
World Watch Research

Burundi: Persecution Dynamics

February 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

February 2025

© Open Doors International

research@od.org

Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	5
Brief country details.....	5
Map of country	6
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	7
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	7
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	7
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	7
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	8
Position on the World Watch List	8
Persecution engines.....	8
Drivers of persecution.....	10
The Persecution pattern	11
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	12
Violence	17
5 Year trends.....	19
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	21
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male.....	21
Persecution of other religious minorities	22
Trends Summary	22
Further useful reports.....	23
External Links	23

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- [Persecution dynamics](#) (published annually in January/February).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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/>.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Burundi: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
13,592,000	12,748,000	93.8

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Burundi: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	12,748,000	93.8
Muslim	286,000	2.1
Hindu	11,400	0.1
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	528,000	3.9
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	10,200	0.1
Atheist	220	0.0
Agnostic	8,100	0.1
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Burundi: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks, Political parties
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.
- Christians continuously face persecution through arrests for engaging in religious activities. For example, on 4 April 2024, 61 members of the "World's Glory Church" were detained by police in Ngozi province for worshipping in an unauthorized location.

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.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

No specific areas.

Position on the World Watch List

Burundi: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	59	63
WWL 2024	57	64
WWL 2023	55	65
WWL 2022	52	64
WWL 2021	48	64

The overall score for Burundi in WWL 2025 rose by 2 points, primarily due to an increase in the violence score, which jumped from the already extremely high level of 12.8 points in WWL 2024 to 14.6 points. This rise reflects a growing number of killings, arrests, and the forced displacement of Christians, with many being compelled to flee their homes and the country. Pressure on Christians remains notably high in both the *National* and *Church spheres*, where church leaders are frequently pressured to align with the ruling political powers. Over the last five years, Burundi's persecution score has steadily increased, with a 11-point rise from 48 points in WWL 2021 to 59 points in WWL 2025.

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 freedom 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				
Political parties								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.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** Some criminal networks operate with background government support. For instance, the ruling party's youth wing Imbonerakure has been repeatedly accused of serious criminal activities.
- **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

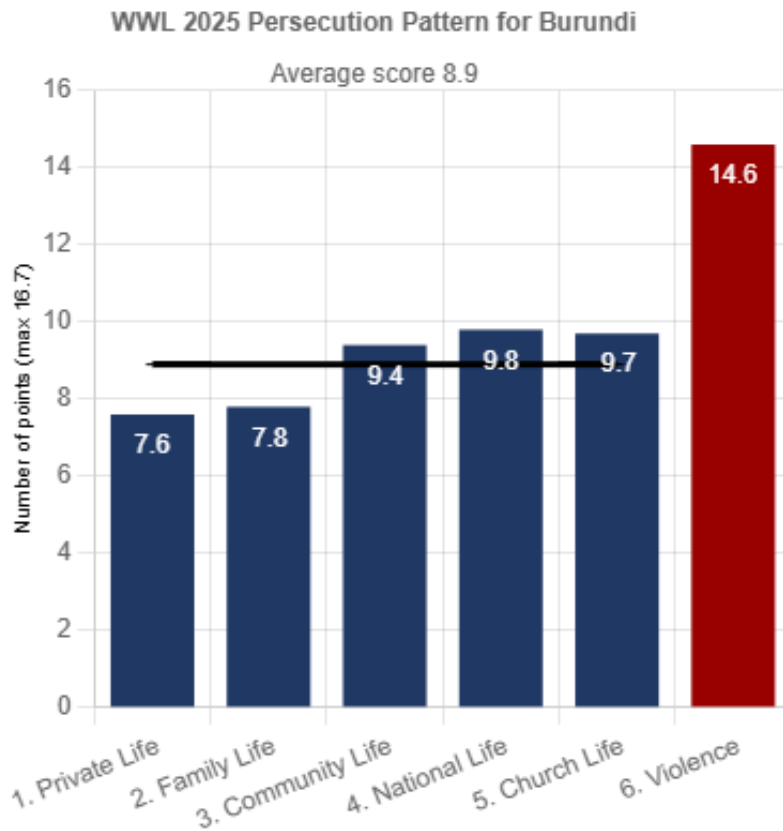
- **Government officials (Strong):** Government officials play a central role in the persecution of Christians in the country. They are involved in monitoring, ordering kidnappings, arrests, and sometimes even the killings of Christians who do not support the government.

- **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):** Pressure caused by *Christian denominational protectionism* also becomes evident 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, such as 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.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Burundi shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Burundi was 8.9 points, the same as in WWL 2024.
- 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 14.6 points, a significant jump from 12.8 points in WWL 2024.

