



TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

B. Assessment of the Enabling Environment

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms
2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework
3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources
4. Open and Responsive State
5. Supportive Public Culture on Discourses on Civil Society
6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

C. Recommendations

D. Research Process

A) An Introduction to the Enabling Environment

What we understand by an Enabling Environment is the combination of laws, rules and social attitudes that support and promote the work of civil society. Within such an environment, civil society can engage in political and public life without fear of reprisals, openly express its views, and actively participate in shaping its context. This includes a supportive legal and regulatory framework for civil society, ensuring access to information and resources that are sustainable and flexible to pursue their goals unhindered, in safe physical and digital spaces. In an enabling environment, the state demonstrates openness and responsiveness in governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Positive values, norms, attitudes, and practices towards civil society from state and non-state actors further underscore the supportive environment.

To capture the state of the Enabling Environment, we use the following six principles:

SIX ENABLING PRINCIPLES

- 1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms**
- 2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework**
- 3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources**
- 4. Open and Responsive State**
- 5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society**
- 6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment**

In this Country Focus Report, each enabling principle is assessed with a quantitative score and complemented by an analysis and recommendations written by our Network Members. Rather than offering a singular index to rank countries, the report aims to measure the enabling environment for civil society across the six principles, discerning dimensions of strength and those requiring attention.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in the insights and diverse perspectives of civil society actors who came together in a dedicated panel with representatives from civil society to discuss and evaluate the state of the Enabling Environment. Their collective input enriches the report with a grounded, participatory assessment. This primary input is further supported by secondary sources of information, which provide additional context and strengthen the analysis.

Brief Overview of the Country Context

Burundi's civic space remains [severely restricted](#), shaped by a decade-long trajectory of [political repression and systemic impunity](#) since the 2015 crisis triggered by former President Pierre Nkurunziza's controversial third-term bid. That crisis led to mass protests, a failed coup, and [widespread human rights violations](#), forcing many civil society organisations (CSOs) and independent media into exile—a trend that persists today. Despite initial hopes for reform under President Évariste Ndayishimiye, who assumed office in 2020 pledging dialogue and respect for freedoms, civic space [has continued to deteriorate](#). Ahead of the 2025 legislative and municipal elections, [reports indicated](#) escalating political intolerance, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation of opposition figures, journalists, and human rights defenders. The ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party [maintains tight control](#) over state institutions and security forces, while its youth wing, the Imbonerakure, is [repeatedly implicated](#) in harassment, enforced disappearances, and violence against perceived critics.

The constitutional and legal framework entrenches these restrictions. The [2018 Constitution](#) expanded presidential powers and weakened checks and balances, undermining judicial independence. While it guarantees freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, these rights are curtailed through laws such as [Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017](#) on the Organic Framework of Non-Profit Associations, which imposes onerous registration requirements and broad government oversight, enabling authorities to dissolve organisations deemed “politically motivated.” Media freedoms are similarly constrained by the Press Law and [Penal Code](#), which criminalise vaguely defined offences like “endangering state security.” [Prosecutions of journalists](#), including Floriane Irangabiye and Sandra Muhoza, underscore the weaponisation of these provisions to silence dissent.

Electoral reforms have further narrowed participation. The [2024 Electoral Code](#) imposed prohibitive candidate fees, raising the cost of registering for elections to as much as 100 million Burundian Francs (approximately US\$ 34,700) for presidential contenders—an amount that [effectively excludes](#) most opposition figures and independent aspirants. In addition, the Code introduced restrictive eligibility rules, including a provision requiring candidates who leave a political party to wait two years before running as independents. These measures, combined with the politicisation of electoral institutions, have further entrenched ruling party dominance and [sidelined prominent opposition leaders](#) such as Agathon Rwasa, undermining prospects for competitive and inclusive elections.

Socio-economic fragility compounds these challenges. Burundi faces [soaring inflation that reached 39 percent](#) on average over the first two months of 2025, fuel shortages, and

widespread poverty, limiting citizens' ability to participate in civic life and increasing vulnerability to state coercion. The militarisation of politics and lack of accountability for past abuses perpetuate a climate of fear, eroding trust in institutions and weakening prospects for inclusive governance.

