

World
Watch
Research

Burundi: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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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 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- 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 can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Burundi

Brief country details

Burundi: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
12,999,000	12,236,000	94.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Burundi: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	57	64
WWL 2023	55	65
WWL 2022	52	64
WWL 2021	48	64
WWL 2020	48	63

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Burundi: Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family

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; in addition several churches have been closed down over recent years.
- *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 voicing opposition to injustice are being monitored by the youth faction of the governing party.
- Increased surveillance has been implemented on church premises.
- Securing permits for the construction of new churches has become notably challenging.
- At least five Christians were killed, possibly by the coordination of the government security agents and the youth wing of the ruling party.

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Burundi

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 country report – covering 156 countries	AI Burundi 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/burundi/report-burundi/	12 September 2023
BBC News Burundi profile - updated 31 July 2023	BBC Burundi profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13085064	12 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index Burundi report 2022	BTI Burundi report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BDI	12 September 2023
Crisis24 Burundi report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Burundi report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/burundi	12 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit 2022 Burundi summary	EIU 2022 Burundi summary	https://country.eiu.com/burundi	12 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Burundi	FSI 2023 Burundi	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	12 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Burundi not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom Index Burundi	Global Freedom Index 2023 Burundi	https://freedomhouse.org/country/burundi/freedom-world/2023	12 September 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Burundi not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Burundi	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/burundi/	12 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Burundi report	Girls Not Brides Burundi	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/burundi/	12 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Burundi country chapter	HRW 2023 Burundi country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/burundi	12 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 Burundi	IWS 2023 Burundi	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#bi	12 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Burundi	https://rsf.org/en/burundi	12 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – Burundi	CPI 2022 Burundi	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/bdi	12 September 2023
UNDP Human Development Report Burundi - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Burundi	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/BDI	12 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Burundi	IRFR 2022 Burundi	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/	12 September 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Burundi not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscifr.gov/countries	
World Bank Burundi data - 2021	World Bank Burundi data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=BDI	12 September 2023
World Bank Burundi overview – updated 28 March 2023	World Bank Burundi overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/burundi/overview	12 September 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Burundi - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Burundi	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefe5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-bdi.pdf	12 September 2023
World Factbook Burundi - updated 5 September 2023	World Factbook Burundi	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burundi/	12 September 2023

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.

In its Global Freedom Index 2023 Burundi report, Freedom House highlights the dire situation in Burundi: "Burundi has been in political and economic crisis since 2015. Democratic gains made after the 12-year civil war ended in 2005 have been undone by a shift toward authoritarian politics and violent repression against perceived opponents of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)."

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 2020 Burundi country chapter). The government particularly targeted members of the opposition National Congress for Freedom (CNL).

According to a 2019 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, Burundi was one of the top 40 countries where freedom of the press was restricted, ranking #160 in the World Press Freedom Index 2020. However, the press freedom situation of Burundi somewhat improved under President Evariste Ndayishimiye, ranking #147 in the 2021 Index, #107 in the 2022 Index and #114 in 2023.

Since President 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."

In its 2023 report (HRW 2023 Burundi country chapter) Human Rights Watch released a grim report about the fate of those who dissent:

- "Killings, disappearances, torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, and detention of real or suspected opponents were documented by international and Burundian rights groups throughout 2022. Unidentified bodies, often mutilated or tied up, were regularly found in different parts of the country, often buried by local authorities, Imbonerakure members, or police, without investigation"

As noted by the Freedom House Freedom in the World 2023 report, the political and legal landscape in Burundi is tough for the opposition. While political parties are technically permitted in Burundi, opposition activities are stifled through threats of violence, repression, or arrest. The Burundi Human Rights Initiative (BHRI) reports that in 2021 and 2022, opposition members and suspected government critics faced arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances, primarily at the hands of the Imbonerakure and the National Intelligence Service (SNR). The opposition has scant chances of gaining popular support via elections, as they are subjected to harassment, intimidation, and even assassination, often forcing them into exile. Policy development and implementation are tightly controlled by the ruling CNDD-FDD party and President Ndayishimiye, whose election did not meet the criteria for being free and fair.

As pointed out by [HRW 2024 Burundi country chapter](#): "The inability of the CNL, the main opposition party in Burundi, to operate and campaign will affect the credibility of the 2025 legislative elections."

