power in Rwanda. Indeed, the CNDD-FDD is a predominantly Hutu movement³¹ founded in 1994 as a rebel movement fighting Tutsi domination in Burundi. During the two official Congo wars (1996-1997 and 1998-2002), the CNDD-FDD fought against Rwanda, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). The FPR was founded by Tutsi refugees in exile before taking power in Rwanda, notably putting an end to the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Finally, the possibility of South Kivu falling under the control of a Rwandan-backed movement, in collaboration with a Burundian armed rebel group, represents a concrete threat not only to Burundi, which could find itself isolated, but also to the CNDD-FDD's politico-militaro-economic networks, which risk suffering severe financial and mining losses. At the time of writing, the International Crisis Group (ICG) has placed Burundi in the “conflict alert” category.³²

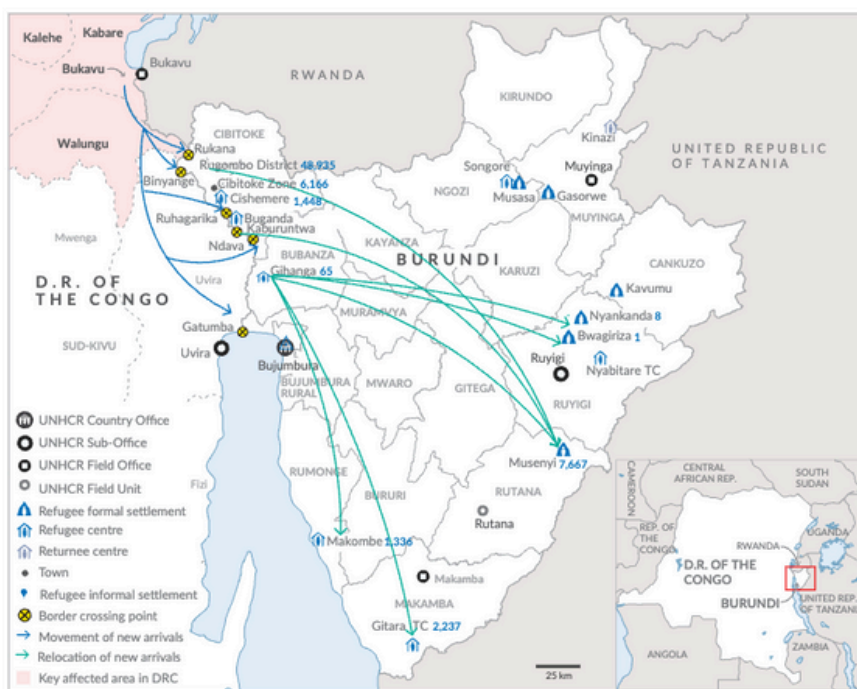
30. *Burundi : des soldats condamnés à de longues peines de prison pour avoir refusé de combattre les rebelles en RDC*, Anadolu, 26 June 2024

31. *The Burundi Rebellion and the Ceasefire Negotiations*, International Crisis Group, 6 August 2022

32. *Crisis Watch Burundi*, International Crisis Group, 2025

The weight of the humanitarian crisis in a country with fragile institutional foundations

Burundi is bearing the full brunt of the humanitarian repercussions of the conflict in the DRC. In early February 2025, following the capture of Goma, a massive influx of Congolese refugees was observed in Bujumbura, exceeding 40,000 by the end of the month. This population displacement led the Burundian authorities to step up controls at the country's borders and within the country, notably by introducing regular searches in several districts of the capital. At the same time, between January and February 2025, the CNDD-FDD and its youth league Imbonerakure, whose militarization is frequently denounced by civil society organizations, stepped up their rhetoric of mobilization and patriotism.



Map of population flows from the DRC, UNHCR, 17 March 2025

Seeing this influx as a potential threat to national security, and fearing that cutting off the axis linking Bukavu, Uvira and Fizi in South Kivu could pave the way for an attack on Bujumbura, the Burundian political-military authorities have tightened their control measures. Congolese refugees in particular are being targeted and told to gather in the Gihanga and Cibitoke camps to better control their presence. There are also reports of rackets and arrests targeting those who try to settle in Bujumbura outside the camps.

In this climate of tension, several members of Congolese civil society, already under pressure since the capture of Goma and Bukavu, are expressing serious concerns for their safety.

This humanitarian crisis comes at a time when the Burundian State is facing a considerable lack of resources, while organizations such as UNHCR are heavily affected by the suspension of US international aid decided by the Trump administration. By April 2024, almost 100,000 people³³ had been displaced by the flooding of Lake Tanganyika and dispersed without sustainable support. At the beginning of 2025, most of these people had still not returned home. Moreover, no public measures have been taken to secure the dikes along the lake, despite the persistent danger. Lacking sufficient resources, the Burundian State is struggling to provide adequate aid to its own population, a situation exacerbated by considerable cuts in international cooperation aid.

This institutional weakness is reflected in the country's classification as a “fragile State” by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as in its ranking in the INFORM global risk management index.³⁴ According to INFORM, Burundi is the 22nd country in the world least able to manage a large-scale crisis, whether man-made or natural. This situation is exacerbated by the effects of climate change, the intensification of which can be seen in the regularity of extreme climatic events such as droughts and torrential rains. It was in this context that the Burundian authorities expelled the Director and Security Officer of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Burundi in mid-February for having asked their staff to stock up on essential products.³⁵ They were accused of “offences against State security”, as their instructions were deemed likely to spread panic among the population. This situation illustrates both the importance of information control by the authorities and the difficulties still faced by foreign partners operating in the country.

33. [Au Burundi, 100 000 déplacés à cause des pluies et des inondations](#), Le Monde, 17 April 2024

34. [Country Risk Profile Burundi](#), INFORM, 2025

35. [Sibi Lawson-Marriot, la directrice du PAM au Burundi, expulsée du pays](#), RFI, 15 February 2025

Diplomatic perception of Burundi's role in conflict resolution

Burundi's various commitments to the war in the DRC are both formal and informal, bilateral and multilateral. They underline the opacity with which Burundi defines and mixes its personal (Head of State, military) and institutional (State, army and CNDD-FDD) interests. It is unclear what the Burundian government wants to achieve. This vagueness is perpetuated by the President's sometimes aggressive, sometimes peaceful speeches, such as the one he delivered to the diplomatic corps on 31 January 2025.³⁶ In light of this, **it is becoming increasingly difficult to rule out the possibility of conflict on Burundian soil, with the country more than ever caught up in the regionalization of the war in the DRC.**

Burundi's direct involvement in the Congolese conflict alongside Kinshasa gives it a central role in this crisis, which has enabled the Burundian authorities to be considered by African and Western chancelleries as potentially part of the diplomatic solution, since they are part of the problem. However, faced with an actor whose real interests remain opaque, it is essential to clarify its objectives. This is all the more essential as some decision-makers are still struggling to see Burundi as a key player in regional stabilization, as evidenced by the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on this crisis on February 11, 2025, in which the word "Burundi" is totally absent.³⁷ This omission reflects the international community's difficulty in fully grasping the complexity of the dynamics at work in the region. Yet **ignoring Burundi's role amounts to neglecting an essential link in regional stability.** It is urgent that the international community, and the EU in particular, **restore Burundi's central role in diplomatic initiatives aimed at establishing a lasting, political and peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern DRC.** To keep ignoring this player is to run the risk of further weakening a region already beset by great instability.