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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

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)

Changing religious denominations often encounters resistance and social disapproval. Strong societal and cultural ties to dominant religious traditions frequently complicate such changes. For instance, where the Roman Catholic church is dominant, a family member leaving Catholicism to join a non-traditional church group is likely to face heavy opposition.

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)

Engaging in personal Christian practices, such as prayer and Bible reading, carries substantial risks in contexts where deviation from dominant religious traditions, such as Catholicism, is prevalent. Catholic family members joining Pentecostal churches, for instance, are likely to face hostile disapproval and even social ostracism.

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

In contexts where Catholicism is the dominant Christian tradition, transitioning to newer denominations, such as Pentecostal or other non-traditional churches, is a highly risky endeavor, particularly when it involves owning religious texts aligned with these faiths. Within both the community and the family, the ownership of these materials often invites conflict, disapproval, and heightened scrutiny.

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)

When Christians express their faith through blogs and social media, they navigate a complex web of risks that transcend geographical boundaries. The intersection of religious expression with political dynamics intensifies the dangers associated with articulating faith-based views. This risk becomes especially acute when religious beliefs overlap with political narratives or dissent, exposing individuals to threats and repercussions regardless of their physical location. This is further compounded for those

who change denomination from dominant traditions, such as Catholicism, to newer, non-traditional Christian denominations.

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 certain contexts, Christians belonging to non-traditional denominations face significant challenges in celebrating weddings according to their faith practices. Government intervention often imposes restrictions, such as requiring couples to take marriage vows using the national flag, with the threat of imprisonment for non-compliance. For non-traditional Christians, these measures are particularly dangerous as they not only infringe on their ability to observe religious traditions but also target their deviation from dominant denominations.

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

Christian children from non-traditional denominations often face challenges in educational systems dominated by traditional religious groups. These systems frequently incorporate curricula that reflect the beliefs and practices of the dominant religious traditions, creating an environment that marginalizes non-traditional Christian perspectives. Students from these groups encounter teachings that conflict with their faith, leading to feelings of exclusion and pressure to conform.

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

Children from families belonging to non-traditional churches, such as Pentecostals, often face heightened harassment and discrimination within their communities and families due to their parents' faith. This not only creates emotional and social difficulties for the children but also serves as a tool to pressure their parents into conforming to dominant religious norms or demonstrating loyalty to political leaders.

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

Parents in certain contexts face significant challenges in raising their children according to Christian beliefs. Teaching core Christian values, such as opposition to corruption and cruelty, is directly hindered by governmental control over societal norms. This influence undermines efforts to instill Christian virtues that conflict with official narratives. The clash between Christian principles and government ideologies imposes substantial barriers for parents seeking to pass on their faith. Educational systems further exacerbate these challenges by integrating government ideologies into the curriculum, creating obstacles both within the family and in the broader educational environment.

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)

Christians from non-traditional denominations face targeted harassment within their communities for changing their denomination and refusing to align with the ruling party. Youth league members, often acting in alignment with government policies, actively harass individuals and families perceived as dissenting from the government's agenda.

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

Christians from non-traditional denominations often face significant barriers in accessing community resources due to their faith. These obstructions are frequently tied to governmental agendas that pressure institutions and individuals to conform to dominant religious norms or political directives. Non-compliance results in targeted discrimination, with access to essential services manipulated based on religious affiliation.

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

Christians who change their denomination or do not publicly support the government face significant obstacles in participating in communal institutions and forums. These barriers are deeply rooted in governmental and ideological biases, where individuals perceived as dissenting from the prevailing regime are deliberately marginalized. Government cadres and security agents often prioritize those who align with the government's ideologies, excluding Christians whose beliefs, denominational affiliations, or lack of public support for the regime diverge from the dominant norms.

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)

Christians from non-traditional denominations and those who do not publicly support the government face significant disadvantages in education due to faith-related reasons. Traditional religious institutions often challenge the presence and growth of newer denominations, influencing educational policies and practices to favor dominant religious norms. Simultaneously, governmental control over educational institutions is used as a political tool, aligning curricula and opportunities with the state's agenda. This creates barriers for Christians whose beliefs or affiliations deviate from these norms, limiting their access to educational resources and opportunities.

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)

Christians face discrimination orchestrated by government and local authorities, particularly targeting those perceived as insufficiently supportive of the regime. Government-imposed loyalty tests are a common tactic, used to assess and pressure individuals into demonstrating alignment with state agendas. Christians who fail to meet these expectations often experience unfair treatment, exclusion from services, and limited access to opportunities. This systemic approach creates significant obstacles for Christians in their interactions with administrative, governmental and military institutions.

