

Briefing Note – 06 May 2015

Burundi: Electoral violence



Need for international assistance	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Urgent
Expected impact	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Significant	Major

Crisis Overview

Socio-political tensions are rising in Burundi with the approach of parliamentary and presidential elections in May and June, and the constitutional court's approval of President Nkurunziza's bid for a third term. Mass protests organised by civil society and some opposition parties since 26 April have turned violent. As of 5 May, at least 13 individuals have been killed, more than a hundred injured, and at least 600 arrested, and nearly 39,100 have fled to neighbouring countries. Inter-ethnic tensions, a rift between the military and the police, and an existing challenging humanitarian situation are all potential aggravating factors.

So far, clashes have taken place mostly in the capital Bujumbura and surrounding areas, but eight provinces have been identified as potential 'hot spots' for an election crisis and related violence. Young men and those seeking to flee the country are particularly vulnerable

Key Findings

Anticipated scope and scale

Although data is not yet available, significant numbers of people have been observed leaving Bujumbura in recent days. An escalation in displacement is likely to increase basic needs. Up to 400,000 people, including 250,000 IDPs and 150,000 refugees, and mostly in eight provinces, could potentially be affected in the first six months of an eventual election crisis and related violence.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- **Protection** support for unarmed civilians and people fleeing Burundi for neighbouring countries and areas outside of the capital.
- **Emergency response** preparedness, and **monitoring** systems for timely assessment of displacement patterns.
- **Livelihoods:** economic activity is blocked in Bujumbura, hampering an already fragile situation.

Humanitarian constraints

- Access to timely information
- Insecurity
- Difficulties to move inside Bujumbura and leave the city

Limitations

Information on internal displacement is urgently needed.

Crisis Impact

Mass protests since 26 April, against President Nkurunziza's intention to run for a third term, have turned violent. As of 5 May, at least 13 individuals have been killed, more than a hundred injured, and at least 600 arrested (local media, 05/05/2015; AFP 02/05/2015; OCHA 04/05/2015). Since the beginning of April, nearly 39,100 Burundians have sought asylum in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 05/05/2015). Although data is not yet available, significant numbers of people have been observed leaving Bujumbura for rural areas in recent days and further escalation in movement of people within the country is likely to increase demand for basic needs (START Fund, 05/05/2015).

Key electoral dates could potentially see heightened tensions (legislative and communal elections are 26 May). Some presidential candidates could reject the whole process and call for the disruption of the elections (HCT 24/04/2015). With the names of official candidates being published on 11 May, there is a potential for escalation of violence. Eight provinces have been identified as potential 'hot spots' (Cibitoke, Bubanza, Bujumbura Mairie, Bujumbura Rural, Bururi, Makamba, Kirundo and Muyinga) (ICG 30/04/2015; HCT, 24/04/2015). Up to 400,000 could potentially be affected in the first six months of an election crisis and related violence in Burundi, including 250,000 IDPs and 150,000 refugees (HCT, 24/04/2015; PI, 06/05/2015).

Displacement to Neighbouring Countries

People are reportedly fleeing Burundi to seek refuge with relatives and in camps in neighbouring countries.

- **Rwanda:** 24,800 Burundian refugees have arrived. The daily arrival rate of has decreased from a peak of over 1,000 per day to an average of 300 per day over the last few days. New refugees are arriving from Bujumbura, Kirundo, Ngozi, and Muyinga provinces (UNHCR, 05/05/2015; UNHCR 06/05/2015).
- **Tanzania:** There are nearly 6,970 Burundian refugees, including some on the islands on Lake Tanganyika; around 4,380 have arrived in the past few weeks as tensions have risen (UNHCR 05/05/2015; UNHCR, 06/05/2015). The Minister for Home Affairs has eased restrictions on asylum seekers (UNHCR 30/01/2015).
- **DRC:** New arrivals of Burundian refugees and DRC returnees have reached 7,320, with the rate peaking on 25–26 April. As of 5 May, new arrivals are mainly women and are hosted by local communities (UNHCR 05/05/2015).

Access to Essential Services in Burundi

Education: Since 26 April, schools in Bujumbura have been closed as a result of movement restrictions in the city. The University has also been closed (START Fund, 05/05/2015).

Livelihoods: Economic activities in Bujumbura are significantly hampered by protests, with most businesses and banks closed, raising concern for the impact on an already fragile economy (OCHA, 04/05/2015).

Protection: Reports of unrest and violence targeting unarmed civilians are increasing (local media, 05/05/2015). The National Liberation Forces' spokesperson, the opposition group, was kidnapped on 26 April. A prominent human rights activist has been arrested, independent radio stations closed, and social media networks blocked (ICG 30/04/2015). Journalists are reportedly facing violence and intimidation from authorities and members of the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure (RSF, 30/04/2015).

