

Burundi - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo border Burundi. Following Burundi's independence in 1962, it was a monarchy until a series of assassinations, coups and instability culminated in the establishment of a republic. Due to ethnic cleansing and genocides, the country has been plagued with underdevelopment and poverty. Burundians deal with corruption, weak infrastructure, poor access to health and education services and hunger. Burundi was ranked the second least happy nation in 2017.

Official language: French, Kirundi

Ethnic groups: 85% Hutu, 14% Tutsi, 1% Twa

Government: Presidential republic

• **President:** Pierre Nkurunziza

• **1st Vice-President:** Gaston Sindimwo

• **2nd Vice-President:** Joseph Butore

Death penalty: Abolished

Population: 11,178,921

Life expectancy: 58 years

Under-5 mortality: 82 per 1000

Adult literacy: 67 %



Section 1: Overall Development

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ²



0.404 – Low Human Development ³

According to the UNDP, Burundians have a gross national income per capita of \$691 and can expect to have on average 10.6 years of schooling. Despite their low HDI, they are better off than other countries with comparable GNIs per capita tend, which have a much lower HDI.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Largely disrespected ⁴

Although the situation has improved since 2015, there have been numerous reports that the government or its agents have committed arbitrary killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Largely disrespected ⁵

There were many reports of political disappearances at the hand of state security forces.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁶

Although the constitution and penal code prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, there were hundreds of reports of government officials employing such measures in 2015 only.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected ⁷

Although the constitution and the law prohibit such measures, there were thousands of arbitrary arrests in 2015 only.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Partially respected⁸

Although the Burundian constitution provides for an independent judiciary, authorities are subject to political influence or bribery; they often drop investigations and prosecutions, or predetermine the outcomes of trials.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Partially respected⁹

Although the Burundian constitution calls for privacy and the requirement of search warrants, authorities do not always respect such rights and conduct arbitrary searches.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹⁰



Score: 55.78, Rank: 160 / 179 – Highly controlled, limited or intimidated¹¹

Since the 2015 crisis and coup attempt, media outlets are all highly controlled. Journalists are harassed and many leave the country.

Freedom from academic censorship



Largely disrespected¹²

All dissident opinions are largely oppressed or censored.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Largely disrespected¹³

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly, the government severely restricts such rights. Authorities deny permission for opposition members to meet. Many political parties boycotted the 2015 elections due to consistent denials of campaign rallies.

Freedom of religion



Respected¹⁴

The constitution establishes a secular state and provides for equal protection under the law regardless of religion. Governmental benefits were granted to religious groups but the criteria were non-transparent and politicized.

Freedom of movement



Respected¹⁵

The government follows its laws and constitution, cooperating with the UNHCR in providing protection and assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons. The state does not practice forced exile.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Respected¹⁶

Refugees residing in camps receive all basic services (including education and health care) and are allowed to find employment. The government has a good system for providing protection to refugees and asylum seekers.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{17 18}



6 / 7 – Not free¹⁹

The Burundian government has been repeatedly criticized by human rights organizations due to judicial corruption, detention and imprisonment of political prisoners and political detainees, restrictions of freedom of speech, assembly and association, etc.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²⁰



7 / 7 – Not free²¹

The Burundian government has been repeatedly criticized by human rights organizations due to judicial corruption, detention and imprisonment of social prisoners and political detainees, restrictions of freedom of speech, assembly and association, especially with regard to political parties.

Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²²



Score: 20%, Rank: 159 / 175 – Highly corrupt²³

New legislation undermines Burundi's press and their ability to hold the government accountable.

Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Largely disrespected²⁴

Reporters have complained that government agents harassed and threatened media that criticized the government. Local sources are intimidated.

Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁵



Listed – Dangers faced by Tutsis and Hutus²⁶

According to Minorities Rights Group International, Burundi has a terrible history of mass ethnic killings. International observers still fear the worst as violence escalated recently in past elections.

Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁷



Score: 74.8%, Rank: 23 / 142 – Somewhat unequal rights²⁸

Women and girls cannot inherit from their fathers, many women do not know their legal rights, implementation of laws is gender-biased and inadequate or prejudiced against women.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)²⁹



Score: 58.3%, Rank: 130 / 165 – Slightly vulnerable³⁰

There are regular reports of child rights violations including injuries, deaths and detentions.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected³¹

The constitution prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, mental, sensory, or intellectual disabilities. The government, nevertheless, did not promote or protect the rights of persons with disabilities with regard to employment, education, or access to health care.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Respected³²

Government institutions hired persons after the elections to meet gender, as well as ethnic, quota requirements.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{33 34}

The law criminalizes same-sex sexual acts with penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment.

Section 8: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Partially respected³⁵

The law provides workers with a conditional right to strike after meeting strict conditions. The parties must exhaust all other means of resolution (dialogue, conciliation, and arbitration) before striking.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected³⁶

Although Burundi has laws that prohibit such labor, the government does not enforce applicable laws, which are subject to discretion.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Partially respected³⁷

Minimum age of employment is 16, although younger children may be employed if the work is "light" and doesn't interfere with their development or their schooling.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁸

Although there is a minimum wage, it is not respected in rural areas and 62% of the population lives below the poverty line. More than 90% of the population works in the informal economy.

Right to employment



7.7% - Reasonable unemployment³⁹

The unemployment rate in Burundi has dropped more than 25% in the past 8 years.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed June 2, 2017 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

³ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Burundi" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed June 2, 2017.

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁴ "BURUNDI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017.

<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.

- ⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a “disappearance” is different than simple arbitrary detention because a “disappearance” is considered permanent.
- ⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ¹⁰ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.
- ¹¹ "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.
- ¹² "BURUNDI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.
- ¹³ "Burundi." World Report 2014: Burundi. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/burundi>.
- ¹⁴ "Burundi." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ "Burundi." World Report 2014: Burundi. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/burundi>.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. World Report 2014: Burundi.
- ¹⁷ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).
- ¹⁸ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed June 2, 2017 https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#_VldwWzHF98F
- ¹⁹ "Burundi." Freedom in the World 2014: Burundi. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/burundi>.
- ²⁰ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed June 2, 2017. https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#_VldwWzHF98F
- ²¹ "Burundi." Freedom in the World 2014: Burundi. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/burundi>.
- ²² Transparency International (TI) publishes a “Corruption Perceptions Index” annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt
- ²³ "Burundi." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.transparency.org/country/BDI>.
- ²⁴ "BURUNDI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.
- ²⁵ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed June 2, 2017 <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.
- ²⁶ "Burundi." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. 2015, or most recent data. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.
- ²⁷ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights
- ²⁸ "Burundi." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/>.
- ²⁹ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable
- ³⁰ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed June 2, 2017. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>
- ³¹ "BURUNDI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.
- ³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ³⁴ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.
- ³⁵ "BURUNDI 2016 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265442.pdf>.
- ³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.
- ³⁹ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed June 2, 2017. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang-en/index.htm.