



Document #2094338

Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2023 - Burundi

NOT FREE

14

/ 100

Political Rights 4 / 40

Civil Liberties 10 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

14 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

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 2022

- In August, President Évariste Ndayishimiye dismissed dozens of judges accused of corruption and mismanagement. The judges were convicted on corruption-related charges later that month, and were issued sentences of up to 30 years' imprisonment and fines of up to 3.3 million Burundian francs (\$1,640).
- In August, Burundian troops associated with an East African Community (EAC) mission were deployed in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). EAC member states had agreed to deploy forces there to help the Congolese government fight armed groups in the region.
- In September, Ndayishimiye accused then prime minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni of planning a coup and removed him from office. Former security minister Gervais Ndirakobuca was appointed to replace Bunyoni as prime minister; members of Parliament unanimously approved Ndirakobuca's appointment the same day.

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

Burundi adopted a new constitution in 2005 after a series of agreements ended the country's 12-year civil war. Among other provisions, the amended constitution lengthened presidential terms from five years to seven.

In January 2020, CNDD-FDD insiders selected Évariste Ndayishimiye, a former army general and interior minister, as the party's candidate to succeed outgoing president Pierre Nkurunziza for that May's election. Ndayishimiye won 71.5 percent of the vote, while Agathon Rwaso of the National Congress for Liberty (CNL) received 25.2 percent, and Gaston Sindimwo of the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) received 1.7 percent. The contest was marred by a wide-ranging campaign of repression, which the UN Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Burundi said included the intelligence services, police, and the Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth wing. International observers were barred from the polls. The CNL claimed that the results were fraudulent, though the Constitutional Court upheld them in June. Ndayishimiye was to take office that August but was inaugurated that June, after Nkurunziza died in office.

The president appoints a vice president, who must be approved separately by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament. Prosper Bazombanza was named vice president in June 2020, while former public security minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni was named prime minister. In September 2022, President Ndayishimiye accused Bunyoni of planning a coup and removed him from office. Ndayishimiye then appointed former security minister Gervais Ndirakobuca as prime minister. Ndirakobuca's appointment was unanimously approved in Parliament the same day.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

Parliament's lower house, the National Assembly, includes 100 members who are directly elected via proportional representation along with 23 "co-opted" members to ensure that members of the Hutu ethnic group hold 60 percent of the house while Tutsis hold 40 percent. Members serve five-year terms. The upper house, the Senate, consists of 39 members, 36 of whom are chosen by locally elected officials for five-year terms. Three seats are reserved for the Twa ethnic group.

National Assembly elections took place concurrently with the May 2020 presidential elections, amid a campaign to repress opposition groups. The CNDD-FDD secured 86 seats, while the CNL secured 32 and UPRONA secured 2. The Twa received 3 seats via co-optation.

Senators were indirectly elected in July 2020; the CNDD-FDD received 34 seats, while the CNL and UPRONA each received 1. Twa members held 3 seats.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 0 / 4

The five-member Independent National Electoral Commission is under the effective control of the ruling CNDD-FDD. In 2015, two members who fled the country amid that year's unrest were replaced

with pro-Nkurunziza appointees approved by a CNDD-FDD-controlled Parliament. Constitutional amendments extending presidential term limits, consolidating power in the executive, and allowing for a future revision of the Burundian ethnic power-sharing system were approved in a 2018 referendum that was marred by a violent intimidation campaign conducted by the CNDD-FDD.

CNL presidential candidate Rwasa challenged the conduct of the 2020 presidential election, alleging incidents of ballot-box stuffing, falsified election reports, and votes counted from deceased or exiled citizens. The Constitutional Court rejected that challenge that June.

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

Political party formation is legally allowed, but the activities of opposition parties and political leaders are discouraged under the threat of retaliatory violence, repression, or arrest.

According to the Burundi Human Rights Initiative (BHRI), opposition party members and those suspected of opposing the government faced arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances by the Imbonerakure and the National Intelligence Service (SNR) during 2021 and 2022.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 0 / 4

The opposition has little realistic opportunity to increase its popular support through elections. Opposition parties, politicians, and their supporters face harassment, intimidation, and assassination. Many are forced to operate in exile.

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

The Imbonerakure, SNR, and police are allies of the CNDD-FDD and use violence and intimidation to influence people's political choices.

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

The 2005 constitution requires power-sharing between Hutus and Tutsis in Parliament, and additionally stipulates that women and Twa representatives be seated in both houses.