Movement restrictions have also been reported. The Government ordered student residences in Bujumbura to close on 1 May as many students are thought to be taking part in the protests; the majority had to go back to their province of origin (France 24, 01/05/2015). Communal transport has ceased, and few civil servants have been going to their offices. Lack of fuel, which has been ongoing in the past few months, is aggravating the overall situation (local media, 05/05/2015).

Vulnerable Groups Affected

- **Young men** are reported to be fleeing Burundi for fear of being targeted: they are reportedly asked to join the Imbonerakure. If they refuse, they are exposed to disappearance, violence, etc. Police are also reportedly arresting young men (UNHCR, 29/04/2015).
- **Refugees:** In Burundi, those suspected to be leaving the country are reportedly detained, asked to pay money, or subjected to sexual violence. Newly arrived refugees in Rwanda and DRC claim that police are working openly with the Imbonerakure and imposing systematic checks on populations. Many refugees are leaving with little or no belongings, so as not to give the impression they are fleeing if they are stopped en route (UNHCR, 29/04/2015).

Humanitarian Constraints

- Some of those who left Bujumbura and failed to cross the border to neighbouring countries are staying with host families in rural areas (START Fund, 05/05/2015). Residents of some areas are choosing to stay indoors, either blocked by demonstrators who won't let them leave their neighbourhoods or afraid of being caught up in the violence (HRW, 05/05/2015).

- People are crowding bus stations to leave Bujumbura for rural areas amid fears that the security situation may deteriorate further, which has caused a sharp increase in transport fares. There are unconfirmed reports that lack of transportation is preventing people from leaving the capital (UNHCR, 29/04/2015).
- Security is expected to be another major constraint. Risks in “hot-spot” areas include cross-border criminal activities, armed groups crossing borders and terrorist activities (HCT 24/04/2015).

Potential Aggravating Factors

- **Rift among security forces:** The risk of a coup is rising as a rift is growing between the police and the military: on 2 May, the Defence Minister stated that the army would not support a violation of the Constitution. Police have reportedly clashed with military officers, the latter protecting civilians (The Washington Post, 03/05/2015). Army reports also suggest that a major offensive has been planned to destabilise the country ahead of the elections (Al Jazeera 01/04/2015, International media 01/05/2015).
- **Ethnic tensions:** Members of the Tutsi community living in Burundi claim to have been threatened with mass slaughter if they do not back President Nkurunziza. Tutsis are perceived as supporters of the opposition (The Telegraph, 05/05/2015). In the capital, radio stations supportive of the ruling party are reportedly broadcasting tracts evocative of past ethnic conflicts (Al Jazeera, 30/04/2015). Burundi’s 12-year civil war left an estimated 35,000 demobilised combatants and at least 100,000 small arms in the country (HCT 24/04/2015).
- **Fragile political institutions:** The situation is aggravated by lack of confidence in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and strategies by the regime to reduce the inclusivity of the electoral process (ICG 17/04/2015). The UN Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi (MENUB) is mandated to follow and report on the presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, but the Government has stated that its mandate is limited, and does not cover validating the results (UN). The Government has also boycotted activities involving MENUB and expressed that there are “technical problems” with the exact role of the mission (AFP 12/01/2015).
- **Protracted displacement:** 78,000 long-term IDPs and 50,000 refugees have yet to return to their areas of origin. 79,000 Burundian returnees are also going through slow reintegration processes, and nearly 30,000 regular and irregular migrants are present in the country (HCT, 24/04/2015). Protracted IDPs may be more vulnerable if violence escalates (IDMC 04/03/2015).

- **Landslides:** Torrential rains in late March caused landslides south of the capital Bujumbura, which killed 20 people and rendered 1,800 homeless. Crops have been severely damaged, as well as roads, bridges and schools (BBC 30/03/2015, Caritas 01/04/2015; Burundi Red cross 07/04/2015).
- **Economic pressure:** On 24 March, government workers and shop owners went on strike over high prices for basic commodities and the high cost of living. Electricity charges increased by 124% and water tariffs 266% in September 2014. Annual inflation hit 22% in February 2015 (local media 27/03/2015). These pressures are significant in a country with a large young population and high rates of unemployment (HCT 24/04/2015).

Key Information

- President Nkurunziza was first elected in 2005. Under the Burundian constitution and the terms of the Arusha Accord, which ended 13 years of civil war in which about 30,000 people were killed, no leader is supposed to hold power for more than ten years. Nkurunziza’s supporter argue that his first term does not content, as he was only elected by Parliament. On 5 May, Burundi’s constitutional court approved the President’s bid for a third term. The ruling CNDD-FDD has expelled members opposed to Nkurunziza’s candidacy (Reuters 05/05/2015; ICG 30/04/2015). The constitutional court’s Vice President has reportedly fled the country, citing “death threats” (local media, 05/05/2015).
- The 50,000-strong Imbonerakure, has mobilised throughout Burundi, threatening those opposing President Nkurunziza (NY Times 28/04/2015; IRIN News 28/04/2015).
- The Government has announced it is ready to free detainees, allow radio, and remove the arrest warrant on protest leaders, if protests stop (local media, 05/05/2015).