Religious landscape

Burundi: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	12,236,000	94.1
Muslim	280,000	2.2
Hindu	10,000	0.1
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	456,000	3.5
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	9,400	0.1
Atheist	200	0.0
Agnostic	7,600	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Christians, who often resist joining the ruling party and its aggressive youth league, find themselves in a precarious situation. They are unable to voice concerns about governance issues and human rights violations, aware of the fate that befell journalists who were forced to flee the country. Individuals not affiliated with the ruling party risk losing their jobs and are often coerced into politically-motivated community service, such as constructing offices for the CNDD-FDD, which a 2019 UN report labeled as forced labor. Although freedom of expression is constitutionally protected, it is severely curtailed by oppressive press laws and a hostile environment for media workers, leading to threats, harassment, and arrests. Since 2015, numerous journalists have fled the country, and some have even been forcibly disappeared. In 2021, life sentences were issued against seven exiled journalists for their alleged involvement in the 2015 events. Relations between the government and the Roman Catholic Church, to which most Burundians belong, have deteriorated, with a 2019 UN report indicating increased government control over churches to suppress political dissent.

Economic landscape

According to the World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Burundi:

- Economic growth:** Economic growth in Burundi is estimated to be 1.8% in 2022, a slight deceleration from 2021, primarily driven by the industrial and services sectors. The agriculture sector faced setbacks due to insufficient rainfall and delays in fertilizer distribution. Inflation rose due to higher commodity prices, influenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Growth is forecasted to rise to 3-4% between 2023 and 2025. The services sector is expected to continue its recovery, while agricultural growth is anticipated to improve, contingent on favorable weather conditions and efficient fertilizer distribution. Industrial growth is likely to speed up due to eased foreign exchange restrictions, resolution of mining disputes, and increased power generation. Both private consumption and public investment are projected to stay high, fueled by economic recovery and a resurgence in partner-financed public infrastructure programs. However, there are significant downside risks, including fiscal slippage. Compounded by rapid population growth, per capita GDP is contracting, and poverty is expected to reach 83% in 2023. The country's economic development is further constrained by structural challenges that perpetuate a cycle of fragility and poverty. Burundi is caught in a multidimensional fragility trap marked by recurring political instability, low economic diversification, high population growth, environmental degradation, and volatile economic performance. The halt in aid between 2015-2019 limited the government's ability to provide essential services. This led to macroeconomic policies that avoided larger cuts in current expenditures but resulted in foreign exchange restrictions, exchange rate overvaluation, fiscal dominance of monetary policy, and increased public sector debt.
- Inflation:** Headline inflation hit 18.8% in 2022, with food inflation reaching 39.2% in December of the same year. This disproportionately impacts the poor, who allocate a larger portion of their income to food. In the short term, poverty rates are expected to rise. Over the long term, this could lead to a depletion of human capital as households resort to coping mechanisms like cutting back on food, selling valuable assets, or sending children to work, which may result in higher rates of early school dropouts, especially among girls.

- **Fiscal deficit:** The fiscal deficit is projected to shrink to 5.5% of GDP in 2023 and further reduce to 4% by 2025, in line with fiscal consolidation measures under the recently sought IMF program. Consequently, public debt is anticipated to decline to 62% of GDP by 2025. While external pressures are expected to intensify in 2023, they are likely to ease gradually as import prices stabilize and exports increase. However, the current account deficit (CAD) is still expected to remain high, at 11% of GDP in 2025.
- **Poverty:** The majority of Burundian people live in poverty. Burundi's population is expected to double by 2050, intensifying the existing strain on limited land resources. Significant structural reforms are crucial to expand the private non-farm sector and boost agricultural productivity. Without such reforms, Burundi remains at risk of reverting to a cycle of fragility and poverty. Based on the current trajectory and using a \$2.15/day income measure (2017 PPP), poverty is projected to reach 81.9% in 2024.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Burundi and UNDP Human Development Report Burundi:

- **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 [August 2023 UNHCR Burundi Operations Overview](#):

- **Refugees:** 84,300 in camps and urban areas in Burundi
- **Asylum seekers:** 3,100
- **Assisted returnees:** 220,800
- **IDPs:** 8,200
- **Persons at risk of statelessness:** 800

According to the [UNHCR](#), as of 29 February 2024, there were the following numbers of Burundian refugees in surrounding countries:

- Tanzania: 112,291
- Rwanda: 48,486
- Kenya: 31,916
- DRC: 49,849
- Uganda: 40,326

According to [OCHA Humanitarian Dashboard Burundi June 2023](#):

- "In 2023, the humanitarian needs analysis identified 1.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance."