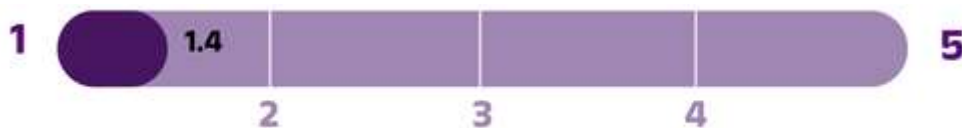
The convergence of restrictive constitutional provisions, repressive laws, political violence, and economic hardship [systematically undermines freedoms](#) of association, assembly, and expression. Without structural reforms—such as revising CSO and media laws, decriminalising speech offences, and restoring judicial independence—Burundi risks deepening authoritarianism and further marginalising independent civil society voices.

B) Assessment of the Enabling Environment

PRINCIPLE SCORE

1. Respect and Protection of Fundamental Freedoms

Score: ¹



Burundi's civic space remains deeply constrained by legal frameworks and enforcement practices that undermine constitutional guarantees of fundamental freedoms. The overall civic space is deteriorating. In 2025, it is rated as [“closed”](#) by the CIVICUS Monitor and “Not Free” by [Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025—Burundi](#). While Article 32 of the 2018 Constitution affirms the right to peaceful assembly and association, the Law No. 1/28 of 2013 on Public Gatherings imposes prior notification requirements that function as de facto authorisation, bans spontaneous assemblies, and grants authorities broad discretion to prohibit gatherings on vague grounds of “public order.” Despite procedural safeguards such as the 48-hour response rule, enforcement in 2025 was marked by systematic denial of opposition rallies and civil society meetings, arbitrary detentions, and violent dispersals—documented by OHCHR and CIVICUS—creating a climate of fear and eroding civic engagement.

Similarly, Article 31 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but restrictive provisions in the Press Law (Law No. 1/019 of 2018) and the Penal Code criminalise “false news,” “public indecency,” and other broadly defined offences. The National Communication Council (CNC) wields sweeping powers to suspend media operations and revoke accreditation, with limited judicial oversight. In 2025, these provisions were weaponised during the electoral period: media coverage was placed under CNC supervision, journalists faced harassment and attacks—such as the assault on Willy Kwizera—and arbitrary detention

¹This is a rebased score derived from the [CIVICUS Monitor rating](#) published in December 2025.

persisted, exemplified by Sandra Muhoza’s prolonged imprisonment. Burundi’s press freedom ranking fell sharply, reflecting a deteriorating environment for independent voices.

Collectively, these restrictions foster self-censorship, weaken accountability, and shrink the enabling environment for civil society, journalists, and activists—entrenching authoritarian control and undermining democratic discourse.

1.1 | Freedom of Association

Freedom of association is formally guaranteed under Article 32 of the 2018 [Constitution of Burundi](#), which states that “freedom of assembly and association shall be guaranteed, as shall freedom to form non-profit-making associations or organisations in conformity with the law.” From the outset, this conditionality—requiring conformity with the law—creates a loophole that authorities have consistently exploited to weaponise legislation against independent civic actors. In practice, this constitutional guarantee is undermined by restrictive legislation and administrative practices that severely limit its exercise.

The most significant legal instrument constraining this right is the [Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017](#), which imposes onerous registration requirements and grants the Ministry of Interior broad discretionary powers to suspend or dissolve organisations deemed to engage in “political activities” or threaten “public order.” For example, Article 82 mandates prior approval for all activities of non-profit associations, under penalty of sanctions, effectively subjecting routine operations to government discretion, while Article 24 empowers the Minister responsible for approving associations to reject applications for non-compliance with the law or if the association’s purpose is deemed contrary to the law. Although the article provides for an appeal to the Administrative Court, this process is lengthy and costly, creating a chilling effect on new organisations. These provisions effectively subject CSOs to political control and operational strangulation, contrary to its obligations under Article 22 of the ICCPR, which permits limitations on freedom of association only when they are lawful, necessary, and proportionate in a democratic society.