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 often face significant obstacles when their activities or beliefs diverge from governmental ideologies. Governments use a variety of tools to restrict or suppress these organizations, including imposing bans, enforcing severe limitations, or subjecting them to intense scrutiny. This creates an environment where only organizations that align with the government's agenda are allowed to function, leaving others marginalized or silenced.

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

Christians in Burundi face significant challenges when expressing their views or opinions in public, especially when such expressions are perceived as political or critical of the government. In a country rated "Not Free" by [Freedom House in its 2024 Burundi report](#), scoring low in freedom of expression and educational freedom, the environment imposes strict restrictions on viewpoints that could be seen as opposing or challenging the government's stance. With an overall freedom score of just 14 out of 100, among the lowest globally, religious leaders and individuals must navigate a precarious landscape.

Block 4.16: International monitoring has been hindered when Christians had to stand trial. (3.25 points)

In Burundi, Christians face severe persecution, including frequent arrests, detentions, and, in some cases, extrajudicial killings. These actions often target individuals for their faith or perceived opposition to the government. Detentions are frequently conducted without due process, amounting to sham proceedings designed to intimidate and silence.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

The constant threat posed by government security agents and youth groups, who closely monitor churches, has forced many churches into self-censorship. The persistent surveillance and interference by government bodies, particularly the Ministry of Interior, reflect a broader effort to control and restrict religious institutions. This atmosphere of intense scrutiny imposes significant barriers on Christian groups, severely limiting their ability to practice their faith freely.

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

Registration is a significant challenge for churches in Burundi, particularly for smaller, non-traditional denominations. The government has imposed stringent regulations that specifically target these churches, creating numerous barriers. These include prolonged delays, excessive bureaucratic hurdles, and restrictive legal requirements. The law mandates that church leaders possess a bachelor's degree, placing smaller congregations at a disadvantage. Additionally, churches are required to engage in socio-economic activities and report these to the Ministry of Interior, further complicating compliance. The law also stipulates a minimum of 300 members for a church to qualify for registration. Even when these stringent requirements are met, applications often remain pending for years. These regulatory practices severely impede the ability of smaller churches to operate freely, underscoring the significant challenges faced by non-traditional Christian groups in Burundi.

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

Churches in Burundi face significant governmental interference in the selection of their religious leaders. The government actively seeks to influence leadership elections, ensuring that individuals aligned with its ideology and political interests are placed in key positions. This intrusion undermines the autonomy of churches, forcing them to conform to state agendas rather than their own beliefs and traditions. Such interference creates friction within religious communities and disrupts their ability to independently choose leaders who reflect their values and spiritual priorities.

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

Christians in the country face immense difficulty in speaking out against persecution, especially when the government is the primary instigator. The risks are not limited to individuals; even families or communities that attempt to raise concerns face potential retaliation. Government measures against dissent have created an atmosphere where openly addressing such persecution can result in severe consequences. This environment of fear and repression makes it extremely risky for Christians to challenge the state's role in perpetuating their suffering, further silencing voices that might otherwise speak for justice.

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 WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Burundi: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	7	5
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?	25	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?	1	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 *
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?	100	10 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	0

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- Killings (6.1):** In-country research confirmed that seven Christians were killed for faith-related reasons, despite broader civilian deaths in the country. [Human Rights Watch](#) noted that the National Intelligence Service (SNR) and the Imbonerakure youth league were responsible for ongoing abuses, including killings (HRW 2025, Burundi country chapter). In May 2024, the country’s [bishops publicly condemned](#) political murders and human rights violations (Zenit, 4 May 2024).

- **Church closures (6.2):** The ten closures targeted churches led by pastors who refused to align themselves with the ruling party. The youth league and intelligence service were identified as key actors behind these actions. This has been the case for years. For example, in 2019, the [UN Commission of Inquiry](#) reported that the government was exerting greater control over churches to curb political dissent (UN Press Release, 4 September 2019). Nothing has changed since that report.
- **Abduction (6.5):** At least ten Christians were abducted. Reports from [Human Rights Watch](#), the US State Department, and statements from the country’s bishops highlighted that abductions and forced disappearances were common (HRW 2025, Burundi country chapter). While these reports often referred to victims as civilians, in-country research has confirmed that some of those were Christians abducted for faith-related reasons.

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.