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 Burundi:

- **Corruption:** Corruption is widespread in Burundi, and officials often escape accountability even when their misconduct is exposed by NGOs and other entities. Organizations tasked with combating corruption are inadequately funded and ineffective. President Ndayishimiye has pledged to tackle corruption, but his actions have been inconsistent. In 2021, his administration terminated the employment of over 120 government workers on charges of embezzlement, yet none were prosecuted. Additionally, Ndayishimiye has restructured the country's anti-corruption institutions, dissolving a specialized anti-corruption court and brigade and integrating their functions into existing offices. The president has also taken the controversial step of banning an anti-corruption NGO, further complicating the landscape for accountability and transparency in the country. This action raises questions about the sincerity of the administration's commitment to combating corruption.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Burundi):

- **Internet users:** 12.9% penetration rate (December 2021 survey)
- **Facebook users:** 6.1% penetration rate (January 2022 survey)

According to World Bank Burundi data (2021):

- **Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people):** 61.7

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 [Datareportal](#) 2023 (accessed 28 August 2023):

- As of the beginning of 2023, Burundi had 1.33 million internet users, making up 10.2% of the population in terms of internet penetration.

- In January 2023, there were approximately 714,700 social media users in Burundi, accounting for 5.5% of the entire population.
- Early in 2023, Burundi had 6.99 million active mobile cellular connections, corresponding to 53.5% of the total populace.

Security situation

The security landscape in Burundi has been fraught for an extended period, a situation further worsened by the political unrest that began in 2015. Despite pledges of peace, unity, and justice from the current president, who took office in 2020 following Pierre Nkurunziza's demise, the reality on the ground remains disconcerting. Global entities, including the US State Department, have issued warnings about rampant violent crimes like grenade attacks and armed robberies, pointing out the inadequacy of local law enforcement. This unstable environment has not only strained international church relations but also hindered the domestic mobility of church leaders.

The youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, known as *Imbonerakure*, is widely accused of endangering public safety. Critics, including human rights activists and opposition members, claim that this group frequently assaults those seen as antagonistic to the government and has been involved in property destruction. Since late 2021, credible sources indicate that *Imbonerakure* members have also been fighting alongside Burundian military forces in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo against rebel factions.

Reports from international human rights organizations in 2023 have raised alarms about uninvestigated killings and mutilations, widely suspected to be the work of both the government and the youth wing.

Trends analysis

1) The government uses church leaders for political gains

The complex relationship between Church and state in Burundi has manifested itself most clearly in the way the government has co-opted religious leaders for its own political agenda. These leaders often face significant pressure to endorse government policies or even the president himself, thereby influencing their congregations. This leveraging of religious authority to shore up political power shows little sign of abating, despite a change in leadership. While the new president offers a glimmer of hope for reduced pressure, the reality is that the government continues to exert significant influence over religious institutions, including the use of intimidation and violence against dissenting voices.

2) Regional instability in the Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes Region has increasingly become a focal point for conflict and geopolitical tensions, particularly concerning the crisis in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). International organizations like the International Crisis Group have already warned about the potential spillover of this conflict into neighboring countries, including Burundi. This

could lead to proxy wars, where countries like Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi support various factions within the DRC. Such a situation would only escalate regional instability, and it could further jeopardize the safety of churches and religious communities in Burundi as they may become targets.

3) The role of Imbonerakure

Imbonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, has become an indispensable arm of the government. Its influence is not limited to just rallying support for the party; it also serves as an enforcement mechanism. Acting in an almost quasi-militaristic fashion, the group has been accused of assaulting and intimidating citizens who are perceived as government critics. They are also suspected of involvement in property destruction and violent acts alongside Burundian military forces in the DRC. Given its key role in the government's domestic and foreign policy strategies, Imbonerakure is likely to remain a powerful force shaping the lives of Burundian citizens, often with severe consequences for human security.

The future outlook for Burundi remains complex and challenging, and there are no easy solutions on the horizon. The geopolitical pressures, regional instability, and entrenched domestic issues suggest that the country's human security situation is likely to remain volatile for the foreseeable future.

