

Burundi

Since 2015 major political turmoil has given rise to a crackdown on opposition, serious human rights violations, and a refugee crisis.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
		<u>Government authorities push a socially conservative, religiously or ideologically inspired agenda, without regard to the rights of those with progressive views</u> <u>Prohibitive interreligious social control (including interreligious marriage bans)</u>	<u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is severely restricted</u>
<u>Preferential treatment is given to a religion or religion in general</u>	<u>There is state funding of at least some religious schools</u> <u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in at least some public schools (without secular or humanist alternatives)</u>		
			<u>Concerns that secular or religious authorities interfere in specifically religious freedoms</u>

Legend

Constitution and government

The Constitution defines the state as secular. The law protects religious freedom and outlaws religious discrimination in theory.

The registration of religious groups is governed by the law on nonprofit organizations. Non-profits including religious groups must register with the Ministry of Interior, including details of religious affiliation. Failure to register, or practicing religion if registration is denied, is punishable by between six months and five years imprisonment. There are no standardized tax exemptions for religious groups in general. Some exemptions for capital investment can be arranged but apply also to other organizations as well (not just religious groups).

<state.gov/documents/organization/256211.pdf>

Nkurunziza: the “Eternal supreme guide” of the nation

Burundi’s president Nkurunziza is self-described born again Christian, while his cabinet has included several prominent members who are Muslim. However, the president has routinely employed religious rhetoric in the context of political speeches and invoked divine guidance for political decisions.

<state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dlid=280716#wrapper>

In early 2015, president Pierre Nkurunziza announced he would stand for a third term in office, in violation of the two-term constitutional limit. Mass protests in the capital, Bujumbura, and a failed coup were met by a brutal crackdown. Opposition parties boycotted the elections which Nkurunziza therefore “won”. The political turmoil has precipitated a major refugee crisis, and continued allegations of serious human rights abuses against those accused of opposing Nkurunziza. Government security forces were accused of “systematic killings” in an attack on civilian neighbourhoods in December 2015, and continue to harass civilians in areas associated with the opposition, including through alleged torture, murder, abduction, and sexual abuse of women.

<newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2017/01/24/burundi-time-is-running-out/>

In 2018, the President Nkurunziza was declared “eternal supreme guide” by the ruling party, ahead of a constitutional referendum which saw his term limits extended by decades. However, he has also pledged to step down in 2020.

<africanews.com/2018/03/12/burundi-s-pierre-nkurunziza-named-eternal-supreme-guide-by-ruling-party/>

<<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-07/burundi-president-pierre-nkurunziza-pledge-s-to-step-down-in-2020>>

The president has also been accused of using religion to increase his hold on power. His evangelical Church of the Rock has spread in the country, and his wife, a pastor in the church, used TV preaching slots in 2018 to brand as sacrilegious anyone who opposed the extension of Nkurunziza’s term limits.

<international.la-croix.com/news/burundi-using-religion-to-keep-hold-on-power/7246#>

A turbulent relationship between the state and the Catholic Church

Although freedom of religion is generally observed within Burundi government and law, government interference in religion has occurred.

In 2013, the state effectively enforced the religious position of the Catholic Church, by forcibly preventing a pilgrimage which the Church rejected as false. The Catholic Church had requested that the government prevent an excommunicated Catholic splinter group from making a monthly visit to a site where a woman reported seeing apparitions of the Virgin Mary (the Church rejected these particular apparitions as false). The government complied, sending police to stop the pilgrims. 10 pilgrims were killed. Three policemen connected to the violence were arrested and prosecuted.

<state.gov/documents/organization/222237.pdf>

In April 2014, 182 pilgrims were convicted of “civil disobedience” for visiting the shrine. Most of the pilgrims were released within a few days but 32 were sentenced to stay in prison for a time period that could range from six months to five years.