36. *RDC : l'armée burundaise, un « soutien militaire très important » pour le gouvernement congolais*, RFI, 2 February 2025

37. *Résolution sur l'escalade de la violence dans l'est de la RDC*, European Parliament, 13 February 2025

Polarization, violence and pre-election intimidation

In the run-up to the 2025-2027 elections and against a backdrop of war in the DRC, Burundi is experiencing rising political and security tensions. Numerous organizations have documented multiple cases of violence involving the *Imbonerakure* youth league, whose militarization is regularly denounced. In addition, internal divisions within the CNDD-FDD continue to intensify. Indeed, **episodes of tension between senior leaders illustrate a tense political climate, marked by increased repression of civic space and growing polarization between different political groups.**

Between the 1st of December 2024 and the 5th of February 2025, 56 events were recorded in the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) database. Around thirty of these involved the *Imbonerakure*, often in cases of racketeering and assaults targeting CNL members in particular, as in Kibenga (Bujumbura Mairie) on December 3, or Rugombo (Cibitoke province) on January 12. In early February 2025, ESDDH also reported similar acts in the province of Kirundo, in the north-east of the country. In the commune of Busoni and its hills, *Imbonerakure* were reportedly seen armed with machetes, truncheons and wooden rifles, and dressed in military-style uniforms. There were also reports of nightly rounds, during which people were demanded to pay sums ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 Fbu if they went out at night. If they refused, they were exposed to beatings and arbitrary detention.

Without reaching the proportions of 2020 and especially of the period following Pierre Nkurunziza's re-election in 2015, these actions seem to be increasing as the elections approach and as the war in the DRC escalates. This tolerance of human rights violations attributed to the *Imbonerakure*, but also to the police and the National Intelligence Service, is frequently observed in the field and regularly denounced by the UNSR on the human rights situation in Burundi to the Human Rights Council.³⁸

The militarization of the *Imbonerakure* has been denounced for several years by numerous local and international players, such as ICG.³⁹ Acting as a tool of loyalty and control for the ruling party, this group is often seen as the obligatory route to integration into CNDD-FDD networks and the hope of obtaining influential positions within the party and the government, police, army or administration. In early February 2025, ICG reported the arrest of

38. [*Burundi : un contexte sécuritaire volatile marqué par une impunité généralisée des Imbonerakure*](#), UN news, 4 July 2024

39. [*Crisis Watch Burundi*](#), International Crisis Group, 2025

two members of the FRODEBU party by this group in the north-western province of Bubanza, which also borders Rwanda. They were reportedly forced to leave FRODEBU to join CNDD-FDD.

In this context, several events during 2024 and early 2025 also revealed or were interpreted as signs of strong tensions between competing personalities and movements within the CNDD-FDD.

Firstly, the life sentence handed down to former CNDD-FDD general and Prime Minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni, who appeared to be a rival of President Evariste Ndayishimiye, was confirmed on appeal in June 2024. He is accused of plotting to overthrow the government, threatening the President's life, illegally enriching himself and destabilizing the economy. He was convicted at first instance in December 2023 along with five co-defendants, including several prominent figures such as the former commander of the Riot Squad and an intelligence officer.

Furthermore, while Ndayishimiye consolidates his power, he also faces internal criticism, notably from the Prime Minister and CNDD-FDD Secretary General Révérien Ndikuriyo. His hospitalization in Kenya in early 2025 gave rise to rumors of poisoning, illustrating the climate of mistrust that prevails in Burundi.

With just a few months to go before the elections, and with the war in the DRC nearing the Burundian border, **it has been noted that political polarization and rivalry are on the rise, and that pressure is mounting on an already considerably suppressed civic space. This trend of shrinking space is targeting opposition political parties, civil society organizations and non-activist citizens.**

A closed civic space where exile remains the main path to survival

Key points:

- The Burundian State continues to obstruct international justice and human rights protection mechanisms, targeting in particular the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burundi.
- Civic space remains heavily repressed and tightly controlled by the authorities. Exile is still the main survival option for civil society actors, while CSOs that are still present on the ground struggle to fulfill their mission under the strict control of the public authorities, urging them to keep a low profile.
- Civic space is also threatened by the suspension of the main human rights associations and the imprisonment of emblematic civil society figures.
- In this context, the international community's support for civic space within the framework of international cooperation remains limited compared to other issues deemed less controversial.

A mask of appeasement since 2020

The change of president in 2020 seemed to initiate appeasement at the level of human rights. However, this alternation at the Head of State, the result of a minimal compromise between the various factions of the CNDD-FDD, has not led to any real fundamental changes. Initially, the tone of the speeches was softened, accompanied by a number of gestures designed to appease national and international public opinion, as part of a strategic resumption of international relations. Nonetheless, repression has become more limited but is however still present. The tools and agents of repression still occupy key positions, protected by an enduring impunity. **The root causes of the problem remain unresolved, and no guarantee of safe return has been offered to the vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of Burundians still in exile.**

Between 2024 and early 2025, repression was still targeted, with tighter control of civic space, including intrusions into private communications. This period also saw a further tightening of political control, fueled by internal struggles within the CNDD-FDD and by the desire to make any political alternation impossible, notably by blocking Agathon Rwasa's candidacy. Official discourse is contradictory, oscillating between violence and temperance, including on the regional scene, sowing confusion in Burundian public opinion and maintaining a climate of terror.

40. [Disparitions forcées au Burundi : 10 ans de silence](#), TLP Burundi, 15 January 2025

In its 15 January 2025 report on enforced disappearances in Burundi, *Tournons La Page Burundi* (TLP Burundi)⁴⁰ reiterates that:

- Since 2020: At least 120 people have disappeared in Burundi and have not been found. In 2024, FOCODE recorded at least 40 new cases of enforced disappearance.
- Between 2015 and 2023, the following were recorded:
 - 13,072 arbitrary arrests;
 - 1,381 bodies recovered;
 - 1,225 cases of torture;
 - 4,040 murders;
 - 697 kidnappings.

Executive stranglehold on other powers and independent institutions

The independence of the legal system has always been fragile, to say the least, in Burundi. Despite some progress between 2005 and 2015, the crisis of Pierre Nkurunziza's third term in office marked a clear setback for the Burundian justice system. Political tensions led to systemic repression, with accusations of institutional bias, particularly in the treatment and trial of protesters and political opponents. In response to this situation, several international players such as the UN and Western countries (including the EU and the USA) urged Burundi to undertake reforms to guarantee a more independent and impartial justice system.

When he came to power, Évariste Ndayishimiye adopted a reformist stance, displaying a desire to improve the autonomy of the judicial system in response to international expectations. However, beyond declarations, **the question of the *de facto* independence of Burundi's justice system remains open.**

In a 2021 Q&A, ICG⁴¹ explained that the President had *"strengthened his grip on the legal system in January by approving the modification of a law governing the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM), an institution officially charged with guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary from the executive, but which in practice is headed by the President"*. The new law gave the CSM greater presidential power, in particular by allowing it to *"carry out quality control of all court judgments"*, which could amount to *"total control"* by the government.

