

World
Watch
Research

Burundi: Full Country Dossier

February 2023



OpenDoors

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Burundi

Brief country details

Burundi: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
12,625,000	11,854,000	93.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Burundi: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	55	65
WWL 2022	52	64
WWL 2021	48	64
WWL 2020	48	63
WWL 2019	43	68

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Burundi: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Christian denominational protectionism	Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Religious leaders of other churches

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong): Opposition political parties have been facing serious abuses of their rights as has the press. Church leaders face intimidation and churches face closure if they do not side with the ruling party. The pressure on smaller churches is particularly high as was the case in the previous reporting periods: Christians of non-traditional Christian communities have been under pressure not to gather due to being denied licenses to build churches. At least ten churches were closed down in the WWL 2023 reporting period. **Christian denominational protectionism (Medium):** Burundi is a majority Catholic country and the fact that non-traditional evangelical Christianity is growing very fast has led to traditional churches reacting in a negative way (for instance, often making accusations of 'noise pollution' being caused by new church groups' worship style). Family and community members also put pressure on those who join the new church groups.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Christians who spoke out against injustice have been targeted by the youth wing of the ruling party.
- Churches were put under surveillance.
- Christians found it difficult to get permission for building new churches.
- Over ten Christians were arrested, most of them for opposing the involvement of the government in their church affairs.

Specific examples of positive developments

None.

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Burundi

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 108-111)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	30 June 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13085064	30 June 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/BDI	30 June 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burundi/	30 June 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/burundi	30 June 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p. 58)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	30 June 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	2 September 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Burundi not included	Democracy Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/burundi/freedom-world/2022	30 June 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries, Burundi not included	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/burundi	30 June 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bi	30 June 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/burundi	30 June 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/bdi	30 June 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/BDI	30 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile)	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/	30 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Burundi not included	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burundi/overview	30 June 2022
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=BDI	30 June 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp. 10-11)	https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/macro-poverty-outlook	30 June 2022

Recent history

The current geographical area covered by Burundi and Rwanda used to be ruled by the kingdoms of Rwanda and Urundi in which the Tutsi upper class dominated the Hutu-majority lower classes. Germany colonized Burundi and Rwanda as part of German East Africa in the period 1890-1916. Germany lost the colony to Belgium following the 1st World War. Belgium favored the Tutsis, thus intensifying the societal differences between the two groups. Hutus were prevented from holding public office and faced disadvantages in education. The Belgians also introduced the race-based identity card in 1933. This divided the population along ethnic lines and had serious consequences.

In 1962 Burundi became independent from Belgium and established itself as a constitutional monarchy. Since independence, the country has been facing an intractable conflict between the two main tribes, Hutu and Tutsi. In 1966 a coup instigated by Tutsi officials overthrew the monarchy and Michel Micombero became the country's first president. Micombero's military dictatorship was responsible for the death of 100,000 people during the 1972 Hutu massacre.

In 1993, there was a glimmer of hope that the country was entering a new era when the first democratically elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, took office. However, hopes were dashed when the president was assassinated within months of his election. In 1994, the parliament elected Cyprien Ntaryamira (also Hutu) as president of the country. He was also killed along with the Rwandan president in Kigali in the same year. As the situation in neighboring Rwanda was spinning out of control, parliament again elected another Hutu president, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya. The mainly Tutsi party, Union for National Progress (Uprona), decided to withdraw from the government and this withdrawal marked the start of a period of ethnic conflict which led to the deaths of more than 300,000 people, mainly civilians and severe damage of the country's economy.

The international community tried to help Burundi during the crisis, with the UN taking over from the African Union forces in 2004. This mission ended in 2007 and the country was stabilized through dialogue and various legal and political changes. Following the 2005 constitutional vote, which favored the power-sharing constitution, Pierre Nkurunziza, president until 2020 (he died in June 2020), was elected by both houses of the parliament and belonged to the Hutu rebel 'Forces for Defense of Democracy' (FDD). He was accused by many human rights groups of being responsible for serious human rights violations. However, he claimed that neighboring countries (like Rwanda) were interfering in Burundi's domestic affairs.

In 2010, the country held presidential elections with the hope of leaving behind the previous conflicts that led to the killings of thousands of civilians and left the economy in tatters. However, these elections only showed up the true authoritarian attitude of the ruling party. The ruling party won the election without any contest due to a boycott by the opposition parties. That was quickly followed by the widespread and unlawful arrest of opposition party members. Death-sentences were quickly issued. Restrictions were imposed on the freedom of press and media. The assassination of some senior government officials and the killings of protestors put the country on the edge of crisis which then erupted when the president decided to run for another term in 2015. In May 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of President Nkurunziza's decision to stand for a third term. There were reports that the judges were intimidated. That was followed by protests in the country, especially in the capital city, Bujumbura. A [failed coup-attempt in 2015](#) further showed how divided the country had become, but at the same time showed that the country's president had enough staunch supporters in both the army and the security apparatus to block a coup (BBC News, 13 May 2015). The general human rights record of the country also deteriorated especially after the 2015 general and presidential elections held during the crisis.