In practice, these restrictions have been weaponised to shrink civic space. Ahead of the June 2025 legislative elections, authorities [intensified crackdowns](#) on independent associations and opposition-linked coalitions. In January 2025, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) [disqualified candidates](#) from the opposition-aligned coalition *Burundi Bwa Bose* despite its prior legal recognition, citing eligibility rules that prohibit individuals who leave a party from running for office for up to two years—a measure [extended by presidential decree](#). This not only curtailed political participation but also undermined the associational rights of groups seeking to organise outside the ruling CNDD-FDD party.

Civil society actors faced escalating harassment in 2025. Reports by [OHCHR](#) and [Amnesty International](#) document arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and enforced disappearances targeting civil society actors and opposition parties. For instance, between January and August 2025, SOS Torture Burundi [recorded 26 enforced disappearances](#), including that of Fidèle Nkurembone, a CNL activist reportedly abducted by National Intelligence Service agents on 2 April 2025. On 11 January 2025, four Imbonerakure members reportedly [attacked](#) two e National Congress for Freedom (CNL) opposition members over their political affiliation. Authorities have detained two suspects, while the other two remain at large. These acts illustrate how associational freedoms are eroded through violence and impunity, despite constitutional guarantees. The implications are profound: by conditioning the right to associate on compliance with ambiguous and burdensome requirements, the law transforms a constitutional guarantee into a privilege subject to executive discretion.

1.2 | Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Freedom of assembly is guaranteed under Article 32 of Burundi's 2018 Constitution but conditioned on conformity with the law—a caveat that enables restrictive interpretation. The main statute, [Law No. 1/28 of 5 December 2013 on Public Gatherings](#), provides a structured framework but [embeds significant limitations](#). Articles 4 and 7 require organisers to submit written notification at least four working days before an assembly, detailing purpose, itinerary, and organiser identities. Positively, the law introduces a 48-hour response rule: if authorities fail to respond within this timeframe, the assembly is deemed authorised, which could safeguard against arbitrary delays. However, in practice, this notification operates as a request for permission, which is usually denied, undermining the principle that assemblies should not require prior authorisation.

While Article 1 proclaims assemblies “free,” Articles 5, 8, and 10 grant authorities broad discretion to ban or defer assemblies on grounds of “public order,” a term undefined in the law, creating space for abuse. Article 12 allows appointed delegates to dissolve meetings if maintaining public order “absolutely demands it,” without clear evidentiary standards. Although Article 5 grants assembly organisers both hierarchical and judicial avenues to appeal an unfavourable decision within 48 hours, the law fails to specify any timeframe for the administrative court to deliver its ruling, creating uncertainty and potential delays in exercising the right to peaceful assembly.

Restrictions such as banning spontaneous assemblies (Article 9) and imposing fines on counter-demonstrators (Article 18(2)) contradict international norms that protect simultaneous assemblies. Time limits under Article 11—restricting assemblies to between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.—may enhance security but unnecessarily constrain peaceful indoor meetings. While the framework aims to regulate assemblies, its vague language and discretionary powers enable systematic suppression. These provisions contravene [Burundi's international obligations](#) under Article 21 of the ICCPR and Article 11 of the African Charter, which allow restrictions only when necessary and proportionate in a democratic society.

In 2025, these legal constraints were aggressively enforced to suppress civic activism and political dissent. Ahead of the June 2025 legislative elections, authorities systematically blocked opposition rallies and civil society gatherings. [Reports indicate](#) that security forces and members of the ruling party's youth wing, the Imbonerakure, violently dispersed meetings organised by opposition coalitions and human rights groups. For example, in May 2025, rallies by the *Burundi Bwa Bose* coalition [were banned](#) under the pretext of “threats to public order,” while activists attempting to hold peaceful demonstrations on electoral transparency were arrested. The [crackdown](#) intensified during the campaign period, with documented cases of intimidation, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances of activists and journalists. Between January 2024 and May 2025 alone, civil society organisations [recorded](#) 892 arbitrary detentions and 58 enforced disappearances, many linked to attempts to organise assemblies.