It is in this context of doubt about the effective independence of institutions that the debate surrounding the Independent National Commission for Human Rights (CNIDH)⁴² comes into play. Created by the law of 5 January 2011, the CNIDH is supposed to be an independent institution in charge of promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms in Burundi. Its main mission is to monitor the human rights situation and investigate alleged violations. However, it was downgraded to B status in June 2024⁴³ by the World Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, on the basis of the Paris Principles,⁴⁴ which set minimum standards for independence. This category is reserved for institutions that do not fully meet the independence criteria but are still considered functional. The Burundian CNIDH was deemed to no longer fully respect its mandate as an independent institution on the basis of the following criteria:

- Political interference in the selection of CNIDH members;
- Lack of cooperation and exchanges with civil society organizations and international human rights protection mechanisms;
- Reluctance to deal with politically sensitive cases of human rights violations.

41. [*Burundi : opération de charme ou véritable changement*](#), International Crisis Group, 2 July 2021

42. [*Website of the CNIDH*](#)

43. [*L'ONU reconnaît la nécessité de continuer à suivre de près la crise des droits humains au Burundi*](#), HRW, 19 October 2024

44. [*Principes de Paris*](#), website of the GANHRI

A civil society where the main organizations are in exile

Following the extreme violence of the 2015 post-election repression, many historic human rights and civil society associations were deregistered or suspended.⁴⁵ **Despite promises of change, these measures remained in force under President Ndayishimiye's regime.** In order to continue their work, these organizations had to go into exile and continue to work remotely from other African countries, or from Europe and North America (such as the Iteka League, APRODH, ACAT-Burundi, RPA, FORSC, FOCODE). At the same time, other structures have been set up in exile (such as ESSDH and SOS-Torture Burundi).

In this respect, it is worth mentioning the sentencing in 2021 in absentia of 12 HRDs,⁴⁶ which occurred at a time when the EU was relaunching its political dialogue with Burundi. These life sentences targeted emblematic figures of Burundian civil society forced to flee the country after the 2015 crisis, and were therefore delivered in their absence. The defendants were denied the opportunity to participate in the trial, either in person or through their lawyers, in total violation of their right to a fair trial.

Although there are still Burundian civil society organizations on the ground, fear and mistrust prevail on all subjects, whether they concern youth, culture, social issues, the economy, memory, democracy or good governance. The result of this repression is extremely cautious speech and the use of concealment strategies to avoid displaying ambitions likely to be perceived as suspicious in the eyes of those in power. Intensive surveillance of civil society organizations has been put in place. These include compulsory re-registration and the imposition of ethnic quotas during recruitment, which can lead to a visit by the documentation services if the hiring is deemed to be non-compliant. What's more, dozens of associations have been created or strengthened by the government to support the regime, particularly during the period when Burundi was still subject to international sanctions. These served not only as propaganda channels to challenge international criticism, but also as a means of circumventing sanctions by facilitating access to funding. This situation has deeply tainted the work of "real" civil society which, despite numerous obstacles, persists in carrying out its actions in this restrictive environment.

45. *Burundi : nouvelle répression de la société civile burundaise*, FIACAT, 27 October 2016

46. *Burundi : condamnation in absentia à une peine de prison à perpétuité de douze DDH en exil*, OMCT, 18 February 2021

In its latest January 2025 report on civic space, the EU SEE consortium⁴⁷ classifies Burundi in the category of repressed civic space.⁴⁸ Burundi's civic space is characterized by *"significant restrictions on the implementation of civil and political rights such as the freedoms of expression, association and assembly guaranteed by the 2018 Constitution of the Republic of Burundi"*. The report also describes that *"human rights defenders, activists, journalists and members of the political opposition are victims of intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and unfair judicial proceedings"*. It concludes that *"in such a context of restrictive laws and increased control by the authorities, CSOs struggle to play their full role in promoting human rights and community development."*

Burundi's socio-economic situation, characterized by profound inequalities in wealth, galloping inflation and shortages of essential products, has led to a rise in social demands. In the face of these protests, the Burundian regime seems to prefer a security response. Indeed, although the police received a pay rise at the end of 2024, the only official response to the National Federation of Health Service Unions' (FNSS) demand for a pay rise in January 2025 was the arrest of five doctors.⁴⁹ This authoritarian attitude threatens not only to fuel popular discontent, but also to exacerbate the country's instability.

⁴⁷. This consortium monitors and analyses the state of civic space worldwide. It is funded by the European Union. The consortium is made up of Hivos (coordination), CIVICUS, Democracy Reporting International, European Partnership for Democracy, Forus and Transparency International.

⁴⁸. [Burundi Baseline Snapshot](#), EU SEE, 31 January 2025

⁴⁹. [Bujumbura : les renseignements burundais détiennent cinq médecins](#), SOS Média Burundi, 8 February 2025



Decrease in repression against the press, but vigilance is still required

Despite some positive signals sent by President Ndayishimiye in favor of press freedom, the Burundian media landscape is still highly regulated. **Independent media face numerous restrictions that limit their ability to operate freely.** Although some initiatives have been taken to relax state control, the reality on the ground remains one of strict supervision and increased surveillance of journalists and media outlets.

At the end of 2022, the censorship that had been imposed on the IWACU news website for almost five years was lifted, which Reporters Without Borders (RSF) considers a positive step forward.⁵⁰ This has led to a slight improvement in Burundi's ranking in the press freedom index, from 114th to 108th position between 2023 and 2024. Despite this progress, RSF also highlights the lack of willingness to sincerely investigate the 2016 disappearance of IWACU journalist Jean Bigirimana.

In the same spirit of relieving pressure on the press, the online media Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), which has been operating in exile since 2015, now manages to organize debates by inviting people present in Burundi. The latter have been able to testify openly without suffering arrest.

The new press law, revised in 2024 and promulgated by presidential decree on 12 July 2024, has generated considerable controversy despite the advances it claims to have introduced. In a September 2024 analysis report, Amnesty International⁵¹ first pointed out that *"one of the main reforms of the law is the partial decriminalization of press offenses."* Indeed, one of the key points is to replace criminal prosecution with fines: *"anyone publishing or disseminating information constituting the offenses of insult, damaging imputation, outrage, dissemination of false news, public outrage to public decency, slanderous denunciation, invasion of privacy, infringement of the presumption of innocence or revealing the identity of a victim of sexual violence."* Nevertheless, Amnesty International also notes that *"this text is still far from complying with international human rights standards."* In addition, the National Communication Council (CNC) prohibited several radio stations from broadcasting an organized debate on the bill, arguing on the pretext that *"it was too early to comment on a text that had not yet been promulgated by the President of the Republic."*

50. [Burundi](#), Reporters Without Borders, 2025

51. [Burundi. Le discours et la réalité. La répression de la société civile se poursuit sous le gouvernement d'Evariste Ndayishimiye](#), Amnesty International, 21 August 2024

Burundian journalists continue to face considerable obstacles, as evidenced by recent cases of arbitrary arrest and detention.

The August 2024 release of journalist Floriane Irangabiye following a presidential pardon was welcome news, but it's important to stress that she should never have been prosecuted or convicted in the first place. Sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 2023 for "undermining State security", a charge frequently used to muzzle dissident voices, her trial, marked by a lack of fairness and evidence, illustrates the climate of repression that hangs over the independent press in Burundi. More recently, the conviction of journalist Sandra Muhoza in December 2024 served as a reminder of the immense challenges facing this profession, which is so essential to the democratic functioning of a nation. This case is also a reminder of how difficult it is for civil society actors to work without fear of reprisals.

