

Freedom in the World 2025 - Burundi

Overview

Burundi has been in political and economic crisis since 2015. Democratic gains made after the 12-year civil war ended in 2005 have been undone by a shift toward authoritarian politics and violent repression against perceived opponents of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD–FDD).

Key Developments in 2024

- The government closed Burundi’s land border with Rwanda in January following deadly attacks by the Resistance Movement for the Rule of Law–Tabara (RED–Tabara) rebel group, which the Rwandan authorities have been accused of supporting.
- With elections expected in 2025, the ruling party increased pressure on the political opposition during the year. A government-backed faction of the opposition National Congress of Liberty (CNL) elected a new leader in March, and the government quickly recognized him as the CNL president, effectively sidelining incumbent CNL leader and former presidential candidate Agathon Rwaswa. Shortly before the vote, police and ruling party activists arbitrarily detained several CNL politicians; other CNL members were reportedly abducted, beaten, or killed in the first half of the year.
- In August, Parliament voted to approve new members of the Independent National Electoral Commission, including a new president who had until then served as the government’s spokesman. Some opposition lawmakers boycotted the vote, citing procedural violations and a lack of consultation.
- Journalist Sandra Muhoza was arrested in April and sentenced in December to 21 months in prison; she was accused of threatening national security after she shared an online message about the alleged distribution of machetes to ruling party militants. Another imprisoned journalist, Floriane Irangabiye, was pardoned and released in August, though her health had deteriorated since she was first detained in 2022 and sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2023. Multiple journalists faced police assaults, arbitrary detentions, and harassment in connection with their reporting during the year.
- In November, the president pardoned and ordered the release of more than 5,400 prisoners across the country, representing some 41 percent of the total prison population. While the release largely excluded political prisoners, the government said it would reduce overcrowding; the prison system had been operating at roughly three times its official capacity of 4,290 inmates.

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For additional background information, see last year’s [full report](#).

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

1 /
4

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

0 /
4

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

0 /
4

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

1 /
4

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

0 /
4

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

0 /
4

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

2 /
4

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

0 /
4

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? | 0 / 4
C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? | 0 / 4

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 0 / 4

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? | 3 / 4

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? | 1 / 4

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? | 0 / 4

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? | 0 / 4

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? | 0 / 4

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 1 / 4

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? | 0 / 4

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 0 / 4

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? | 1 / 4

Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 because the pardon and release of thousands of prisoners effectively eased inhumane conditions associated with severe overcrowding in the country's prison system.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? | 1 / 4

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? | 1 / 4

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? | 1 / 4

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? | 1 / 4

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? | 1 / 4