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>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW 2024 Burundi country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/burundi>
- Social and cultural landscape: August 2023 UNHCR Burundi Operations Overview - <https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/unhcr-burundi-operations-overview-august-2023>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR - <https://reliefweb.int/map/burundi/situation-du-burundi-refugies-burundais-dans-la-region-au-29-fevrier-2024>
- Social and cultural landscape: OCHA Humanitarian Dashboard Burundi June 2023 - <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burundi/burundi-humanitarian-dashboard-june-2023>
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm - <https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Burundi-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses?r=51>
- Technological landscape: Datareportal - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-burundi>

WWL 2024: 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	2,300	0.0
Catholic	8,324,000	68.0
Protestant	3,353,000	27.4
Independent	430,000	3.5
Unaffiliated	301,000	2.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-174,000	-1.4
Total	12,236,300	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	2,340,000	19.1
Renewalist movement	2,175,000	17.8

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Burundi

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Burundi: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	57	64
WWL 2023	55	65
WWL 2022	52	64
WWL 2021	48	64
WWL 2020	48	63

The 2-point rise in overall score was mainly due to the increase in violence (which rose in score from 11.1 points to 12.8). 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.

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	Strong

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 and *Christian denominational protectionism* are intertwined in a complex web that threatens to further destabilize an already fragile nation. Both serve as instruments that could be exploited by the ruling regime to maintain its grip on power, making the prospect low for significant positive change in the near future.

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong)

The ruling government in Burundi exercises tight control over its citizens, stifling their freedoms and autonomy. *Dictatorial paranoia* is thus evident in multiple sectors, from the judiciary to the media. Though the nation's Constitution ostensibly guarantees judicial independence, the reality is a system rife with state interference. Judges operate under a cloud of intimidation and coercion, making unbiased rulings a near impossibility. Corruption adds another layer of complexity, further eroding the rule of law.

Political opposition does not fare any better. Parties challenging the ruling government face relentless persecution, including arrests, intimidation, and the stifling of free speech. The media, another cornerstone of a democratic society, also remains under intense scrutiny and control. There is little to suggest that the current president, who took office in June 2020 and was a staunch ally of his deceased predecessor, will shift the status quo. This does not bode well for a country that has already experienced its fair share of political instability and social discord.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

Organized corruption and crime in Burundi is deeply embedded within the government structure, including parallel systems that operate alongside but not formally within the state framework. This entanglement complicates the enforcement of the rule of law and creates an environment of impunity. Such conditions allow persecutors of Christians to commit crimes

without facing consequences, exacerbating the challenges for the Christian community.

Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)

Amid this restrictive political landscape, Burundi's religious community is also undergoing significant changes that are causing tensions. Predominantly Catholic, the country has seen a surge in non-traditional evangelical Christian denominations. This fast-paced growth has triggered a backlash from traditional Catholic circles, which perceive these emerging groups as a threat to their longstanding religious influence. As a result, members of the historical Christian communities have often weaponized social norms and laws against these burgeoning evangelical groups. Accusations range from noise pollution during services to more insidious claims that aim to delegitimize these new religious movements. Community and family pressures also come into play, creating a challenging environment for those who opt to join these new evangelical denominations. This trend of *Christian denominational protectionism* would appear to be gaining momentum.

Drivers of persecution

Burundi: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
					MEDIUM			STRONG	STRONG
Government officials								Strong	Strong
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs					Medium				
One's own (extended) family					Medium				
Organized crime cartels or networks								Strong	Strong

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

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Strong):** The principal instigators of dictatorial paranoia in Burundi are the government officials, who wield significant power in shaping policy and enforcing regulations. They are known to single out specific groups, including Christians, who do not show unwavering support for the ruling party. Criticizing the president or the government is often considered not just a political dissent but a crime against the state, leading to potential repercussions such as imprisonment, harassment, or social ostracization.
- **Political parties (Medium):** While government officials are the primary drivers, political parties—especially those aligned with the ruling regime—also contribute to this atmosphere of paranoia. They can disseminate propaganda, stoke fears, and contribute to the narrative that any opposition is an existential threat to the nation, thereby maintaining a climate of fear and repression.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials play a central role in the persecution of Christians in the country. They are involved in monitoring, ordering kidnappings, arrests, and sometimes even the killings of Christians who do not support the government.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** There are highly organized crime networks operating outside, yet sometimes with the support of, the government structure. Some analysts view the youth wing of the ruling party itself as an organized crime network.

Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

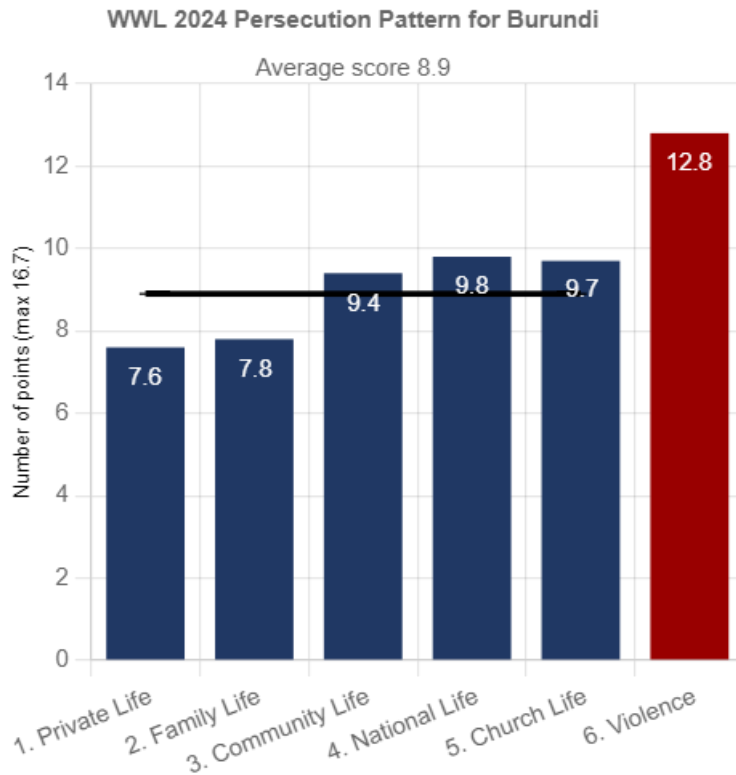
- **Other Church Religious Leaders (Medium):** Established church leaders, particularly from the Catholic Church, play a significant role in fomenting *Christian denominational protectionism*. They exert influence on their congregations to ensure that their social circles remain predominantly Catholic. The encouragement can be both subtle and overt, but the message remains clear: deviation from traditional faith is frowned upon, and in some cases, could be interpreted as an indirect call to socially ostracize or even persecute those who have deviated.
- **Ordinary citizens (Medium):** In areas where Catholicism has a strong foothold, residents often become the enforcers of religious norms. Non-Catholic groups might find it difficult to gather or preach without facing social pressures or even intimidation. The community may dictate the kind of theology that is acceptable, setting boundaries that limit religious freedom and diversity.
- **Family Members (Medium):** The pressures of Christian denominational protectionism also manifest within the family unit. In a predominantly Catholic family, leaving the faith for a non-traditional church is met with not just theological opposition but also cultural ramifications. Apostasy can result in being shunned by the family, leading to loss of familial support and privileges, thereby making it a highly consequential decision to diverge from the traditional religious path.

Both *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Christian denominational protectionism* are fueled by a range of actors, each contributing to the complex and challenging social fabric of Burundi. While the drivers are distinct, their impacts intersect in ways that perpetuate a cycle of persecution.

The Persecution pattern

The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Burundi shows (see chart below):

- The average pressure on Christians in Burundi was 8.9 points, similar to in WWL 2023.
- Pressure was 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 12.8 points, an increase from 11.1 points in WWL 2023.



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 2024 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)

This mostly affects those who change denominations from one Christian denomination to another, and they often face societal resistance and constraints. This includes family and societal backlash.

Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.75 points)

Practicing personal Christian worship activities like prayer or Bible reading can be risky, particularly in areas where deviation from the dominant religious tradition is frowned upon. This is more pronounced for adherents of the newer non-traditional denominations, who may face social ostracism or disapproval due to strong societal and cultural ties to established dominant church norms.

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (2.50 points)

Privately owning or possessing Christian materials can be particularly dangerous for those transitioning from Catholicism to non-traditional Christian groups. This risk stems from deep societal and cultural dynamics, where such actions signal a departure from traditional religious norms and often lead to social and legal repercussions.

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)

Expressing Christian faith through written forms like blogs and social media can be risky, potentially leading to arrest or even torture, especially if it attracts negative attention from the youth wing of the ruling party.

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

For Christians, meeting with fellow believers carries inherent risks due to the complex relationship between religious freedom and the socio-political climate. In some regions, religious gatherings, even peaceful worship, can lead to legal consequences or arrests.