52. See the [page about Burundi on the ICC website](#)

A conflicting relationship with international human rights mechanisms

Since the start of the 2015 crisis, Burundi has maintained conflicting relations with international human rights mechanisms, rejecting any cooperation with bodies such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) or UN bodies. **This stance came against a backdrop of growing tensions with the international community**, with the Burundian government invoking the defense of its national sovereignty to justify its refusal.

Following the terrible and systematic repression in the country in 2015 and 2020, the International Criminal Court (ICC)⁵² announced a preliminary examination of the situation in Burundi on 25 April 2016. It *"focuses on acts of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as cases of enforced disappearance allegedly committed since April 2015 in Burundi"*. *The ICC estimates that for this period, "more than 430 people are believed to have been killed, at least 3,400 arrested and more than 230,000 Burundians forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries."* Nevertheless, the investigation faces numerous obstacles, mainly due to the Burundian government's refusal to cooperate with the Court and the country's withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2017.

In September 2016, the UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry on Burundi through Resolution 33/24. This commission carried out its mission until 2021⁵³ when it was replaced by a UNSR on the human rights situation in Burundi, thus reducing the risk of criminal sanctions. Since then, the Burundian government has firmly opposed UN justice mechanisms. In 2019⁵⁴, it demanded and obtained the closure of the UN Human Rights Office, which had been in operation since 1996, seriously complicating the work of documenting human rights violations and verifying the denunciations made by civil society organizations.

In the same spirit, the UNSR's mandate is now being targeted. Although the current mandate-holder, Fortuné Gaetan Zongo, a judge and citizen of Burkina Faso, manages to monitor and document the human rights situation in Burundi despite limited resources, the Burundian authorities persist in refusing any cooperation. They deny him access to the territory and target local people wishing to collaborate with him. Despite these obstacles, his mandate was extended for a further year in October 2024⁵⁵ testifying to the international community's support for human rights in Burundi. For its part, the Burundian government remains inflexible, denouncing what it sees as a policy of "double standards", while other countries that refuse to cooperate on these issues escape similar pressure.

In its latest resolution of October 2024, the Human Rights Council⁵⁶ also condemned *"widespread impunity for all human rights violations and abuses"*, urged *"the Government of Burundi to ensure that, regardless of their affiliation or status, all perpetrators of such acts, whether members of the defense and security forces or of the ruling party's youth movement, the Imbonerakure, are held accountable for their actions, and that the victims can seek justice and reparation"*, and urged *"the Government to reverse its decision to denounce the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and to honor its legal obligation to cooperate fully with the Court in the ongoing investigation"*.

53. [Commission d'enquête sur le Burundi](#), website of the OHCHR, 2025

54. [Fermeture du Bureau des droits de l'homme des NU au Burundi](#), OHCHR, 5 March 2019

55. [Situation des droits humains au Burundi, rapport du RSNU présenté le 24 octobre 2024](#), UNGA, 23 July 2024

56. [Résolution du 2 octobre 2024 sur la situation des droits de l'homme au Burundi](#), UNGA, 2 October 2024

With a view to the next electoral cycles, the Council also asked “the Government of Burundi to create the conditions necessary for the holding of inclusive, transparent and credible legislative elections in 2025, in accordance with its international obligations and commitments,” and requested “the Government of Burundi to guarantee the full independence of the judiciary.”

During its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2023 at the UN Human Rights Council, the Burundian delegation left the meeting, offended by the presence of exiled HRDs, “**criminals convicted in Burundi according to Bujumbura**”.⁵⁷ During the same review, the Burundian government pledged in its report to cooperate fully with the UN⁵⁸ in the field of international human rights mechanisms:

“107. Burundi continues to implement the accepted recommendations of the committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of international human rights treaties.

108. Burundi reaffirms its commitment to work with all United Nations bodies, including the Human Rights Council. It cooperates with human rights bodies and mechanisms at both the regional and international levels.”

Despite this opposition, the UN is maintaining its human rights activities in Burundi. A multi-partner trust fund⁵⁹ has been set up, including a component dedicated to the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, although its total approved budget for the period 2024-2028 amounts to US\$4.8 million, the UN has yet to raise \$3.4 million, or 78.43% of the target.

Burundi was elected in 2024 as one of the 18 new members of the UN Human Rights Council, where it has sat since 1 January 2025.⁶⁰

⁵⁷. [Le Burundi claque la porte du Comité des droits de l'homme des NU](#), RFI, 5 July 2023

⁵⁸. [Rapport du Burundi soumis en application des résolutions 5/1 et 16/21 du Conseil des droits de l'homme](#), UNGA, 10 February 2023

⁵⁹. [Burundi Multi-Partner Trust Fund](#), UN Trust Fund Office, 2025

⁶⁰. [L'Assemblée générale élit 18 nouveaux membres du Conseil des droits de l'homme](#), UN, 9 October 2024

Focus on the international re-engagement strategy - a non-prioritized civic space

Burundi's election to the UN Human Rights Council is part of the policy of re-engagement and diplomatic disenfranchisement initiated after the 2020 presidential election and Evariste Ndayishimiye's accession to power. This strategy was also reflected in the country's assumption of the The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) presidency at the end of October 2024. Another example of this dynamic was the credit facility agreement signed with the IMF in 2023, which is now considered a failure.

Western countries account for the vast majority of official development aid, whether bilateral or multilateral (UN agencies, EU, World Bank Group). In a move to re-engage cooperation, European diplomats have also lifted the majority of sanctions (restrictive and appropriate measures). In June 2024, for example, Belgium announced a multi-annual support package worth 75 million euros, earmarked for the agriculture, health and education sectors.

The objective of the donor countries was to push for a return to a certain institutional normalcy in comparison with the catastrophic situation of 2015-2020. By supporting Burundi financially and diplomatically, they hoped to foster more peaceful governance and a more open political environment. However, it has to be said that such normalcy has not yet returned to Burundi. Authoritarian control of power, restrictions on fundamental freedoms and political tensions persist, preventing the stable functioning of institutions.

Despite these observations, **support for more relaxed control of civic space is still not a priority for international, and particularly European, cooperation**, which favors other themes perceived as less controversial. For example, the 2021-2027 program of European funds allocated to Burundi under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) initially earmarked 13%⁶¹ for the rule of law and support for civil society. In an amendment made in early 2025, the share of this provision was reduced to 8%⁶² and the civil society support component disappeared.

61. [Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021-2027 for Burundi](#), DG INTPA, 8 March 2022

62. [Decision amending the MIP 2021-2027 for Sub-Saharan Africa](#), DG INTPA, 31 October 2024

Since the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, the Western and Central and Southern African diplomats involved and present in the area aim to reach a peace agreement in the east of the DRC by inviting the various stakeholders involved in this crisis, including Burundi, to the negotiating table. **It seems essential to avoid repeating the mistakes of 2021-2023, when the lifting of sanctions without concrete compensations failed to rebuild or free up civic space**, which is essential for development, thus depriving the EU of levers to promote the rule of law. For example, during a long-awaited visit by the EUSR for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, in February 2023, he emphasized the urgent need to reform the judicial system, raised some worrying individual cases and urged the authorities to facilitate visits by the EUSR for Human Rights to Burundi. Just after his visit, on February 14, 2023, five HRDs were arbitrarily arrested and illegally detained.⁶³ These arrests and imprisonments were widely interpreted as a brutal warning against HRDs and Europeans, aimed at dissuading any challenge to the government and refusing any foreign interference in the country's internal affairs.