In 2020, the country remained volatile and oppressive. Former Hutu rebel leader Évariste Ndayishimiye of the ruling CNDD–FDD party (National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy) was elected president with 71% of the vote in May 2020, with the CNDD–FDD also winning 72 of the 100 elected national Assembly seats. In June 2020, President Nkurunziza, who was due to stand down as president in August 2020, unexpectedly [died](#) at the age of 55. His death was reportedly due to a heart-attack, but some suggest that this could have been a COVID-19-related death (The Guardian, 6 June 2020). Ndayishimiye took office as president, a week after Nkurunziza's death.

Political and legal landscape

Burundi is a small landlocked country located in the Great Lakes Region, one of the most volatile regions on the African continent. Some of the opposition parties in the country were among the factions that earlier fought in Eastern Congo. As a country that has been through a series of devastating conflicts, Burundi has struggled to maintain rule of law. Even though the Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary, the judges are not free in practice - state interference and intimidation have been common. Corruption has been one of the main problems.

In May 2018, the voters backed the amendment of the Constitution to extend [presidential term limits](#) with a reported 73% of votes (Al-Jazeera, 22 May 2018). In June 2018, the president vowed not to [seek re-election in 2020](#) (Al-Jazeera, 7 June 2018). However, in 2020 tensions continue to rise as the election-date approached. A report submitted by [the UN Commission of Inquiry](#) on Burundi said, there is a climate of fear and intimidation against anyone who did not show support for the ruling party (Reuters, 4 September 2019). Many Burundians [suspected of supporting](#) the opposition disappeared, were arrested, beaten or killed (HRW, World Report 2020). The government particularly targeted members of the opposition National Congress for Freedom (CNL).

According to a report by the UN: “[Freedom of the press](#) had become a fiction, while Nkurunziza had exceeded his powers, making appointments that [were] not within his constitutional authority and relying on shadowy informal structures such as a committee of generals.” (Reuters, 4 September 2019). According to Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2020), Burundi was one of the top 40 countries where freedom of the press is restricted, ranking #160. However, the press freedom situation of Burundi has somewhat improved under President Evariste Ndayishimiye, ranking #147 in the World Press Freedom 2021 Index and #107 in the 2022 Index.

According to the HRW 2022 country chapter, since President Évariste Ndayishimiye came to power in June 2020, there have been limited improvements in Burundi’s human rights situation. Ndayishimiye came to power with the promise of unity and justice for all Burundian. However, as reported by Foreign Affairs Magazine on 8 February 2022, he has failed to deliver since [his government](#) "has intimidated and silenced its critics, detained and tortured its opponents, and as a growing body of evidence gathered by international and Burundian rights groups attests, killed and disappeared many of those it suspects of working with the political opposition or with rebel groups."

Religious landscape

Burundi: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	11,854,000	93.9
Muslim	270,000	2.1
Hindu	10,000	0.1
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	474,000	3.8
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	9,200	0.1
Atheist	190	0.0

Agnostic	7,400	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022 (D2):

- "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 2017, the government set up a commission to monitor religious groups and guard against political subversion within them. In 2019, the UN Col reported that the government was exerting more control over churches to curb political dissent."

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank country overview:

- **Economic growth:** "Economic growth was estimated at 1.8% in 2021 against 0.3% in 2020, supported by an easing of restrictions related to Covid-19. For 2022, economic growth is projected at 2.5%."
- **Inflation:** "Inflation remained high at around 8.3% in 2021 against 7.5% in 2020, driven by rising food prices and monetization of the fiscal deficit. Inflation will remain high at around 9% in 2022, particularly following the impact of the Russia/Ukraine conflict on food and oil prices worldwide."
- **Poverty:** "Burundi's Human Capital Index remains low at 0.39, with stunting and learning poverty at 52.2 and 93 percent, respectively. Literacy remains particularly low among women and rural residents. With high population growth, any demographic dividend remains out of reach. GDP growth per capita remains negative, with poverty estimated at 87.2 percent in 2021 (based on international poverty line of \$1.90/day, in 2011 PPP), from 72.8 percent in 2013 (the last year with data availability)."

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 for Sub-Saharan Africa:

COVID-19 impact: "The national vaccination rate is still low; as of March 8, 2022, less than 1% of the population was vaccinated, against a WHO vaccination target of 70% per country. ... The COVID-19 epidemiological situation has stabilized since January 2022, after a huge wave linked to the omicron variant in December 2021."

Social and cultural landscape

According to the CIA Factbook and UN Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hutu (Bantu) 85%, Tutsi (Hamitic) 14%, Twa (Pygmy) 1%
- **Main languages:** Kirundi 29.7% (official), French 3% (official), Swahili 2%, English 1% (official), Kirundi and French 8.4%, Kirundi, French, and English 2.4%, other language combinations 2%, unspecified 56.9% (2008 est.)
- **Urban population:** 14.1% of the total population (2021)

- **Rate of urbanization:** 5.48% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)
- **Median age:** 17.7 years
- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.1 years (11.0 for females and 11.1 for males)
- **Adult literacy rate (ages 15 and older):** 68.4%
- **Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):** 78.0%
- **Unemployment, total:** 1.4% of the labor force
- **Youth unemployment (ages 15-24):** 2.7%
- **HDI score and ranking:** Burundi ranked 185th of 189 countries, with a value of 0.433 points
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 61.6 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.999
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.504

According to the [UNHCR](#) 2021 Interagency Regional Response Plan for the Burundi situation (published on 13 October 2021) and [IOM Burundi – Internal Displacement Trends \(April 2022\)](#):

- **Refugees:** 276,000 Burundian refugees reside in Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC and Uganda. Of these, 44,144 of them were assisted to voluntarily return to their country in 2021. Preparations are underway to further scale up voluntary return operations, based on planning figures for some 143,000 Burundian refugees to return to their country of origin in 2021.
- **IDPs:** As of April 2022, 84,791 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) live in Burundi with about 19407 displaced households. For 91% the factors of displacement are linked to natural disasters, while for 9% they are linked to the socio-political situation.