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)

In Burundi, Christians have encountered difficulties in conducting Christian weddings, often due to government interference. Couples are pressured to incorporate the symbolism of the national flag into their marriage vows, with the threat of imprisonment for non-compliance looming over them.

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

Children of Christians in certain regions are pressured into participating in educational programs that either oppose their Christian beliefs or favor the majority religion. The curriculum, reflecting a mix of religious traditions, can sometimes be implemented in ways that disadvantage Christian students. This is part of a broader government effort to mold young minds according to its narrative.

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

Children are subjected to harassment and discrimination at times due to their parents' faith, facing tactics like shaming and bullying, sometimes even by government agents. This targeting aims to create pressure on both the children and their parents, the latter to show loyalty to the authorities.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

In certain contexts where government control over societal norms is prevalent, parents encounter significant challenges in raising their children according to Christian beliefs. The conflict between Christian values and official state narratives can be a very real challenge. Government interference in education, with attempts to influence the curriculum, further complicates this task.

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)

In some communities, government agents and local supporters of the government apply intense pressure on Christians. This harassment from both official and community sources significantly disrupts the daily lives of Christians, making it challenging for them to live according to their faith. The combined pressure from governmental and community levels creates an environment where practicing Christian beliefs freely becomes increasingly difficult.

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

Christians in some regions face barriers in accessing shared community resources, like clean drinking water, because of their faith. This situation, often a result of government agendas that enforce conformity or impose repercussions based on religious beliefs, represents a method of control. It adds a layer of difficulty for Christians in obtaining basic necessities.

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

Christians, especially those not aligned with government ideologies, often encounter difficulties in participating in communal institutions and forums. Government cadres and security agents often implement measures that favor those who support prevailing ideologies, creating barriers for Christians with differing beliefs. This discriminatory practice reflects a systematic effort to control and influence participation based on religious identity.

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.00 points)

Governments shaping curricula and opportunities to suit political agendas result in Christians, especially those from families not actively supporting the government, encountering barriers and discrimination in educational settings. This leads to a situation where Christians are at a disadvantage, potentially being left behind in education and job competitiveness.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points)

Christian civil society organizations have experienced hindrances or have been forbidden from functioning due to their Christian convictions. The government permits only organizations that align with its ideology, leading to closures or restrictions for those expressing differing views.

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)

Christians face hindrances in expressing views or opinions in public, particularly when perceived as political or anti-government, due to significant restrictions in the country. Navigating the delicate balance between religious expression and political sensitivities is a particular challenge for church leaders. The restrictions underscore the complex dynamics Christians encounter in voicing opinions within the socio-political landscape.

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

In some areas Christians encounter travel obstacles for faith-related reasons, driven by government concerns about potential political influence from religious figures. This is evident in Burundi, where authorities restrict the movement of pastors or priests to mitigate perceived challenges to political power. These restrictions pose significant challenges for Christians aiming to engage in religious activities beyond their immediate communities, illustrating the complex interplay between religious freedom and political considerations in certain regions.

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

In some regions, Christians encounter discrimination as they pursue public office, and face hindrances in promotion. Government loyalty tests, which gauge alignment with political expectations, create obstacles for individuals perceived as not conforming. These challenges underscore the complex interplay between religious identity and political considerations within these areas, limiting equal opportunities for Christians in the public sector.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Church activities in the country have faced systematic monitoring, hindrance, disturbance, and obstruction, primarily driven by government efforts to control religious institutions. The Minister of Interior has established a dedicated body to regulate and monitor religious organizations, impacting Christian groups significantly. The youth wing of the ruling party has made it even tougher by taking violent action against any perceived disloyalty. This restrictive environment emphasizes the challenges encountered by churches in freely practicing their faith within the socio-political landscape.

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

Securing registration or legal status for churches has been a challenging process at any level of government, often resulting in denials without disclosed reasons. The lack of transparency in these denials creates uncertainty and complexity for churches seeking legal recognition, contributing to an environment where the reasons behind registration refusals remain undisclosed. This opacity adds an extra layer of difficulty for churches striving to establish a legal and recognized presence within the socio-political landscape. The government said it wants to limit the number of churches in the country. To achieve this, it imposed unjustifiable and cumbersome requirements for licensing and registration.

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

Churches have encountered impediments in organizing Christian activities within their places of worship, facing government monitoring that results in harassment and arrests for individuals attending prayer meetings without pre-approval. This also generates an intimidating atmosphere.

Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (3.50 points)

Christians have faced interference in selecting their religious leaders, as the government actively intervenes to install individuals aligned with its ideology in leadership positions within religious groups. This interference goes beyond oversight, creating tension within religious communities.

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

Since 2015, the country has experienced a climate of intimidation, with government security agents actively making life difficult for Christians, resulting in harassment and frequent arrests. This is further exacerbated by the continuous and rampant intimidation tactics employed by the youth wing of the ruling party - Imbonerakure.

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 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. 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.

Burundi: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	5	1
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
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 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *

Burundi: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
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 *	10
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 *	10
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?	0	10

5 Year trends

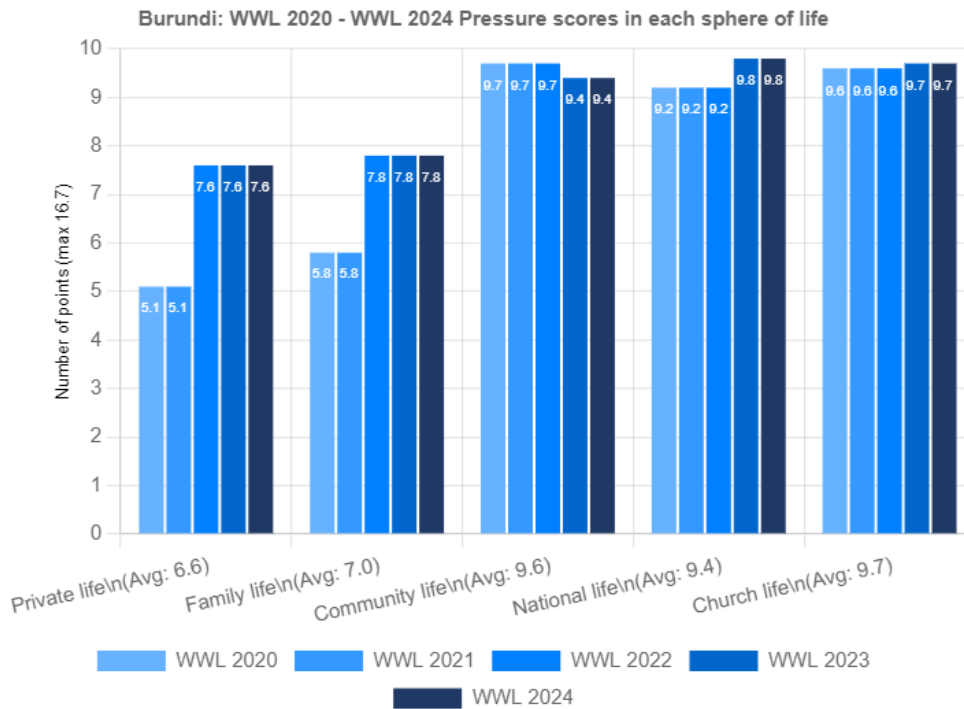
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Burundi: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	8.9
2023	8.9
2022	8.8
2021	7.9
2020	7.9

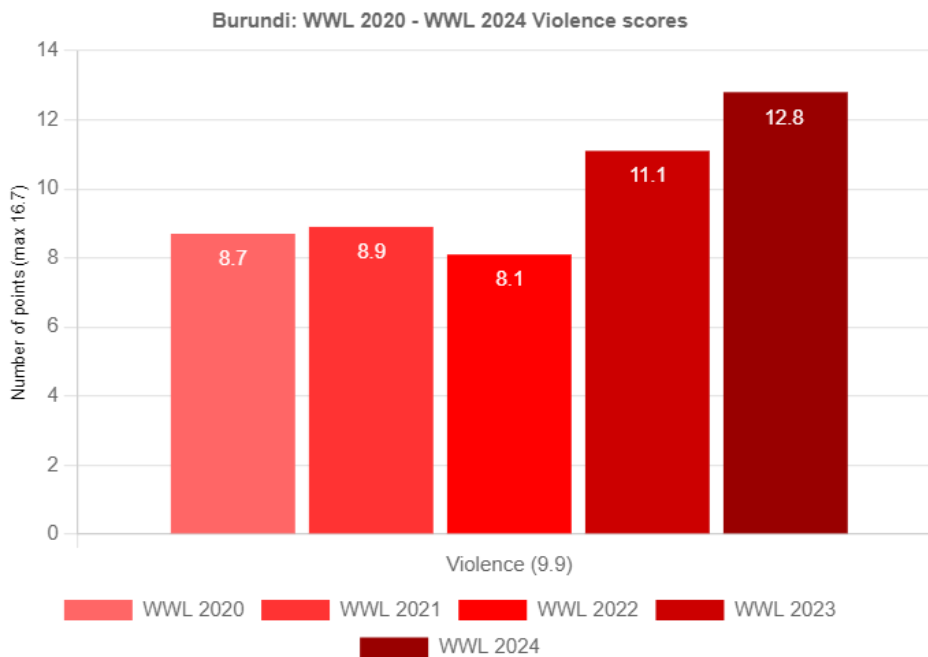
Since WWL 2022, the average pressure on Christians has stabilized around 8.8/8.9 points. For a country with a Christian majority, this level of pressure is significant. The intense involvement of Imbonerakure has caused the level of pressure faced by Christians in Burundi to remain consistently high.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