Like these arrests, Burundi's votes on resolutions linked to Russia's invasion of Ukraine confirm its distance from the Western bloc.

63. *Burundi : l'emprisonnement de 5 DDH est un acharnement judiciaire injustifié*, TLP Burundi, 17 February 2023

Burundi's voting record at the UN General Assembly regarding Russia's war in Ukraine 2014-2025

UN General Assembly resolutions	Burundi vote
ES-11/L.10. Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, 18 February 2024 (Results)	Against
78/316. Safety and security of nuclear facilities of Ukraine, including the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, 11 July 2024 (Results)	Against
ES-11/6. Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, 23 February 2023 (Results)	Abstention
ES-11/5. Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine, 14 November 2022 (Results)	Abstention
ES-11/4. Territorial integrity of Ukraine : defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, 12 October 2022 (Results)	Abstention
ES-11/3. Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council, 7 April 2022 (Results)	Absence
ES-11/2. Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine, 24 March 2022 (Results)	Abstention
ES-11/1. Aggression against Ukraine, 12 March 2022 (Results)	Abstention
68/262. The territorial integrity of Ukraine, 27 March 2014 (Results)	Abstention
Total: 9 resolutions	Total: 2 against, 6 abstentions and 1 absence

In this context, it's worth mentioning the Burundian nickel mining contract awarded in March 2022 to the Russian company East African Region Project Group. This 10-year contract is estimated to be worth US\$15 billion.⁶⁴ It is of particular importance, as it comes at a time when foreign direct investment is stagnating at US\$20 million a year, three times less than the annual amount of remittances from the diaspora (US\$60 million in 2022) and ten times less than official development assistance, mainly from Western countries (US\$606 million in 2021 and US\$617 million in 2022, according to the OECD).⁶⁵

64. [Mémorandum d'entente avec East African Region Project Group](#), IWACU, 2 April 2022

65. [States of Fragility report](#) Burundi, OECD, 2025

Socio-economic situation: a most alarming state of affairs

Key points:

The socio-economic situation in Burundi at the beginning of 2025 is extremely worrisome:

- Ongoing since 2022, the fuel shortage has been exacerbated by the resurgence of war in the DRC since November 2024, resulting in extremely high prices and scarcity of the product;
- This fuel shortage is accompanied by a shortage of many basic necessities such as flour, oil and beverages;
- The currency crisis is characterized by a significant gap between the official exchange rate and that of the black market, with the Burundian franc worth around 2.5 times less than the US dollar, resulting in a 60% loss of officially exchanged funds;
- Faced with the inability of the Burundian authorities to harmonize exchange rates, the IMF decided to cease cooperation with the country, raising the risk of alienation from other international partners;
- The economic crisis appears to be benefiting the ruling party, whose most prominent members are suspected of controlling both the formal and informal economies.

Parallel exchange rates and an ongoing currency crisis

On January 18, 2025, the IMF terminated an aid program for Burundi approved in July 2023, in a phase of rapprochement between Western stakeholders and the Burundian government. The program, worth US\$271 million⁶⁶ over three years, was conditional on the implementation of reforms to reinforce macroeconomic stability. In particular, it aimed to improve the management of foreign exchange policy, a central point in demonstrating Burundi's progress since the 2015 crisis. In October 2023, a new foreign exchange rate code was adopted, and in January 2024, a first review of the reforms was deemed satisfactory by the IMF.

66. [Le conseil d'administration du FMI approuve un accord de 38 mois en faveur du Burundi](#), IMF, 19 July 2023

Since then, the IMF had been advocating a devaluation of the Burundi franc (Fbu) to bring the official and unofficial exchange rates with the US dollar into line. The authorities envisaged moving from a controlled float to a fully floating exchange rate regime. However, efforts to achieve these objectives are hampered by the weakness of the interbank market, the difficulty of coordinating monetary and fiscal policies, and the intermittent shortage of

foreign exchange reserves.⁶⁷ The Burundian government has been unable to control exchange rates and has refused to devalue its currency, resulting in the termination of the IMF program and the non-disbursement of the remaining funds, nearly US\$200 million.⁶⁸

This has also led to the suspension of other projects by international partners, such as those negotiated with the World Bank, which were dependent on the successful execution of the IMF program, and is also likely to complicate cooperation with the EU, making the possibility of budgetary support hoped for by the Burundian government even more remote.

Several country risk analyses by COFACE, the French Treasury and the analysis unit of the British magazine The Economist have highlighted this type of program to show the “*return of international financial support*” for a country sometimes compared to “*little Eritrea*”. Indeed, the economic trajectories of the two countries are similar. They are both marked by international isolation, an opaque economic governance and heavy dependence on international aid.

67. [Chapitre pays Burundi](#), The Economist, 2025

68. [Burundi : échec d'un programme d'aide du FMI après le refus de dévaluer la monnaie locale](#), RFI, 3 February 2025

69. [Rapport sur la gestion des réserves internationales de la CEMAC](#), IMF

Points forts

- | Richesses du sous-sol (terres rares, nickel) en grande partie encore inexploitées et potentiel agricole (café, thé)
- | Retour du soutien financier international
- | Désenclavement progressif du pays

Points faibles

- | Institutions politiques et sociales fragiles dans un pays marqué par les putschs, l'autoritarisme et les conflits ethniques
- | Environnement des affaires extrêmement dégradé (réglementation incertaine, manque de devises et prime de change sur le marché parallèle élevée)
- | Manque de diversification de l'économie qui repose essentiellement sur le secteur primaire
- | Agriculture de subsistance peu productive et concentrée autour du lac Tanganyika, sujet à de fréquents débordements
- | Faiblesse des infrastructures (énergie, eau, transport, sanitaire)
- | Extrême pauvreté répandue (62 % de la population en 2023)

The situation is further complicated by the fact that foreign currency reserves are estimated at 1 month of imports, whereas the IMF recommends a minimum of 3 months, and even 5 months when instability is due to greater exposure to fluctuations in raw materials.⁶⁹ This is precisely the case in Burundi, as its economy is largely based on agricultural exports, making the country particularly vulnerable to variations in world prices.

COFACE website – [Burundi page](#), consulted on 31 January 2025

Within this context, the Burundian government organized a round table on 5 and 6 December 2024, in the presence of numerous international partners, including the African Development Bank and China. Many took advantage of this event to send messages calling for the stabilization of formal and informal exchange rates, appeals which went unheeded. On the eve of this round table, the Burundian government announced on X a subsidy, officially “without counterpart”, of US\$14 million from China.⁷⁰

Rising cost of living and scarcity of basic commodities

High inflation has plagued the Burundian economy for many years, with official rates particularly high. According to the Central Bank of Burundi, inflation was estimated at 36% in December 2024.⁷¹ To illustrate, the following is a comparison of staple food prices at the beginning of February 2025:

- 1kg of dry maize officially costs 1,700 Fbu (compared with 680 in 2021), but is sold for 4,200 Burundi francs.⁷
- An Amstel-type beer officially costs 3,500 Fbu, but can be sold for 6,500 - 7,000 Fbu.
- 1kg of sugar now costs between 9,000 and 11,000 Fbu (compared with less than 5,000 Fbu in 2021).
- 1 skewer of meat can cost between 6,000 and 8,000 Fbu in some places, and accompanied skewers 12,000 Fbu.
- It's not uncommon to find the monthly rent for a three-bedroom family home in Bujumbura rising from 180,000 Fbu in 2020 to 450,000 Fbu in 2025. Where the average salary for a teacher is 500,000 Fbu.
- At the beginning of February 2025, as fuel became increasingly scarce, the price of a liter of petrol on the black market rose to 26,000 Fbu, or US\$9 at the official exchange rate.