The convergence of restrictive laws, discretionary enforcement, and violent repression renders the constitutional guarantee of freedom of assembly largely illusory. By criminalising spontaneous gatherings and conditioning assemblies on prior approval, the state effectively neutralises civil society's ability to mobilise, advocate, and hold authorities accountable. These practices not only violate Burundi's obligations under international law but also perpetuate a

climate of fear and impunity, shrinking civic space and undermining prospects for democratic governance.

1.3 | Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in Burundi is formally guaranteed under [Article 31 of the 2018 Constitution](#), which affirms the right to opinion and expression, including access to information. However, this guarantee is undermined by restrictive legislation. The [Penal Code \(Law No. 1/27 of 29 December 2017\)](#) criminalises vaguely defined offences such as “endangering state security” and “spreading false information,” notably under Article 625, which penalises knowingly disseminating false news likely to disturb public peace. This is [criticised for lack of clarity](#) on how to determine whether information is “false,” a “rumour,” or within the scope of what is considered “public peace.” Section 625 therefore does not provide clear guidance for individuals and risks giving too much discretion to those responsible for enforcing this law.

The Press Law—specifically Articles 21, 65, 66, 76, and 79 of [Law No. 1/ of July 2024](#) Amending Law No. 1/019 of 14 September 2018—sets out obligations intended to promote responsible journalism and protect public interests. For instance, Article 66 positively requires media outlets to ensure fair access for political parties, civil society associations, and citizens, fostering pluralism and inclusive debate. Similarly, Article 21 provides a framework for accreditation of foreign journalists, with decisions subject to appeal before competent courts, which is a safeguard against arbitrary exclusion. However, other provisions introduce significant risks of abuse. Article 79 criminalises broad categories of speech—including “false news,” “public indecency,” and “insult”—with fines ranging from 500,000 to 1,500,000 BIF, without clear definitions or consideration of intent, creating uncertainty for journalists and civil society actors. Likewise, Articles 65 and 76 empower the National Communication Council (CNC) to suspend or prohibit media operations for non-compliance, granting sweeping discretion without independent oversight. While these measures aim to uphold ethics and protect legitimate interests such as privacy and public order, their vague language and lack of proportionality enable arbitrary enforcement. This fosters self-censorship, limits investigative reporting, and constrains advocacy, undermining the enabling environment for accountability and democratic discourse. Procedural safeguards—such as requiring CNC decisions to be justified and allowing appeals—are positive, but weak in practice due to the CNC’s close ties to the executive and the absence of strict timelines for judicial review.

In practice, these laws have been weaponised to silence dissent. Ahead of the June 2025 elections, the CNC [issued a directive](#) on 13 May 2025 requiring media coverage to be supervised by a delegate from the Ministry of Communication—himself a ruling party candidate—effectively curtailing editorial independence. Journalists faced escalating harassment: on 28 April 2025, Willy Kwizera of Bonesha FM [was brutally attacked](#) by members of the ruling CNDD-FDD youth wing, the Imbonerakure, while reporting on student living conditions. In May, Reporters Without Borders [documented](#) at least four serious press freedom violations involving security forces or Imbonerakure, with authorities remaining silent. Burundi dropped 17 places to 125th in the [2025 World Press Freedom Index](#). Arbitrary detention persists: journalist Sandra Muhoza has been [imprisoned since April 2024](#) for comments in a WhatsApp group, charged with “undermining national integrity” and “racial hatred,” despite an appeal court ruling her conviction invalid.

These restrictions create a chilling effect on journalists, activists, and CSOs, eroding the enabling environment for civic engagement. By criminalising speech and imposing political control over media, the state transforms constitutional rights into conditional privileges. This

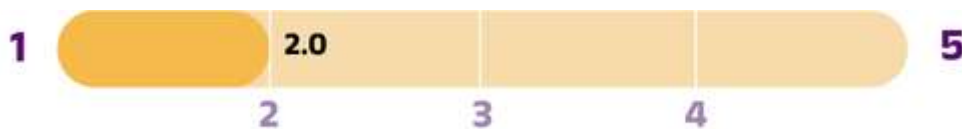
fosters self-censorship, limits public debate, and undermines accountability—key pillars of democratic governance.