According to [OCHA's Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 Report](#) published on 2 December 2021:

- “In 2021, despite decrease in number of people in need, the vulnerabilities of the population in Burundi has increased compared to previous years due to the combined effects of recurring natural disasters, such as flooding caused by the rising waters of Lake Tanganyika and Rusizi River, frequent epidemic outbreaks, the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, as well as increasing refugee returns, which are putting pressure on host communities.”

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2022 (C2):

- **Corruption:** "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 under-resourced and ineffective."

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 12.9% of the population – survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 6.1% of the population – survey date: July 2022

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 57.0 per 100 people.

According to [BuddeComm](#) research (Publication date: February 2023):

- Mobile penetration remains low by regional standards, suggesting considerable room for growth: "To overcome difficulties associated with the poor telecom infrastructure the government, supported by the World Bank, has backed a joint venture with a number of prominent telcos to build a national fiber backbone network, offering onward connectivity to submarine cable infrastructure landings in Kenya and Tanzania. The first sections of this network were switched on in early 2014, and additional provinces have since been connected. In addition, the government in early 2018 kick-started the Burundi Broadband project, which aims to deliver national connectivity by 2025. Based on this improved infrastructure the government and ITU have developed an ICT strategy to make use of telecoms to promote the country's socio-economic development through to 2028."

According to the [Nations Encyclopedia](#) (accessed 10 February 2023):

- There are many institutions in the country that directly or indirectly engage in technological matters: "The National Center of Hydrometeorology, the Ministry of Geology and Mines, the Institute of Agronomical Sciences of Burundi (founded in 1960), and a medical laboratory devoted to nutritional studies are located in Bujumbura. The University of Burundi, in Bujumbura, has faculties of sciences, medicine, psychology and education, agriculture, and applied sciences."

Security situation

The security situation in Burundi has been a serious issue for years. This problem has been exacerbated by the 2015 political crisis. Even though the new president (who assumed power in 2020 after the death of Pierre Nkurunziza) promised unity, peace and justice, things are not going as promised. Other countries and organizations are well-aware of the problems in the country. For example, the US State Department [advised](#) travelers in October 2022: "Violent crimes, such as grenade attacks and armed robbery, occur frequently. Though Westerners are unlikely to be targeted, the risk of being in the wrong place at the wrong time is high. Local police lack the resources and training to respond effectively to crimes." This insecurity has restricted church relationships with the international community as well as seriously affecting the travelling of church leaders within the country.

Youth league of the ruling CNDD-FDD party

Many human rights activists and members of the opposition believe that the ruling party's youth-wing, "Imbonerakure", is posing a serious threat to the safety of the general population and has been responsible for carrying out beatings of people perceived to be opponents of the government. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, there have been many instances where the group attacked civilians or destroyed their properties. For example:

- On 28 August 2022, Imbonerakure and a local government official attacked and beat civilians on Mugendo hill (Ntega, Kirundo). The civilians were trying to confiscate a motorcycle involved in a traffic accident;
- On 14 August 2022, Imbonerakure arrested 24 CNL members on Murama hill (Kirundo, Kirundo) while heading to the celebration of the third anniversary of their party in Kirundo. Some of their possessions were confiscated. Military forces intervened and demanded their release some hours after;
- Around 8 August 2022, Imbonerakure and some local government officials destroyed the houses of 150 refugees in Buraza (Buraza, Gitega). The refugees were recently repatriated from Tanzania. Their houses were destroyed to force their eviction.

Since December 2021, there is also evidence that Imbonerakure members have been [fighting alongside Burundian government forces](#) in neighboring Democratic republic of Congo against armed opposition groups (Burundi Human Rights Initiative, An Operation of Deceit, July 2022).

Trends analysis

1) The country is still affected by the consequences of the 2015 political crisis

The country has been facing daunting challenges in the past few years due to the political environment created by the ruling party and its supporters. The crisis has forced thousands of citizens to flee the country. People speaking out against brutality and injustice in the country, including religious leaders, have been intimidated. This is likely to continue, at least in the short-term.

2) The government is not shy of using church leaders for political purposes

The past few years have shown that the government has used church leaders for helping steer the politics of the country. On numerous occasions, the authorities have put pressure on church leaders and their congregations to openly side with the president. The government has even gone to the extent of killing those who oppose it. This pressure and violence is likely to continue. The election of the new president (although from the same ruling party as the previous president) might reduce this concern. The new administration has, however, kept up massive pressure on the Church.