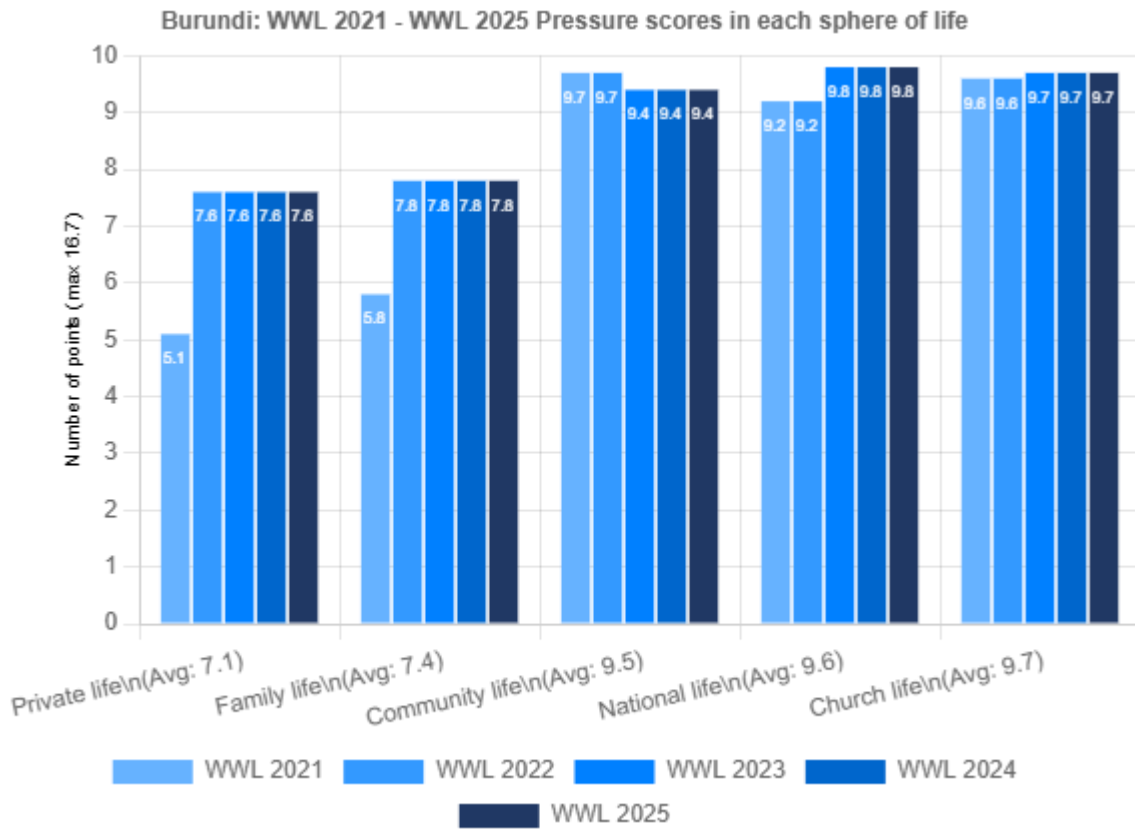
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Burundi: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	8.9
2024	8.9
2023	8.9
2022	8.8
2021	7.9

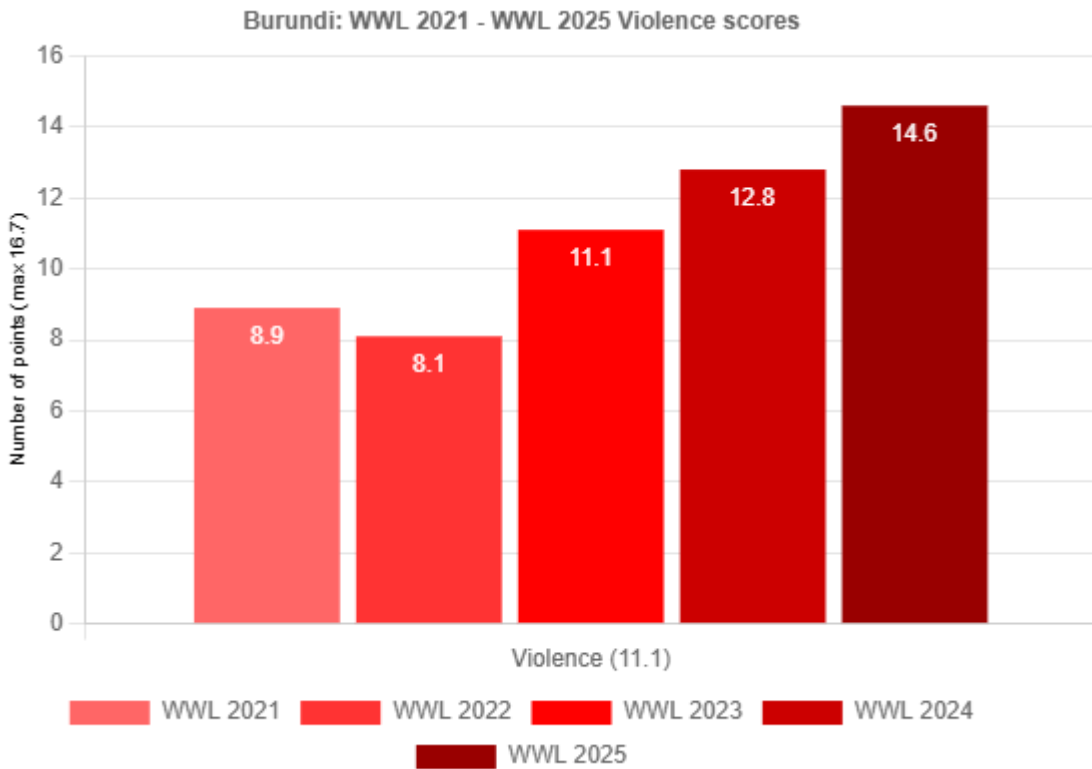
Since WWL 2022, the average pressure on Christians has stabilized around 8.8/8.9 points. For a country with a Christian majority, this level of pressure is significant. The intense involvement of Imbonerakure has caused the level of pressure faced by Christians in Burundi to remain consistently high.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