PRINCIPLE SCORE

2. Supportive Legal and Regulatory Framework

Score:



This assessment of operational realities for civil society organisations in Burundi reveals a paradox between formal guarantees and restrictive practices. While the legal framework—anchored in Article 32 of the 2018 Constitution and Law No. 1/02 of 2017 on Non-Profit Associations—recognises freedom of association and provides mechanisms for registration, coalition-building, and appeals, its implementation imposes pervasive state control. CSOs face mandatory pre-approvals for activities, replacing simple notification with discretionary authorisation, and burdensome reporting obligations that create operational uncertainty. Access to funding is tightly regulated: foreign resources must pass through the central bank (Article 74) and require detailed disclosure of partners (Article 75), delaying projects and undermining sustainability. These measures, though framed as accountability tools, often serve as instruments of control. While the law provides theoretical safeguards—such as requiring Administrative Court proceedings for dissolution (Articles 82–88)—broad ministerial powers to impose suspensions without judicial oversight (Article 83) and vague grounds like “public order” enable politically motivated actions. In practice, 2025 saw intimidation of CSO members, and interference by ruling party affiliates during sensitive advocacy initiatives.

Collectively, these findings reveal an enabling environment that is not merely constrained but systematically engineered to curtail pluralism and accountability. Despite procedural safeguards, vague provisions and discretionary enforcement foster legal insecurity, self-censorship, and weakened resilience—contravening international standards under Article 22 of the ICCPR and Article 10 of the African Charter.

2.1 | Registration

Although Burundi’s legal framework formally recognises the right to freedom of association, its practical implementation imposes significant restrictions that undermine this right. [Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017](#) introduces multiple barriers that disproportionately affect civil society

organisations, including those representing marginalised groups. Article 14 requires proof of at least two years of prior activity for associations to be approved under the declaration regime—a condition [widely criticised](#) as unjustified and exclusionary. This requirement effectively prevents new or grassroots organisations, particularly those serving vulnerable communities, from registering. Furthermore, Article 10 delegates approval to municipal administrations through a multi-layered process in Article 8 involving ad hoc committees, municipal councils, and administrators. While refusals must be justified in writing, the law fails to specify grounds for denial, granting municipal authorities broad discretionary power. The absence of transparent criteria and the concentration of decision-making power in political authorities render the process ineffective. In practice, appeals rarely succeed, leaving organisations without meaningful recourse when registration is denied.

In addition, CSOs must submit a separate application to obtain legal personality, which, under Article 20, can only be processed through a legal representative and must be filed with the competent ministry. Articles 22–24 centralise authority in the hands of the Minister, who appoints a commission to process applications and grants legal personality only upon ministerial approval. While the law stipulates a two-month decision period, extendable by one month, this timeline is rarely respected in practice, creating prolonged uncertainty for applicants.

Refusals must be justified in writing, and applicants may appeal to the Administrative Court. If the appeal succeeds, the Minister is obliged to approve the association. However, these mechanisms lack transparency and effectiveness. Grounds for refusal remain vaguely defined—limited to “non-compliance with the law” or purposes deemed “contrary to the law”—giving authorities broad discretion to block organisations perceived as critical of government policy. This ambiguity fosters selective enforcement and politicisation of registration decisions.

Registration procedures are neither clear nor affordable. The process is lengthy, bureaucratic, and costly, often delaying organisational activities for months. Paragraph 2 of Article 25 adds another restrictive layer by requiring a registration certificate signed by the Minister and countersigned by the sectoral minister before operations can begin. Worse, this certificate must be renewed every two years, introducing [a recurring compliance burden](#) and a “sword of Damocles” effect that perpetuates a structural vulnerability, enabling authorities to suspend or dissolve organisations arbitrarily. Such provisions discourage civic engagement and weaken organisational sustainability, particularly for grassroots and rights-based groups.