3) The Great Lakes Region: The crisis in Eastern DRC could spill over

The Great Lakes Region has become a hotbed for conflict and instability; various countries in the region have gone through or are going through internal conflicts and foreign intervention. This is particularly true for Burundi's neighbor, DRC and its ongoing crisis in its eastern parts, which many international observers think could affect the whole region. In putting the latest development in DRC in regional perspective, the [International Crisis Group \(ICG\)](#) stated in May 2022: "President Félix Tshisekedi has allowed Uganda to deploy troops to fight rebels based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and is tacitly permitting Burundi do to the same. Rwanda appears to be considering its own incursion in the area. Meanwhile, a Congolese armed group, the M23, is re-grouping." This can create a conflict among the other countries who are

planning to engage in proxy war inside the DRC. That means, the conflict might even expand into the neighboring countries. This issue will have serious ramifications for churches in the region and Burundi.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: failed coup-attempt in 2015 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-32724083>
- Recent history: died - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/09/burundi-president-dies-illness-suspected-coronavirus-pierre-nkurunziz>
- Political and legal landscape: presidential term limits - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2018/05/burundi-backs-constitution-extending-presidential-term-limits-180521134736408.html>
- Political and legal landscape: seek re-election in 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/burundi-pierre-nkurunziza-step-2020-180607160413061.html>
- Political and legal landscape: the UN Commission of Inquiry - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-rights/u-n-warns-of-burundi-atrocities-as-divine-ruler-eyes-2020-election-idUSKCN1VP1T8>
- Political and legal landscape: suspected of supporting - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/burundi>
- Political and legal landscape: Freedom of the press - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-rights/u-n-warns-of-burundi-atrocities-as-divine-ruler-eyes-2020-election-idUSKCN1VP1T8>
- Political and legal landscape: his government - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2022-02-08/burundis-vicious-crackdown-never-ended>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89112>
- Social and cultural landscape: IOM Burundi – Internal Displacement Trends (April 2022) - <https://displacement.iom.int/sites/default/files/public/reports/DTM%20Burundi%20Dashboard%20-%20April%202022.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: OCHA’s Global Humanitarian Overview 2022 Report - <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Global%20Humanitarian%20Overview%202022.pdf>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Burundi-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses?r=51>
- Technological landscape: Nations Encyclopedia - <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Burundi-SCIENCE-AND-TECHNOLOGY.html>
- Security situation: advised - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/burundi-travel-advisory.html>
- Security situation: fighting alongside Burundian government forces - <https://burundihri.org/rep/Report-July-2022-Engl.pdf>
- Trends analysis: International Crisis Group (ICG) - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo-uganda-burundi-rwanda/easing-turmoil-eastern-dr-congo>.

WWL 2023: Church information / Burundi

Christian origins

The Great Lakes Region of Africa is an area where Christian mission arrived very late on the scene. During the second half of the 19th century, the Roman Catholic Church made many attempts to introduce Christianity into the deep mainland of Africa.

In 1879, the White Fathers were sent to Burundi to launch a mission but were unsuccessful when two priests were killed within the first few years. In 1899 further attempts were made following the reorganization of the country as a German colony. In 1907, German Lutherans started working in the country, but following the conclusion of the First World War, in which Germany was defeated, Burundi was made part of the Belgian protectorate by the League of Nations. All the German mission stations were closed and French missionaries took over. Danish Baptists came in 1928 and Anglicans in 1934.

Church spectrum today

Burundi: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	2,200	0.0
Catholic	8,073,000	68.1
Protestant	3,233,000	27.3
Independent	420,000	3.5
Unaffiliated	301,000	2.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-175,000	-1.5
Total	11,854,200	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,265,000	19.1
Renewalist movement	2,115,000	17.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox.
Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome.
Protestants: Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics.
Independents: Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant).
Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches.
Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once.
Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls.
Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Christians can be found all over the country, the majority of whom belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

No specific areas.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not involuntarily isolated and are therefore not counted as a separate category for WWL-analysis.

Historical Christian Communities: This group, which includes the Roman Catholic Church, faces persecution where its leaders publicly oppose the actions of the government.

Converts: In the case of Burundi, this concerns mainly Christians from a Muslim background or from a traditional belief system (ATR).

Non-traditional Christian communities: The Christian groups in this category are known for outspoken preaching which often puts them on a collision course with the government.

WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Burundi

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Burundi: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	55	65
WWL 2022	52	64
WWL 2021	48	64
WWL 2020	48	63
WWL 2019	43	68

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The rise in overall score was mainly due to the increase in violence (which rose in score from 8.1 points to 11.1). Pressure is highest in the *National and Church spheres* and there is constant pressure on church leaders to side with ruling politicians. Churches face closure if they do not side with the ruling party. At least ten were closed down in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Persecution engines

Burundi: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Weak

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

The government restricts citizens' freedom in many ways and Christians are being pressured into supporting the government. As a country that has been through various devastating conflicts, Burundi has struggled to maintain the rule of law. Even though the Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary, the judges are not free in practice and state interference and intimidation have been common. Corruption has also been a major problem. Rights that are constitutionally guaranteed are often restricted by subordinate laws. Opposition political parties have been facing serious abuses of their rights as has the press. There is no optimism that things will change under the new president who took office in June 2020 after the former president - of whom he was a strong ally - suddenly died.

Christian denominational protectionism (Medium): This Persecution engine is growing in influence. Burundi is a majority Catholic country and the fact that non-traditional evangelical Christianity is growing very fast has led to traditional churches reacting in a negative way. Family and community members also put pressure on those who join the new church groups. They often accuse the newly established churches of making noise pollution etc..