As illustrated in the blue chart below, the pressure experienced by Christians is most pronounced in the *Church* (averaging 9.7 points), *Community* (averaging 9.6 points), and *National* (averaging 9.6 points) spheres of life. In the most recent WWL reporting periods, the levels of pressure have remained relatively stable across all spheres, reflecting consistent challenges faced by Christian communities in these areas.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The red chart highlights a rising trend in violence in Burundi, with scores consistently exceeding 8.0 points since WWL 2021. A significant escalation of violence against Christians occurred in WWL 2023 - WWL 2025. Such a growing intensity of violence is of great concern.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

“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 country expert, “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 from the Muslim minority 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

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 new faith, they may be expelled from their homes by families and threatened harshly.

The issue of Christian men being forced to leave their homes or go into hiding within the country for faith-related reasons is particularly prevalent. 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 recent years, a country expert added: “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 have also at times been 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 2023 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."

Trends Summary

1) Government co-opting church leaders

The intricate relationship between the Church and State in Burundi has led to the government's use of religious leaders for political gain. These leaders are often pressured into endorsing government policies and the president, thus exerting influence over their congregations. Despite a change in leadership with the new president, who was expected to reduce such pressure, the government's manipulation of religious institutions persists. Intimidation and violence against dissenting religious voices continue, reflecting the government's ongoing control over religious authorities.

2) Regional instability in the Great Lakes region

The Great Lakes region, particularly eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), remains a hotspot for conflict and geopolitical tensions. The International Crisis Group has regularly highlighted the risk of this conflict spilling over into neighboring countries, including Burundi ([ICC, 20 June 2024](#)). Such instability could lead to proxy wars involving regional powers like Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi escalating the conflict and increasing the risk to churches and religious communities in Burundi. The potential for churches to become targets in this volatile environment is significant.

3) The role of Imbonerakure

Imbonerakure, the youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD party, has become a crucial element of the government's enforcement mechanism. This group not only rallies support for the party but also acts aggressively against perceived government critics, including through assaults and property destruction. They have also been reportedly involved in violent activities alongside Burundian military forces in the DRC (BHRI, 9 September 2022). Imbonerakure's role in both domestic repression and foreign conflicts underscores its impact on the safety and security of Burundian citizens, including religious communities.

4) Authoritarianism and freedom of religion

In Burundi, Christians face significant challenges to their freedom of religion. The government's security forces frequently arrest and detain church leaders, for instance, creating a climate of fear and intimidation. This repression is complemented by the violent and intimidating actions of Imbonerakure. The trend is clear: The overarching authoritarian environment continues to stifle religious expression and assembly, exacerbating the insecurity faced by Christians in the country.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and 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/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points): Freedom House in its 2024 Burundi report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/burundi/freedom-world/2024>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/burundi>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: bishops publicly condemned - https://zenit.org/2024/05/04/burundi-bishops-denounce-political-murders-and-human-rights-violations/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: UN Commission of Inquiry - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/09/burundi-un-commission-inquiry-raises-red-flags-serious-human-rights>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Human Rights Watch - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/burundi>
- 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>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Burundi - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/>
- Trends Summary: ICC, 20 June 2024 - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/burundi-colombia-mozambique-pakistan/horizon-june-november-2024>

- Trends Summary: BHRI, 9 September 2022 - <https://burundihri.org/rep/Opinion-9-September-2022-Engl.pdf>