Other Countries’ Involvement

Foreign ministers from the East African Community have been requested to investigate the political situation in Burundi. Ugandan President Museveni was asked to intervene to restore peace (World Bulletin, 05/05/2015). Rwanda has expressed serious concern over the deteriorating security situation, voicing concerns over elements of the FDLR, an armed group based in eastern DRC and involved in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, being drawn into the protests in Burundi (local media, 05/05/2015).

Western countries, including the US and UK, have warned that Nkurunziza’s bid is unconstitutional and efforts to restore peace are urgently needed (local media, 05/05/2015).

Past Electoral Conflict

During the 2010 elections, opposition parties, claiming fraud, rejected the results of district elections, and announced a boycott of the presidential and legislative elections. The boycott was declared illegal by the Government, and President Nkurunziza was left as the only presidential candidate (HRW 01/07/2010). In the kick-off to the presidential campaign, political violence included grenade and arson attacks, and killings of both ruling-party and opposition activists (Al Jazeera 28/06/2010, IJJD 22/09/2010). The CNDD-FDD used the Imbonerakure during the 2010 electoral period to intimidate and harass political opponents (Human Rights Watch, 12/02/2015).

Since the President's re-election in 2010, scores of political killings, intimidation of the opposition, and a crackdown on media freedom have been reported. Opposition figures were jailed for bribery and accused of rebel links in January (local media 16/01/2015).

Key Characteristics of Host Population and Area

Demographic profile: 10,306,000 total population, including 605,000 in Bujumbura (2011).

Food: As the lean season progresses, household food stocks and purchasing power have declined. Food security for the poor is expected to deteriorate to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) starting in April until the beginning of Season B in June. Other households will remain in Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food security through June. Most staple food prices are roughly 25% above the five-year average, particularly in Bujumbura, Ruyigi, Myinga, and Gitega markets. Around 1.3 million people are affected by food insecurity.

Nutrition: Under-5 chronic malnutrition rate: 58% (2013); under-5 acute malnutrition rate: 4%

Health: Under-5 mortality rate: 104 (2012). Maternal mortality ratio: 500. Life expectancy at birth: 54

Lighting and cooking sources: Solid fuels: 98%; Wood: 94.2%; Charcoal: 5.1%; Other: <1%

Literacy rate: 86.9%

Sources: CIA World Factbook; World Bank; Clean Cookstoves; UNICEF; FEWSNET.

Response Capacity

Local and National Response Capacity

The Burundi Red Cross has prepared a contingency plan for the elections aimed at media leaders and associations of media professionals in their support on the prevention of violence (Croix-Rouge du Burundi 04/03/2015). Its response capacity, however, is limited, much like that of the Government.

Capacity is likely to be overstretched if the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is above 10,000 (HCT, 24/04/2015).

International Response Capacity

The UNCT and the few international NGOs in the country tend to be more development-oriented. Financial and capacity constraints are causing gaps in response. UN agencies (WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, UNFPA) as well as international NGOs are largely concentrated in Bujumbura. Sub-offices in provinces Gitega, Ruyigi, Muyinga, Rutana, Makamba and Ngozi have the capacity to reopen (HCT, 24/04/2015).

Population Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are already stretched in the country. In case of election violence, most affected people would rely on international protection and assistance for their survival (HCT, 24/04/2015).

Information Gaps and Needs

- There is no information on internal displacement.
- Internal politics and affiliations within state structures are unclear as the situation is dynamic and highly volatile.
- Social media, and major radio stations such as Radio Publique Africaine, have been blocked on 28 April, affecting the diffusion of information to the public; other radio stations continue to broadcast in the capital, but their signals in provincial areas remains blocked (OCHA, 04/05/2015).

Lessons Learned

- Mediation has been a powerful tool in the past for conflict management in Burundi. Flaws in the mediation process have been highlighted and lessons learned include the importance of extensive background knowledge, a professional approach to mediation processes and a well-designed incentive structure to reach sustainable agreements (Thomas Kwasi Tiekou 2011).
- Displacement of populations to neighbouring countries prior to elections have been commonplace in Burundi, and fed by internal rumours of a potential spiralling crisis. In 1993, populations fled to Rwanda the day before the June elections, and came back right after. In 2005, up to 10,000 people sought refuge in neighbouring countries prior to the elections; they came back soon after (local media, 20/04/2015).
- How the international community engages with local issues matters a great deal for the domestic conduct of politics. Promoting democracy may require engaging core state institutions – such as legislatures – to reinforce horizontal accountability, as opposed to focusing on the President and Presidential elections (The Washington Post, 03/05/2015).

Map of Affected Area

Burundi: Electoral violence

(as of 5 May 2015)