While the legal framework nominally allows any person or entity to establish an organisation, excessive administrative hurdles and discretionary power create systemic barriers, especially for marginalised groups. The appeal process, though legally available, is ineffective in practice, leaving CSOs without meaningful recourse. Operationally, even routine activities such as meetings require prior authorisation, further eroding autonomy and increasing state control over civic space. These measures collectively represent a regression in the exercise of freedom of association, fostering a climate of insecurity and self-censorship that undermines democratic governance and limits citizen participation.

2.2 | Operational Environment

Burundi’s legal framework in [Article 32 of the 2018 Constitution](#) formally recognises the right to form associations or organisations in accordance with the law, and the [Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 on Non-Profit Associations](#) provides a structured basis for CSO registration and operation. Positive elements include the explicit allowance under Article 41 for registered associations to form networks, forums, and coalitions, which can strengthen collaboration and

advocacy. Similarly, the law provides for appeals against administrative decisions, offering a formal—though limited—avenue for redress. These provisions reflect an effort to regulate the sector and promote transparency.

However, significant gaps persist that undermine CSO autonomy and operational viability. While the framework permits CSOs to exist, it does not allow them to freely determine internal governance or activities without interference. Article 82 requires prior approval for all activities of civil society actors, clearly stating threats of penalty or sanctions. This requirement replaces simple notification with mandatory pre-authorisation, enabling authorities to block meetings and advocacy initiatives—particularly those critical of government policies. This, combined with Article 24, which allows and empowers the Ministry to reject applications for vague reasons such as objectives “contrary to the law,” creates a chilling effect on independent civic action.

Reporting obligations under Article 26, combined with financial disclosure requirements in Articles 74 and 75, impose disproportionate compliance burdens and expose organisations to selective enforcement. Article 74 requires all foreign resources to pass through the central bank, with detailed documentation submitted to the relevant ministry. While these measures aim to enhance financial accountability, they delay project implementation and restrict sustainability, particularly for governance-focused CSOs reliant on external support. Further, Articles 39 and 40 prohibit foreign associations from carrying out any activities in Burundi other than sending documents to their members residing in the national territory and collecting membership fees from said members, severely limiting foreign associations’ activities, curtailing international partnerships essential for capacity building.

Administrative oversight is extensive and intrusive. Article 26 obliges CSOs to report any administrative changes within two months, while Articles 86–88 allow suspension or withdrawal of approval for failure to submit annual reports or hold meetings. These provisions, framed as compliance measures, create operational uncertainty and expose organisations to selective enforcement. Reporting obligations are onerous, requiring detailed financial and activity reports that impose disproportionate burdens, especially on small organisations.

The cumulative effect of mandatory pre-approvals, burdensome reporting, and restrictive funding rules is a deeply hostile operational environment. While the law provides for appeals to the Administrative Court, the process is costly and slow, offering little practical protection. These constraints foster self-censorship, weaken organisational resilience, and erode civic engagement. By conditioning CSO operations on compliance with vague and discretionary rules, Burundi transforms constitutional guarantees into privileges subject to executive control. The result is an operational space systematically engineered to curtail pluralism and accountability, representing a profound regression in democratic governance.

2.3 | Protection from Interference

Burundi’s legal framework formally recognises freedom of association under [Article 32 of the 2018 Constitution](#), and [Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 on Non-Profit Associations](#) provides mechanisms for registration and appeal, which represent positive steps toward structured governance. For example, sanctions such as suspension or dissolution under Articles 82–88 must follow proceedings before the Administrative Court, and decisions can be appealed—offering theoretical safeguards against arbitrary action. Similarly, Article 41 allows CSOs to form networks and coalitions, promoting collaboration within legal boundaries.