Drivers of persecution

Burundi: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
				VERY WEAK	MEDIUM			STRONG	WEAK
Government officials								Strong	Weak
Ethnic group leaders				Very weak					
Non-Christian religious leaders					-				
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs					Medium				
One's own (extended) family					Medium				
Political parties								Medium	
Organized crime cartels or networks									Weak

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

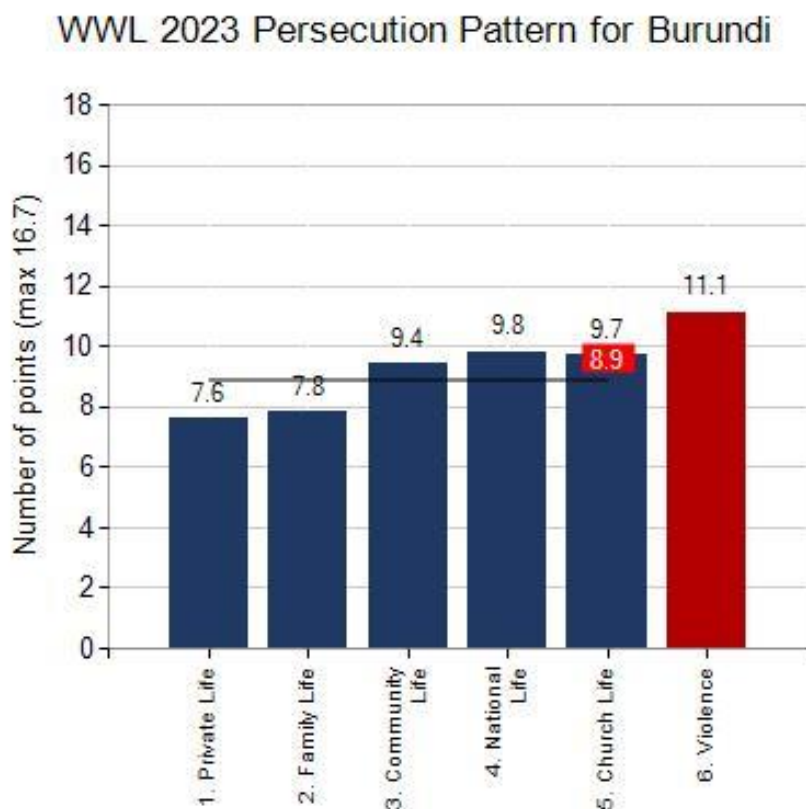
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong) / Political parties (Medium):** The main drivers are government officials who are targeting and pressurizing some Christians in the country. Speaking against the ruling party (i.e. criticizing the president) is seen as a crime against the state.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Other churches religious leaders (Medium):** Church leaders of established churches, especially Catholics, put pressure on their congregations to make sure that their family members, friends and local community stay Roman Catholic. This has far-reaching consequences as it can be interpreted as 'go and persecute those who already left.'
- **Citizens (Medium):** In strong Catholic neighborhoods, it is often the case that non-Catholic groups face pressure not to gather or preach in public. Sometimes they are even told what kind of theology they can and cannot preach.
- **Family members (Medium):** In a Catholic family, it is difficult for a family member to leave Catholicism and join a non-traditional church. This has both theological as well as cultural reasons. If one decides to leave the family's church affiliation, they can be shunned and lose family connections and privileges.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 Persecution pattern for Burundi shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Burundi was 8.9 points, much the same as in WWL 2022 (8.8 points).
- Pressure is highest in the *National and Church spheres* (9.8 and 9.7 points respectively). There is constant pressure on church leaders to side with ruling politicians.
- The score for violence was 11.1 points, an increase of 3.0 points from the WWL 2022 level.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.75 points)

As a majority Christian nation, for most policymakers or experts, this question seems odd for Burundi. However, conversion does not necessarily mean converting from non-Christian faith only. In Burundi Roman Catholics are the dominant denomination: Christians openly leaving Catholicism face many forms of opposition, such as not getting access to certain schools or to shared community resources.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (2.50 points)

This form of pressure has more than one dimension. First, interdenominational change of churches (usually away from the Roman Catholic Church) is not infrequent. The risk here is that if those changing their church loyalty are open about their new affiliation, they are likely to face hostility. Secondly, any religious expression that can be construed as political or criticism of the government can be dangerous. In these two dynamics, Christians face restriction when it comes to expressing their faith or views related to their faith.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.50 points)

This has links to the nature of the government and the way families and communities treat those who join the new churches. The government of Burundi tries to control all aspects of life, including movements and meetings. Many Christians groups have struggled to obtain land and licenses to build their own church. If a Christian belonging to an unregistered church meets for discussion or worship with others, they can easily be detained.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (2.00 points)

For those who are converts from the small Muslim minority or who are ex-Catholics now attending one of the new non-traditional churches, discussions about faith are risky and will, at the very least, provoke severe rebuke from their families. In the context of Burundi, a very poor country, this can have devastating consequences for Christians. It can lead to expulsion or denied access to basic goods.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

There are two major issues in here. Just like in many other African countries, a Christian wedding in Burundi involves gathering with fellow Christians and singing. If the couple take their marriage vow without the national flag, the government are quite likely to see this as an act of defiance and it could lead to a prison sentence. Secondly, if the wedding involves Evangelicals, it might even be restricted by the dominant Christian denomination in the country.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

The country's school curriculum contains Catholic, Protestant and Muslim values and principles. This sounds positive but works against Christians where the government seeks to prioritize content which glorifies the regime. Also, most of the schools in the country are Catholic schools and many non-Catholic Christians have no choice but to accept the customs and values taught by the Catholic teachers.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)

There are two sources of persecution in this case: The first one is at the community level where children of Protestant/Evangelical parents face harassment from the dominant Christian group. Secondly, government agents employ the tactic of shaming or bullying the children of Protestant/Evangelical parents to force the latter to become loyal to the president.