In June 2015, an apparent assassination attempt was made against the Catholic Archbishop of Bujumbura, Evariste Ngoyagoye, during an event at which he was expected to speak out against the president’s third-term candidacy. Ngoyagoye escaped the attempt.

state.gov/documents/organization/256211.pdf

Education and children's rights

According to the Ministry of Education, the official education program includes religious and moral classes in the curriculum for all secondary and primary schools. The program includes religious classes for Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, depending to some extent on demand or on local religious backgrounds. Students are free to choose from one of these three religion classes or attend a Moral education class instead.

However, individual reports indicate that in practice most public schools only offer Christian religious education, with no other religious or civic alternative. The course is called Religion moral and is taught by Catholic or Protestant teachers. It is compulsory and students are required to pass it in order to get access to the next academic year. In the morning, students are given 5-10 minutes to pray before classes start.

Many secondary schools are run by religious groups, predominantly the Catholic Church, under contract to the Education Ministry, according to a report by International Alert (2000). Some of these schools require students to be members of the church in order to be admitted.

international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/equal_access_to_education.pdf

Literacy in Burundi had remained extremely poor at around 50% at the turn of the century, but had reportedly climbed to around 85% by 2015. Many schools have re-opened or been rebuilt following the civil war and the introduction of compulsory primary schooling.

Family, community and society

As of July 2013, Burundi has a population of about 10.8 million.

Religious leaders have estimated that Roman Catholics comprise 60 percent of the population, Protestants make up about 15 percent, 20 percent follow indigenous religions, and 2 to 5 percent are Muslims, most of whom are Sunni. Religious groups appear to coexist and interact with few reports of tensions or conflict

state.gov/documents/organization/256211.pdf

It is unclear how open expression or promotion of non-religious views is received. Burundi Humanist Charity (an IHEU Member Organization) operated in the country, at least until it was disrupted by the political crisis beginning in 2015.

“Moralizing” society

In May 2017 President Pierre Nkurunziza launched a campaign to “moralize society” by requiring unmarried couples to legalize their relationships in marriage by the end of the year. If those couples failed to do so, they could face charges based on the provisions of the criminal code against unmarried cohabitation. Children born out of wedlock would not be eligible for waivers on primary school fees and other social services. The campaign especially targets interfaith or non-religious couples who refused to officially marry in a church or under the state according of their beliefs. Civil society activists criticized the campaign as a “religious crusade.”

state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280716#wrapper

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

The law guarantees freedom of speech, but press laws place restrictions on journalists. Defamation and insult are prohibited and may be punished with harsh fines and imprisonment. In 2012, the National Assembly introduced draft laws that would put further restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly. Journalists have been censored by authorities and have censored themselves as well, but they have become more willing to express criticism of the government. The government dominates the media. It has ownership of the public television and radio stations and runs the only daily newspaper. Private broadcast media outlets exist but most of them have a limited broadcast range. The British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio France Internationale, and Voice of America are available on FM radio in the capital. Print publications of most newspapers are still minimal, and low literacy rates mean that readership is low.

<freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/burundi#.VG5eivnF9HU>

Despite the fact that a pluralistic press has recently emerged, journalists have been arbitrarily arrested, harassed, or threatened. After the Gatumba attack that occurred in September 2011, the government imposed a media blackout regarding the massacre that lasted 30 days, and banned any commentary related to the investigations into the attack. Even after the 30-day period passed, journalists who tried to report on or investigate the attack faced harassment and intimidation from the government. In June 2012, Hassan Ruvakuki, a reporter for Radio France Internationale and 13 others were given life imprisonment sentences for allegedly participating in the Gatumba attack. Ruvakuki was reportedly targeted by prosecutors because he had conducted an interview in Tanzania with the leader of a new rebel group, the Front for the Restoration of Democracy, Abanyagihugu.

<freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/burundi#.VG5eivnF9HU>

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, but the government has threatened members of human rights groups that criticize it and subjected them to surveillance.