Imelde Sabushimike, who was appointed as human rights minister in June 2020, is Burundi's first Twa cabinet minister.

Women face social pressure that can deter active political participation, and few women hold political office at senior levels.

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

The ruling CNDD-FDD, and particularly President Ndayishimiye, whose election to power fell far short of standards for free and fair elections, controls policy development and implementation.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 0 / 4

Corruption is rampant in Burundi. Corrupt officials generally enjoy impunity, even when wrongdoing is exposed by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other actors. Anticorruption organizations are underresourced and ineffective.

Though President Ndayishimiye has vowed to address corruption, his actions in office have been contradictory. The Ndayishimiye administration dismissed over 120 government employees for embezzlement in 2021, though none of them faced prosecution. Ndayishimiye has also reorganized Burundian anticorruption bodies since taking office, abolishing an anticorruption court and an anticorruption brigade and placing their functions within existing offices.

C3 0-4 pts

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

Government operations are opaque, and government officials are generally unaccountable to voters. There are few opportunities for civil society actors and others to participate in policymaking. Due to recurrent assassinations and assassination attempts, politicians are wary of organizing town hall-style meetings or making other public appearances before voters.

The government was not transparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, with authorities providing little scientific information.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 0 / 4

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed but severely restricted in practice by draconian press laws and a dangerous operating environment for media workers, who face threats, harassment, and arrest in response to their coverage.

Many journalists have fled the country since 2015, and some have been forcibly disappeared. In 2021, the Supreme Court published a 2020 decision to issue life sentences against seven exiled journalists for their alleged involvement in the events of 2015.

The government lifted its ban on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in March 2022; the BBC's operating license had been revoked in 2019 after it aired an investigation into human rights abuses allegedly committed by the government.

D2 0-4 pts

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

Freedom of religion is generally observed. However, relations between the government and the Roman Catholic Church, of which most Burundians are members, have worsened in recent years. In 2019, the UN Col reported that the government was exerting more control over churches to curb political dissent.

D3 0-4 pts

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

Both university students and staff who support the CNDD-FDD receive preferential treatment at academic institutions. Continued intimidation of opposition supporters has created an atmosphere of fear and limited free speech on university campuses. Reports indicate that teachers allied to the CNDD-FDD have intimidated students who are considered unsupportive, in some cases preventing them from attending school. Teachers are increasingly screened for political loyalty to the ruling party.

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

While freedom of expression on political matters is constitutionally guaranteed, in practice Burundians generally do not feel safe discussing issues related to the government or politics. There is a reluctance to engage in speech that could be perceived as critical of the CNDD-FDD for fear of reprisal. The SNR and the Imbonerakure actively surveil private citizens. Social media and messaging applications were notably blocked on election day in 2020.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

Opposition or antigovernment meetings and rallies are usually prevented or dispersed, and participants face harassment or arrest. Many people who participated in the 2015 protests against late president Nkurunziza fled Burundi amid a subsequent crackdown.

In 2021, the UN Col noted that the strictest restrictions on assembly were effectively loosened after the 2020 elections, as the CNL was perceived as a less acute threat to the CNDD-FDD.

E2 0-4 pts

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

NGOs in Burundi face restrictive registration laws and persecution for activity seen as hostile to the government. Human rights advocates can face arrest and imprisonment. A number of human rights and other groups perceived as antigovernment were banned during the 2018 referendum and the 2020 elections, and many of their members have fled the country. A 2021 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report noted that NGO workers avoided open criticism of the government.

The government reversed its ban on anticorruption NGO PARCEM (Words and Actions for the Awakening of Consciences and the Evolution of Mentalities) in 2021, but authorities continued to

impede and monitor its work through 2022.

E3 0-4 pts

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

The constitution provides protections for organized labor, and the labor code guarantees the right to strike. However, it is unlikely that union members would feel free to exercise legally guaranteed collective bargaining rights in the current political climate.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The judiciary is hindered by corruption and a lack of resources and training. The judiciary is generally subservient to the executive, which regularly interferes in the criminal justice system to protect CNDD-FDD and Imbonerakure members and persecute the political opposition.

In 2020, the Constitutional Court partially checked the CNDD-FDD's power by upholding a challenge to the disqualification of an opposition parliamentary candidate. However, it did not entertain a challenge over the conduct of the presidential election, despite evidence of widespread fraud and intimidation.