Block 2.2: Registering the birth, wedding, death, etc. of Christians has been hindered or made impossible. (2.50 points)

As discussed above, the country's government wants couples to make marriage vows holding the national flag. Because of the pressure from the government which requires such loyalty, converts and Christians belonging to small denominations are known to find the registration of weddings very difficult.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.00 points)

Government and community-level decision-makers operate in tandem, making it difficult for some Christians to live their lives according to their faith. They are often harassed, monitored and excluded from what the community offers. Government supporters and agents have infiltrated society at village level and make life difficult for those Christians deemed to be un-loyal to the president. Also important is the fact that the dominant Catholic Church sees the expansion of non-Catholic Christian groups as a threat to the status quo.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.00 points)

As mentioned under 3.1, some Christian groups are often directly or indirectly excluded from sharing community resources, either because of their interdenominational change of church or their lack of support for the government. This pressure (coupled with other forms of pressure) often forces Christians to relocate.

Block 3.6: Christians have been hindered in participating in communal institutions, forums, etc., for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)

This is related to what has been mentioned under 3.1 and 3.4. On the one hand, this affects all Christian groups who are deemed not supportive of the government. The government cadres and security agents make sure that priority is given to those who support the president. On the other hand, conservative Catholics also put obstacles in the way of non-Catholic Christians to keep them from participating in communal institutions etc.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (2.50 points)

Most of the challenges that some Christians face in their community are interrelated and intertwined. The government has established a monitoring body which even operates at village level, making the lives of Christians difficult. Government supporters also do this in the churches where they spy on the church leadership. Church leaders are followed and constantly asked to support the government and tell their congregations to support the government.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Nepotism and other forms of discrimination are applied against some Christians. Although Burundi is a Catholic-dominated nation, government officials are said to be discriminatory in their handling of cases for Christians. The government uses loyalty tests and those who are deemed disloyal will be treated unfairly. This is particularly harsh on some of the Christians who are outspoken about their faith.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

There are many obstacles that the government puts in place to restrict freedom of movement. Security concerns and silencing dissent is the main rationale behind all travel restrictions. The government fears that church leaders who travel around the country might be spreading political views and challenging the regime's authority and power.

Block 4.6: Christians have been barred from public office, or has promotion been hindered for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

This issue is related to 4.5 above. The test is always how loyal one is to the ruling party. Christians often speak out against injustice and they will be ignored and even at times detained, harassed or bullied. Those who speak about the existing injustice, human rights violations and corruption will be targeted and they will never get the chance to serve in a government department.

Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (2.75 points)

This is particularly the case for some Christians who are seen as public figures. Government agents try force some renowned Christians to act against their conscience and then use this as blackmail. Also, this should be seen from the context of the 'loyalty pledge'. Government security agents also force couples to act against their conscience when they demand that the national flag be used when making their marriage vows.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)

Church monitoring is one of the most serious challenges that the church in the country faces. The setting up of a body under the Ministry of Interior and Civil Education in January 2017 to "monitor, regulate and settle" inter and intradenominational disputes ([US State Department IRFR 2017](#)) has been highly controversial even to this day. It was set up to control biased political messages in the name of religion. However, judging by the government's previous practices, many church leaders think this body has also been set up to control all church activities more closely and not just silence criticism from churches.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.75 points)

The registration of new churches has become one of the most contentious issues in many African countries, including Burundi. Some reports indicate that church registration applications have been denied without any explanation. There is also evidence to suggest that officials intentionally deny registration to prevent Christians from getting tax exemption. As stated in IRFR 2021, the criteria for registering a new church is another concern for church leaders: "Any new, independent religious group based in the country must have a minimum of 300 members to qualify. Foreign-based religious groups seeking to establish a presence in the country must have at least 500 members to qualify. The law prohibits foreigners from being part of executive and decision-making committees of religious groups at the national level".

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.50 points)

This is partly related to registration. Minority Christian groups have found it difficult to build and renovate their churches, which goes hand in hand with the difficulties experienced in the registration application process. The government, on many occasions, vowed to control the 'proliferation' of new churches. This control is meant to target the new Protestant/Evangelical church movements.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.50 points)

Everything is controlled or infiltrated by government agents. Through its monitoring system, the government has been harassing and arresting people who attend prayer meetings without prior approval. That has created an intimidating environment in the country. Government security agents are known, for instance, to have arrested Christians who were praying together through the night. The assumption is that religious meetings are being held as a cover for illegal political activities. In addition, there are many government informers who have infiltrated the churches which is causing many church leaders to self-censor. On some occasions those who lead the church have been arrested. ,

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

4. The use of symbolic numbers: In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

5. The symbol “x” in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Burundi: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	1	0
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	100 *
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10	10 *
6.4	How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	0
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	1
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	100 *	100
6.9	How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	0
6.10	How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	1
6.11	How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10	0