As the chart above shows, pressure on Christians is clearly highest on average in the *Church* (9.7 points), *Community* (9.6), and *National* (9.6) spheres of life. In WWL 2024, the levels of pressure have more or less stabilized in all spheres.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The chart indicates a rising trend in violence in Burundi, consistently scoring above 8.0 points since WWL 2020. There was a notable spike in WWL 2023 with a score of 11.1 points and a further increase to 12.8 points in WWL 2024, marking its highest level to date.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

“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,” a country expert reports. Faith-based persecution compounds and exploits the existing societal pressures 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 a 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 Burundi, rape is used as a tool of intimidation and coercion against Christians, particularly by the youth wing of the ruling party. According to country experts, this form of sexual violence is even employed to put pressure on men and the spouses of these men are targeted as a means to exact retribution. Given the sensitive and stigmatized nature of sexual violence, obtaining exact numbers is challenging. However, the information from experts suggests that this is a pervasive issue requiring urgent attention.

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	-
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Christian men in Burundi face multiple and violent forms of persecution. Christian men in Burundi commonly face challenges in the workplace on the basis of their faith; converts and those who change denomination to non-traditional 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.

The issue of Christians being forced to leave their homes or go into hiding within the country for faith-related reasons is particularly prevalent. Men, especially those in leadership roles within their churches or communities, often find themselves targeted and are compelled to move from place to place to avoid persecution.

Christian men also risk being detained by state forces. A country expert comments: “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 government. They are liable to be arrested, detained or imprisoned on false charges.” Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to being detained. Reflecting on the actions of the government in the WWL 2024 reporting period, a source adds: “This pattern of behavior suggests a systematic approach to curbing religious freedom and suppressing dissent within faith communities. The detention of Christians, particularly men who serve as pastors or leaders within their church communities, has been a modus operandi of the government for years.”

Repressive government action has also resulted in the abduction and death of Christian men. In Burundi, the abduction of Christians, particularly those who speak out against government injustices, is a grave concern. These abductions are often carried out by state security and the youth wing of the ruling party. The abducted individuals are not only killed but also subjected to horrific acts such as dismemberment and mutilation. A country expert states: “In the past, most of the killings were considered politically motivated. However, we have discovered that some of the killings target Christians who speak against the government, motivated by their faith.”

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 2022 Burundi) apart from:

- "International and local organizations reported that young Muslim women were particularly at risk of forced labor and sex trafficking. According to the representative of a local Muslim NGO, while many of the country's victims of trafficking in persons come from Muslim communities, non-Muslims seeking employment abroad are also often forced to convert to Islam before being accepted to work in Gulf countries, the destinations for many of the country's trafficking victims."

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. Dictatorship is deeply entrenched, significantly limiting freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Moreover, freedom of religion is under serious surveillance and faces numerous restrictions. Those who speak out against injustice and impunity live in a state of fear, as the government's tight control and surveillance systems create a challenging environment for voicing dissent or practicing religious beliefs freely. Given the current state of affairs, these characteristics of limited freedom and an entrenched dictatorship in Burundi are likely to continue.

Organized corruption and crime

The future of both corruption and organized crime in Burundi shows no signs of diminishing influence. The drivers of this engine, notably government officials and criminal networks, including factions like the youth wing of the ruling party, operate with a significant degree of impunity. Given this entrenched system and the lack of accountability, it is likely that these groups will continue to act without facing consequences, maintaining their strong influence and continuing to pose challenges, particularly for the Christian community.

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

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: BBC News, 4 November 2022, - <https://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>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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