Another illustration of this crisis of parallel exchange rates and lack of foreign currency is the case of a teacher paid 500,000 Fbu. Between late 2024 and early 2025, his salary corresponded to US\$ 172 at the official rate of US\$ 1 = Fbu 2,900. On the Burundian black market, where the rate is 1 US\$ = 8,000 Fbu, the teacher's salary was worth just 62 US\$.

70. [Post on X](#) from Burundi's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 December 2024

71. Website of the [Central Bank of Burundi](#)

72. The first price corresponds to the price at which Burundian farmers sell their maize to the National Agency for Agricultural Stock Management (ANAGESCA), while the second is the price at which intermediaries resell this maize. The difference in price is collected by companies and resellers, often considered to be close to the government.

Rate Late 2024 / early 2025	Salary in Burundi francs (Fbu)	Salary in US dollars (US\$)
Official rate, 1 US\$ = 2,900 Fbu	500, 000 Fbu	US\$ 172
Informal rate, 1 US\$ = 8,000 Fbu	500,000 Fbu	US\$ 62

In response to these rate differentials, several small money changers were arrested at the end of 2024, but the main black market operators remained untroubled. This situation may have been interpreted as a message from the authorities to avoid a further widening of the gap between official and parallel rates. Furthermore, the fact that the main money changers were not directly targeted raises rumors of collusion with political and security officials.

The increase in these prices, in addition to the fuel shortage which has been going on since 2022, has made certain basic products such as oil, sugar and beverages virtually impossible to find. It has been noted that it has become almost impossible to provide micro-credit in a situation where US\$ 1 is officially exchanged for 2,900 Fbu against 8,000 Fbu on the black market, effectively paralyzing a large part of the economy.

This economic situation is all the more serious given that Burundi is one of the least developed countries in the world. In 2023, it ranked 187th out of 193 countries on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index. It is also very densely populated, with an average of over 420 inhabitants per km² and peaks of 700 inhabitants per km² for a total population estimated at 13.6 million. This situation gives rise to a high level of socio-economic vulnerability. According to several international sources, between 62%⁷³ and 87%⁷⁴ of Burundi's population lives below the national poverty line, and almost 11% of the total population is in need of humanitarian aid.⁷⁵ The latest available figures from 2023 show particularly high food insecurity in a country where only 16.6% of the population has access to quality and quantity food, with the remainder ranging from marginally secure (42.2%) to severely secure (8.9%) to moderately secure (32.3%).⁷⁶

73. [Website of the World Bank Group](#)

74. [Burundi, situation économique et financière](#), Direction générale du Trésor français

75. [Burundi](#), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

76. [Burundi Annual Country Report](#), World Food Program, 2023

Hyper-favoritism and power-based control over the formal and informal economy

This economic crisis is the result of poor management and benefits CNDD-FDD members in the short term. It is the party's most influential figures who control, or are suspected of controlling, this dual formal and informal economy. This control over economic flows is seen as essential to prevent others from enriching themselves and becoming a threat to the ruling power. In reality, **this is a one-party State where the ruling party is considered to be that of the people, and where no entity can exist between the people and the State.**

In a 2021 Q&A, ICG questioned whether President Ndayishimiye's commitment to reform was a charade or a sign of real change.⁷⁷ His efforts to *"promote a reformist program that would dismantle the mechanisms of repression created by his predecessor"* were partly recognized, but ICG was particularly concerned about the *"resistance"* of the CNDD-FDD, and especially of those who did not want him to become President. In particular, it cited the example of *"generals"* not *"in favor of closer ties with the EU and any conditionality that might accompany the resumption of budgetary aid, having enriched themselves during Nkurunziza's fifteen years in power"*, and this while it was analyzed that *"the absence of reform"* could *"expose the country to an even longer economic crisis and the political tensions that accompany it."*

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) state of fragility reports,⁷⁸ Burundi accounts for several problems in terms of political fragility that are considered as "severe", i.e. the highest grade in the areas of:

- Prevalence of favoritism;
- Perception of corruption;
- Constraints on the judiciary by the executive;
- Constraints on legislative power by executive power;
- Risk of being arrested for disseminating political content online;
- Risk of being murdered or tortured for political reasons;
- Restriction of political rights.

⁷⁷. [*Burundi : opération de charme ou véritable changement*](#), International

Crisis Group, 2 July 2021

⁷⁸. [*States of Fragility report Burundi*](#), OECD, 2025

In terms of perceived corruption, Burundi is at the bottom of Transparency International's rankings (162nd out of 180⁷⁹).

In the run-up to the elections, we also received several reports of “contributions” demanded by members of the ruling party, likened to “racket” as reported by TLP-Burundi.⁸⁰ This practice has become commonplace in the run-up to elections. In 2024, several articles (see [IWACU](#), [RPA](#), [SOS Médias Burundi](#)) and reports (see [TLP Burundi](#) and [Ligue Iteka](#)) had pointed to this phenomenon.

There are two kinds of contributions, both of which reflect a problem of cash flow and good management of public institutions, as well as predatory behavior on the part of the institutions of power. Some contributions officially relate to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), while others are used to finance the CNDD-FDD campaign. In this context, there have been several reports of restrictions on market access. Farmers wishing to sell their produce must present a receipt for payment of “contributions”, or risk being denied market access. This has notably been reported by RPA on 26 August 2024, concerning the COTEBU market,⁸¹ located in the commune of Ntahangwa, in the province of Bujumbura..

It is also in this context that, in early 2025, a report by the Forum for the Strengthening of Civil Society (FORSC)⁸² recorded 29 cases of expropriation across the country for the benefit of personalities close to or members of the ruling party. According to FORSC, the intensification of such operations in the run-up to elections highlights the mechanism employed by the ruling party to secure the support of influential figures and thus retain control of the economic and political spheres. The expropriation process is said to affect several hundred hectares in the provinces of Cibitoke, Bubanza, Rumonge and Bujumbura. In an environment where the rule of law is lacking, where the boundary between legal and illegal is blurred, where functional compensation mechanisms are non-existent and where the balance of power in favor of the circles of power is disproportionate, it is appropriate to question the social and economic impact of these expropriations which, according to the report, would leave thousands of families without resources.

79. [Burundi Corruption](#)

[Perceptions Index](#),

Transparency International, 2024

80. [Déclaration suite aux contribution forcées par le parti CNDD-FDD pour les élections à venir](#), TLP Burundi, 11

September 2024

81. [Des Burundais privés de leurs droits pour avoir refusé de donner leurs contributions au parti CNDD-FDD](#), RPA, 30

August 2024

82. [Expropriation massive au Burundi : Des milliers de familles dépossédées au profit d'intérêts privés](#), RPA, 2

February 2025

Another instance, this time on the issue of energy. In 2022-2023, the Burundian President addressed the fuel crisis by deciding to break Interpetrol's monopoly on the import of petroleum products. This Tanzanian company controlled all stages of the sector, including import, distribution, transport and storage.⁸³ Two companies had been designated by the President to take over these activities: Regideso, the public company responsible for supplying water and electricity in Burundi; and Prestige,⁸⁴ a private company created for the occasion by a shareholder group unknown to the public, but which, according to RPA, included the President's wife. Despite this presidential intervention, the fuel crisis remains unresolved. The issue seems to be stirring up rivalries and tensions within the ruling party, with criticism of the President and his wife's alleged stranglehold on the sector. There are reports of tensions between the President, who tends to favor official channels, and the Prime Minister, who is said to encourage people to make do with what they have in the face of shortages, resulting in the establishment of an informal market.