5 Year trends

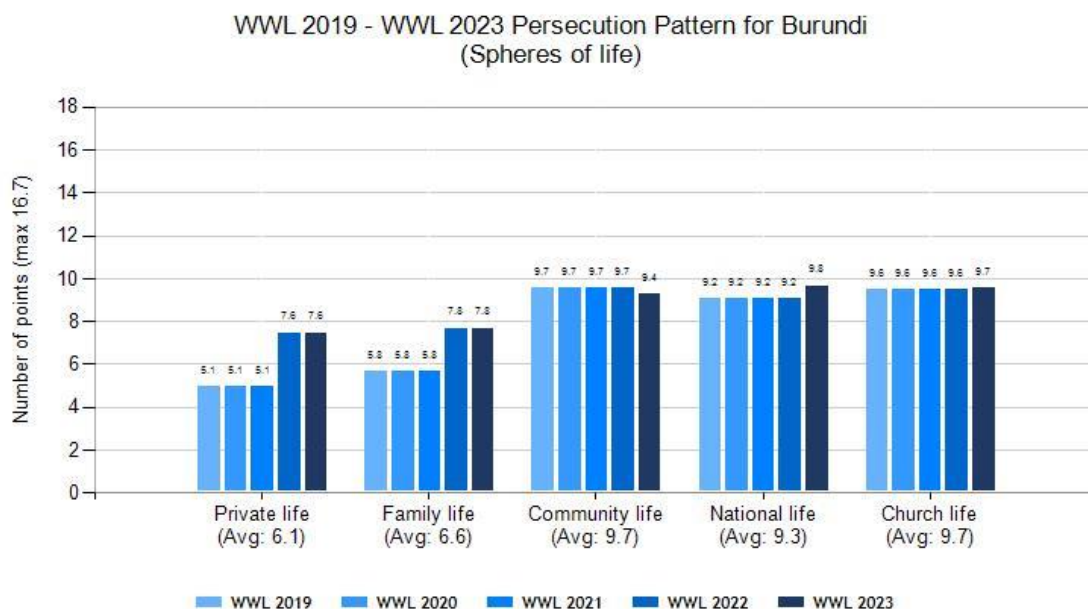
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Burundi: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	
	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	8.9
2022	8.8
2021	7.9
2020	7.9
2019	7.9

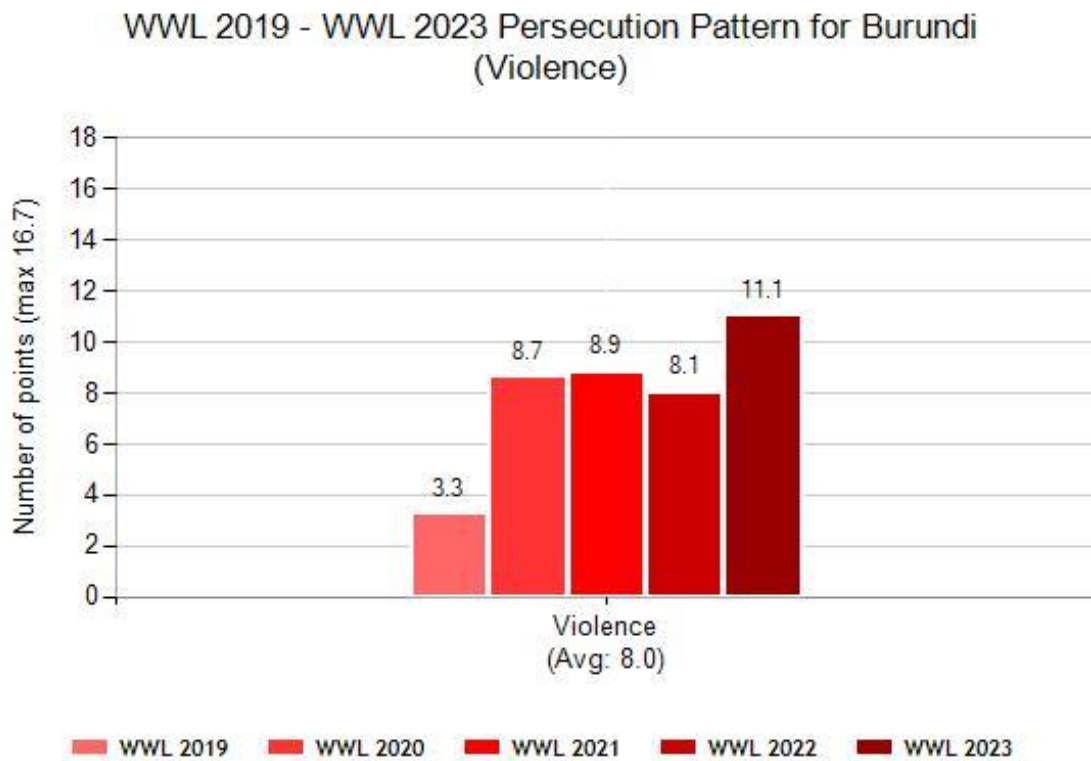
After stabilizing at 7.9 points in the period WWL 2019-2021, the average pressure on Christians has increased WWL 2022 and WWL 2023 to reach 8.9. For a Christian majority country (with leaders who also claim to be Christians), this level of pressure is significant. The election of a new president after the sudden death of the previous long-term president has not alleviated the situation for Christians. In fact the same *modus operandi* continues.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