President Ndayishimiye has repeatedly accused the judiciary of corruption and human rights violations. In August 2022, Ndayishimiye dismissed 40 judges accused of corruption and mismanagement. The judges were convicted on corruption-related charges later that month, and were issued sentences ranging from 1 to 30 years in prison as well as fines of up to 3.3 million Burundian francs (\$1,640).

F2 0-4 pts

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

The courts, police, and security forces do not operate independently or professionally, and constitutional guarantees of due process are generally not upheld. Arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detention are common.

In 2017, the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by the government. Burundi left the ICC days later, becoming the first country in the world to do so.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

The security situation in Burundi remains extremely poor. A 2021 UN Col report notes that widespread human rights violations persist, including forced disappearance, execution, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention. The report identified the SNR as the principal perpetrator, though it also noted the involvement of the Imbonerakure and police.

According to a July 2022 BHRI report, hundreds of Burundian soldiers and untrained Imbonerakure members were "secretly deployed" to fight the Resistance Movement for the Rule of Law-Tabara, a Burundian armed opposition group located in the DRC, as early as December 2021. Burundian troops

officially entered the DRC in August 2022 as part of an EAC mission meant to help the Congolese fight armed groups active in the east of that country.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 258,000 Burundian refugees resided in nearby countries as of December 2022, 48.9 percent of them in Tanzania. The CNDD-FDD apparatus has violently targeted returning refugees on suspicion of opposition sympathies, along with individuals suspected of having ties to Burundian rebels operating in the DRC.

The Burundian prison system is overcrowded. In late November 2022, the World Prison Brief reported that although Burundian prisons have an official capacity of approximately 4,290, over 12,000 inmates are imprisoned.

F4 0-4 pts

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

Despite quotas for representation in the National Assembly, the Twa population remains marginalized relative to the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. People living with albinism face systematic discrimination and violence. LGBT+ people also experience official and societal discrimination. The 2009 penal code criminalizes same-sex sexual activity, and punishments include up to two years in prison.

Discrimination against women is common in access to education, healthcare, and employment.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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

Since 2015, concerns for personal safety have restricted free movement, particularly in neighborhoods regarded as opposition strongholds and where security forces frequently conduct search operations. In 2020, the UN Col reported that the Imbonerakure maintained a checkpoint system to control population movement, despite official instructions for the organization to refrain from such activity. Some local authorities have imposed curfews on women and girls.

According to the International Organization for Migration, there were over 84,000 internally displaced persons in Burundi as of April 2022.

G2 0-4 pts

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

Land conflict has been an explosive issue in Burundi for decades, which was exacerbated by the return of displaced populations after the end of the civil war in 2005. Many returnees found new owners occupying their land, and the courts have often failed to fairly adjudicate land disputes.

Due to customary law, women are typically unable to inherit property. The deteriorating security situation hampers private business activity in Burundi, as does rampant corruption.

G3 0-4 pts

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

Sexual and domestic violence are serious problems but are rarely reported to law enforcement agencies. Rights monitors continue to report sexual violence carried out by security forces and the Imbonerakure, who act with impunity. Women are often targeted for rape if they or their spouses refuse to join the CNDD-FDD. Men sometimes experience sexual abuse while in government custody.

According to the citizenship code, a Burundian woman married to a foreign national cannot pass on her citizenship to her husband or children.

The constitution explicitly bans same-sex marriage.

G4 0-4 pts

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

Individuals not allied with the ruling party may lose their employment. Community service requirements have taken on political overtones, such as building offices for the CNDD-FDD, amounting to what a 2019 UN report called forced labor.

Women have limited opportunities for advancement in the workplace. Much of the population is impoverished. In 2017, “vagrancy” and begging by able-bodied persons became formal offenses under the penal code.

Human trafficking continues to be a serious issue in Burundi, with the IOM counting over 1,000 trafficking victims between 2017 and July 2021. Burundian government employees are reportedly complicit in trafficking girls. According to the US State Department's 2022 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Burundi's government has significantly expanded investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of traffickers, including allegedly complicit officials.

ecoi.net description:

Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2022

Country:

Burundi

Source:

[Freedom House](#) (Author)

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/burundi/freedom-world/2023>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

2023

Available on ecoi.net since:

6 July 2023

Document ID:

2094338

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of
Origin and Asylum Research and
Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041
Wien
T +43 1 589 00 583
F +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