The situation deteriorated further in early 2025 with the advance of the M23 into South Kivu, along the Burundian border. This led to an interruption in fuel supplies to Burundi from the DRC. As a result, the number of vehicles circulating in Burundi's economic capital has dropped significantly since 28 January 2025, the date on which Goma was taken.

In this country, where almost 80% of the population lives from subsistence farming, the import of fertilizers has been banned in 2019 in favor of fertilizers produced locally as a monopoly by a company owned by a member of the CNDD-FDD.⁸⁵ The company *Fertilisants Organo-minéraux Industries* (FOMI) is regularly criticized for the poor quality of its inputs⁸⁶ as well as for failing to supply Burundian farmers throughout the country with inputs paid for in advance.⁸⁷ Despite numerous public statements by CNDD-FDD political leaders, the government is unable to honor its promises to improve the situation. Farmers are under the control of the State-party, regularly called upon to prove their loyalty to the CNDD-FDD to be able to obtain fertilizers essential to their economic activity.⁸⁸

83. *Burundi : le président accuse les traîtres à la nation d'être la cause de la pénurie de carburant*, RFI, 29 June 2024

84. *RPA's post on X*, 7 January 2025

85. *Au Burundi, la colère de paysans dépourvus de l'engrais qu'ils ont payé d'avance*, RFI, 16 January 2023

86. *Réutilisation des engrais chimiques : l'efficacité des engrais FOMI remise en cause*, Burundi Eco, 15 September 2023

87. *Région Centre/Saison cultural, s'annonce très mouvementée chez les agriculteurs*, IWACU, 18 September 2024

88. *Bubanza : favoritisme du CNDD-FDD dans la distribution de fertilisants*, SOS Médias Burundi, 22 December 2024

Preparing for the elections: a race controlled by the authorities

Key points:

- Several signs point out to a tailor-made electoral framework, designed by the authorities, and aimed at stifling all forms of expression and competition, including:
 - The voter registration process was marked by acts of intimidation by the State and representatives of the ruling party;
 - The electoral law was revised three times between June and December 2024, discriminating against the opposition;
 - The use of forced contributions and intimidation to finance the ruling party and guarantee a high turnout.
- Depending on developments in the security situation in the Great Lakes region, the proposal to postpone the 2025 elections might come back into play.

Burundi's electoral experience has been marked by numerous tensions, political contestations and instability that have profoundly affected the credibility of previous electoral processes. During the last general elections in 2020, the country once again faced numerous irregularities, including acts of intimidation, arrests of opposition members and restrictions on press freedom. As the 2025 elections approach, many challenges remain. Resolving them is crucial to ensuring the legitimacy of the upcoming polls.

Electoral calendar 2025-2027

- Legislative and communal council elections on 5 June 2025;
- Senatorial elections (by communal councillors) on 23 July 2025;
- Elections for hill and ward councillors on 25 August 2025;
- Presidential elections in 2027.

In light of the criteria of election observation reports considered to be international best practice (SADC, AU, EU), hereafter is an analysis of preparations for the Burundian elections in June 2025.

Pressure on voter registrations

The voter registration process was marked by acts of intimidation by the State and representatives of the ruling party, notably its youth league, Imbonerakure, to force citizens to register on the electoral roll. It has become customary over the pre-electoral period to have to show the registration receipt to move around, obtain administrative documents or carry out certain economic activities as a trader. This strategy of mobilization by force, which has been observed throughout the country, both in Bujumbura and in rural areas, contributes to creating a climate of fear and intimidation, particularly towards political opponents. It also runs counter to the right of every citizen to participate freely in the electoral process.

89. [Organic law n°1/05 of 16 March 2023](#)

Voter registration was not particularly popular. The policy of intimidation seems to have been aimed at achieving a very high turnout in June-August 2025 , in order to present the winners as enjoying broad popular legitimacy. This type of practice fosters an opaque electoral environment in which the authorities can exert pressure on voters to guarantee results favorable to the ruling party.

Administrative redistribution

A politico-administrative redrawing was carried out by the law of 16 March 2023,⁸⁹ reducing the number of municipalities from 119 to 42 and the number of provinces from 18 to 5. As with other recent legislation, this law has been criticized for its contested objectives and lack of an inclusive consultation process, despite the fact that such a decision has a direct impact on the representation and needs of local populations.

Furthermore, many observers suspect that this redistribution was carried out with the aim of reducing the electoral influence of the CNDD-FDD's rival movements, starting with the CNL. The reduction in the number of municipalities and provinces could facilitate control of future elections by reducing the ability of opponents to mobilize voters in certain regions.

Election campaign finance

In addition to forced contributions to fund elections and the ruling party's campaign, **Burundi has neither a legal framework establishing a ceiling for campaign financing, nor transparent control mechanisms.** This leads to total opacity regarding the origins of campaign funding, whether public, private, Burundian or international, opening the door to possible manipulation of the electoral process.

90. [Droit de succession : Ndirakobuca soulève tollé chez les militantes de la cause féminine](#), IWACU, 15 November 2021
91. [Déclaration au regard de la discrimination de la femme burundaise pour jouir de son droit de propriété](#), FORSC, 23 September 2024
92. [States of Fragility report Burundi](#), OECD, 2025

Women's participation and ethnic representation

At present, there are a few initiatives to raise women's awareness of elections, financed on a small scale by European stakeholders and the UN.

The representativeness of the current members of the National Assembly and Senate is apparently maintained according to the principles of ethnic and gender representativeness in force since the early 2000s and the Arusha Accords. However, it is important to remember that these quotas are achieved via unclear co-optation mechanisms in an environment where political freedoms remain severely restricted. Furthermore, it should be noted that among the victims of the repression put in place since 2015, women have been particularly hard hit and are still suffering the tragic consequences.

Statements by the President of the National Assembly opposing urban women's demands for equal treatment in inheritance rights,⁹⁰ and more recently by the President of the Supreme Court, who questioned case law favoring the equality of girls and boys in land inheritance,⁹¹ highlight the deep tensions that still exist between efforts to make progress on the issue of gender equality and anchored resistance within Burundian institutions. They underline the difficulty of imposing reforms in a context where resistance from political elites continues to hold back any significant progress towards equal rights for women.

In its report on Burundi's fragility, the OECD stresses that **the political emancipation of Burundian women is extremely low, and that the State has not put in place sufficient mechanisms to prevent and manage gender-based violence.**⁹²

Women's representation in the National Assembly:

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union:⁹³ *"In 2020, 72 Hutus and 28 Tutsis (including a total of 35 women) were directly elected. To comply with the 60/40 split between Hutus and Tutsis and the 30% quota for women, 20 Tutsis (9 men and 11 women) were co-opted, giving a total of 46 women out of 120 members. In addition, 3 Twa representatives (including one woman) were co-opted. The National Assembly therefore comprises a total of 123 members, including 47 women."*

93. [Website of Burundi's National Assembly](#)

94. [Website of Burundi's Senate](#)

The percentage of women Members of Parliament (MPs) is 38.2%.