As the chart above shows, pressure on Christians is clearly highest in the *Community, Church* and *National spheres of life*. Although the levels of pressure have now more or less stabilized in these three spheres, there were marked increases in pressure in the *Private* and *Family spheres of life* in the past two reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart above shows that the violence score has been showing an upward trend, reaching its highest level in WWL 2023.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

A country expert reports: “Girls and women are often victims of clan oppression and age-old practices. For example, they are often hunted as witches and are subjected to repressive cultural practices and norms like forced and child marriage, as well as crimes like rape and defilement. This eventually affects their esteem, education, confidence and their faith eventually, is eroded due to hopelessness”. Faith-based persecution compounds and exploits the existing societal

pressure on women and girls in Burundi, especially those that arise from ongoing political instability and from women’s low status in society ([BBC News, 4 November 2022](#); [World Bank, 28 November 2022](#)). Poor living conditions and human rights violations also contribute to the growing [human trafficking](#) networks in Burundi – one of the major source countries for victims of human trafficking in Africa (Global Organized Crime Index, 2022). According to one source: “Internal trafficking poses a larger problem than transnational trafficking, with most victims being subjected to labor exploitation and sexual exploitation.” Although there has been no established correlation with religious persecution, human trafficking remains a potent threat to Christian women and girls in Burundi.

In the previous reporting period (WWL 2022), a young Christian from a Muslim background experienced abuse at the hands of her landlord, who had discovered her faith. This young girl had already experienced persecution by her parents in 2019 and had been expelled from the family home, hence the reason for her living in rented accommodation supported by her church. Now living with her pastor’s family, she is reportedly living in fear of future harassment. Female converts to Christianity face severe pressure for their faith. They may be rejected by their families and husbands, denied their inheritance and possessions, evicted from the home, forced into an arranged marriage with a Muslim, forcibly divorced, denied custody of their children and in rare instances, put under house arrest. Arranged marriages affect women who have converted to Christianity from Islam as well as 'converts' from the traditional majority Christian denominations such as Catholicism. Women are also vulnerable to sexual harassment by their relatives and local community.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men in Burundi commonly face challenges in the workplace on the basis of their faith. An elderly man recently lost his job after deciding to join an evangelical church, and now struggles to provide for his five children. Given Burundi’s high unemployment rates - exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis - it is challenging for men to survive economically without the support of the family unit (World Bank data profile).

Converts to Christianity may also become victims of physical attacks. Upon discovery of their faith, converts risk being expelled from their homes by families and threatened harshly.

Christian men also risk being detained by state forces. During the COVID-19 crisis, the rate of arrests increased. A country expert commented: “Government officials are drivers of persecution against Christians mainly in the form of the facilitation and practice of corruption. In addition, the government is very repressive and high-handed against Christians who criticize or speak out against the government. They are liable to be arrested, detained or imprisoned on false charges.” Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to being detained, as detailed by the United States Department IRFR 2021. Reflecting on the actions of the government in the previous reporting period (WWL 2022), a source stated: “The state actively monitors the activities of churches for political reasons. The state is paranoid about activities of churches especially those that are deemed to be opposed to government. Churches and church leaders or Christians that are vocal against the government face the risk of arrest and detention or even imprisonment.”

Christian men and boys are also at risk of forced recruitment by non-state and government-affiliated militias due to ongoing conflict within the country.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Religious minorities often face discrimination, although there were no incidents listed by the US State Department (IRFR 2021) apart from:

- "In a June [2021] meeting with religious leaders, Minister of Interior Ndirakobuca asked Muslim sheikhs to lower the volume of early-morning calls to prayer so as not to disturb the public while sleeping. ... In response, Rashid Ndikumana, an imam at a small mosque on the outskirts of Bujumbura, accused Ndirakobuca of openly attacking Islam and demanded his resignation and an apology. Some Muslim representatives said his comments were an insult to the minister and called on Ndikumana to withdraw his remarks and apologize. Authorities arrested Ndikumana the day after his comments, and he reportedly remained in detention at year's end."

In [IRFR 2019](#), it was noted: "Some Muslim leaders reported that public schools and those run by other religions sometimes excluded girls who opted to wear the hijab."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Dictatorial paranoia

The government has shown that it is not shy of attempting to use the Church for political purposes and has on numerous occasions put pressure on church leaders to publicly side with the president. Although the authoritarian president died in June 2020 (potentially from COVID-19), his successor is unlikely to be lenient towards civil society since he is from the same ruling party and a staunch supporter of his predecessor's policies. The situation in the country has not significantly improved even though the political upheaval that began in 2015 has now more or less stabilized. *Dictatorial paranoia* will continue to be a threat to the Church for the time-being.

Christian denominational protectionism

Non-traditional church groups are growing very fast in the country. This is being met by some resistance from the established Catholic Church. Such intolerance will likely continue. And it could even get worse if the government keeps ignoring the plea of these smaller churches for protection, registration and licenses. If the pressure from the Catholic Church remains intense, it might push the situation into some form of confrontation.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points): US State Department IRFR 2017 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News, 4 November 2022 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13085064%22%20/h%20%20HYPERLINK%20%22https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13085064>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: World Bank, 28 November 2022 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/11/28/burundi-certifying-land-ownership-protects-the-landscape-and-women-as-well>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: human trafficking - <https://ocindex.net/country/burundi>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2019 - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Burundi>