In political terms, the breakdown is as follows:

- 86 MPs for the CNDD-FDD;
- 32 MPs for the CNL;
- 2 MPs for the Union pour le Progrès National (UPRONA);
- 3 MPs for the Twa ethnic group.

Representation of women in the Senate:

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union:⁹⁴ *"As of August 5, 2020, the Senate included a total of 16 women out of 39 senators, as follows:*

- *15 women among the 36 indirectly elected senators (two senators for each of the 18 provinces) ;*
- *1 woman among three co-opted Twa senators."*

The percentage of women senators is 41.7%.

Politically, the breakdown is as follows

- 34 women senators for the CNDD-FDD
- 1 for the CNL ;
- 1 for UPRONA;
- 3 for the Twa ethnic group.

Independent election observation

In 2015, EU observers were forced to leave the country in the face of the violence. In 2020, the Burundian government refused to invite the UN and AU to observe the elections, accusing them of “being too close to the opposition”.⁹⁵ **The EU has not been invited to observe the 2025 elections, and there is no guarantee that continental and regional African organizations will be able to deploy missions in June.**

As regards independent civil society, too many organizations are in exile. However, since 2024, The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Burundi (CECAB) has been preparing to observe the elections at provincial and commune level.

An electoral code tailor-made for the ruling party

The electoral code was amended three times between June and December 2024, too frequently, in a discretionary manner, resulting in a deeply unfair electoral process.

The year 2024 was marked by a new organic law (n°1/12)⁹⁶ of 5 June 2024 amending organic law n°1/11 of 20 May 2019 on the electoral code. Two presidential decrees, n°100/123 of 19 July 2024⁹⁷ and n°100/187 of 7 December 2024,⁹⁸ respectively specified the functioning of the Electoral Commission and the rules for standing as a candidate. These decisions run counter to international best practice for several reasons.

The [Venice Commission's 2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#) recognizes that the electoral framework should not be reformed less than a year before the elections (paragraph 65⁹⁹):

“It is not so much changing voting systems which is a bad thing – they can always be changed for the better – as changing them frequently or just before (within one year of) elections. Even when no manipulation is intended, changes will seem to be dictated by immediate party political interests.”

95. [Website of Burundi's National Assembly](#)

96. [Organic law n°1/12 of 5 June 2024](#)

97. [Decree n° 100/123 of 19 July 2024](#)

98. [Decree n° 100/187 of 7 December 2024](#)

99. [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#), Venice Commission, 18-19 October 2002

Article 23 of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance¹⁰⁰ stipulates that States Parties agree not to resort to any amendment or revision of Constitutions or legal instruments that undermines the principles of political alternation without exposing themselves to sanctions. Burundi is a signatory but has not ratified the Charter.

Article 128 of the organic law of June 2024 stipulated that an independent candidate must not have been a member of a political movement for at least one year. On March 10, 2024, an extraordinary congress of the CNL was convened without the agreement of its Chairman, Agathon Rwasa, or its Secretary General. Following this meeting, a new leader was appointed to head the party: a businessman reputedly close to the ruling party, according to *Jeune Afrique*.¹⁰¹ Agathon Rwasa, the last major opposition figure left in Burundi, who came second in the 2020 presidential election, was ousted from his own party.

Article 2 of Presidential Decree no. 100/187 of 7 December 2024 specifies that *"a member of a governing body of a political party may only stand as an independent candidate in these elections after a period of two years has elapsed since his ousting or resignation from his original political party."* This article seems to have been written to exclude Agathon Rwasa, a historic opponent of the CNDD-FDD, from the 2025 electoral race, at a time when the 2027 presidential election is already at the heart of political strategies. He was an independent candidate in a coalition of opposition movements for 2025. The one-year period of non-membership could have been contested between March 2024 and June 2025.

In its analysis of the 2024 electoral code, the TLP Burundi coalition considers that the code contains discriminatory and unfair provisions that make it difficult for independents to exercise their right to stand for election, with the inevitable consequence that they are excluded from the political game.¹⁰²

On 3 January 2025, on the basis of the presidential decree of December 2024, CENI reaffirmed the ban on dual party membership. Members or ex-members of the CNL opposition party can therefore not run under the banner of the opposition coalition as independents. The Constitutional Court confirmed this decision on 7 January 2025. It also authorized the *Burundi Bwa Bose* coalition to resubmit lists for the elections, which the political

100. Charte Africaine de la démocratie, des élections et de la gouvernance, African Union, 30 January 2007

101. Au Burundi, l'opposant Agathon Rwasa se fait voler son parti, *Jeune Afrique*, 11 March 2024

102. Burundi : le nouveau code électoral, un instrument potentiel d'exclusion, TLP Burundi, 7 January 2025

grouping did. This reflects an evolution in the approach of the opposition parties, who have chosen to abandon the boycott strategy adopted in the past, so as not to leave a total monopoly to the ruling party. This decision is also aimed at guaranteeing a degree of political visibility and securing funds linked to elected representatives' allowances. The participation of the Burundi Bwa Bose coalition to the election will enable it to have representatives at polling stations alongside those of the ruling party, thus ensuring an opposition presence in the electoral process.

In its current configuration, the CENI cannot guarantee its independence. As a matter of fact, its chairman is a former minister and still maintains links with the ruling party, which raises doubts about the institution's ability to act impartially.

For TLP Burundi, it is also important to point out that the new deposit amounts introduced to be able to stand as a candidate are likely to exclude a very large majority of people, other than members of the ruling party, particularly at the communal level. A deposit of 200,000 Fbu (US\$68) has been introduced at this electoral level. Bonds for deputy and senator candidates have also been increased, from 400,000 FBu (US\$130) to 2 million FBu (US\$680), and from 30 million (US\$10,200) to 100 million FBu (US\$34,000) for presidential candidates. In an environment where both the formal and informal economies seem to be under the control of CNDD-FDD members, these deposit amounts may insidiously make it even more difficult for non-members of the ruling party to exercise their right to stand for election.

According to a 2018 World Bank and United Nations Sustainable Development Group study titled *"Pathways to Peace - Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict"*¹⁰³ and based on hundreds of studies and reports worldwide, here are the criteria for guaranteeing peace and stability in a country:

- Responsible political leadership and broad participation of all political actors to mitigate "winner-takes-all" processes.
- Inclusive, representative and integrated power-sharing arrangements, favoring better prospects for peaceful resolution.
- Institutionalization of power-sharing arrangements through constitutions and other legal frameworks, rather than ad hoc agreements, improving their sustainability.

103. [Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict](#), UN Sustainable Development Group, October 2018

Yet, as the above analysis demonstrates, **Burundi's electoral code for the period 2024-2025 has been carefully crafted to restrict the possibilities of political competition and consolidate the domination of the ruling party.** By locking in the rules of the game, this code creates an environment that systematically disadvantages opponents, making any credible alternative virtually impossible.

The 2025 electoral sequence appears to be under the total control of the ruling party and the President. In the context of the war in the DRC and its implications for Burundi, as well as the State's financial problems, the possibility was raised of postponing these elections until 2027, to be held in conjunction with the presidential election. **However, depending on developments in the security situation in the region, a postponement of the elections could once again become a credible alternative.**



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