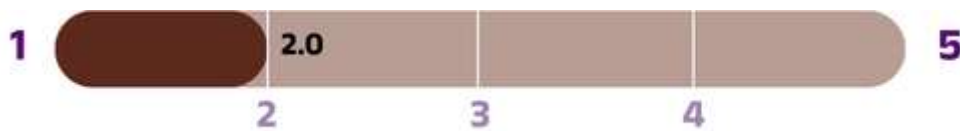
However, these protections are undermined by broad discretionary powers and vague provisions that enable state interference. While grounds for dissolution are defined—such as failure to adhere to original purpose or being found guilty by a court of law of disturbing public order or undermining state security (Article 83 and 86)—the law also empowers the Minister of Interior to impose suspensions of up to two months *ex officio* without judicial oversight (Article 83). This creates a loophole for politically motivated actions. Reporting obligations under Articles 12, 27, and 33 require CSOs to submit detailed activity reports to multiple authorities, while Articles 74 and 75 impose stringent financial disclosure requirements, including listing all foreign partners and routing foreign funds through the central bank. These measures, though framed as accountability tools, often serve as instruments of control and surveillance.

While Burundi's framework includes procedural safeguards and promotes coalition-building, its vague language and discretionary enforcement foster legal insecurity. Mandatory pre-approvals, intrusive inspections, and restrictive funding rules erode CSO independence and resilience. The result is an environment where formal guarantees coexist with systemic interference, shrinking civic space and weakening democratic accountability.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

3. Accessible and Sustainable Resources

Score:



Civil society organisations in Burundi face systemic challenges across resource availability, effectiveness, and sustainability. While the legal framework formally permits access to resources, restrictive provisions such as mandatory routing of foreign funds through the Central Bank and prior project authorisations create bureaucratic delays and political scrutiny. Donor conditions remain highly prescriptive and short-term, forcing CSOs to adapt their missions to external agendas and limiting flexibility to respond to emerging needs. Sustainability is further undermined by fragmented funding cycles, lack of core support, and minimal self-reliance mechanisms, leaving organisations vulnerable to geopolitical shocks such as the [USAID withdrawal](#) that created an \$80 million shortfall in 2025. These dynamics collectively shrink civic space and perpetuate dependency, making long-term planning and programme continuity increasingly difficult.

3.1 | Accessibility of Resources

Resources for civil society actors in Burundi, including those working on sensitive issues or with marginalised groups, remain formally permitted under the legal framework, but in practice they are scarce and highly constrained. International donors remain cautious due to the political climate, further shrinking funding channels that were already reduced after the 2015 crisis. While international donors such as [Gavi](#), [Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund](#), and [UNDP](#) continue to provide thematic grants, these opportunities are short-term and competitive, often requiring complex compliance documentation that smaller organisations struggle to meet. Platforms like [FundsforNGOs](#) and [GrantStation](#) list active calls, but access to information outside Bujumbura remains limited, and capacity-building programmes are scarce. Empirical evidence from 2025 shows that governance-focused CSOs and human rights organisations faced prolonged delays in accessing donor funds, and intimidation during compliance checks, particularly in rural provinces. These constraints reinforce inequalities among CSOs, leaving grassroots actors underfunded and vulnerable.

The enabling environment is further undermined by donor fatigue and the abrupt exit of USAID, which [historically provided \\$70–110 million](#) annually for health, governance, and development programmes. The 2025 freeze left Burundi with [an \\$80 million shortfall](#), disrupting critical sectors such as HIV/AIDS, maternal health, agriculture, and governance. [Surveys indicate](#) that 40–50% of CSOs globally experienced budget cuts of up to 50%, forcing layoffs and programme closures. For Burundi, this translates into shrinking civic space and heightened competition for remaining funds, with governance and rights-based organisations particularly vulnerable.

Government regulations and approval processes significantly influence access to resources, especially for organisations working on sensitive topics. Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 imposes strict controls on foreign funding: Article 74 requires all foreign-origin funds to pass through the Central Bank with detailed documentation, while Article 75 mandates annual reports listing all partners. These measures, framed as accountability tools, create bureaucratic delays and expose organisations to political scrutiny.

Funds routed through commercial banks are monitored, and sensitive financial data can be misused for surveillance or intimidation. In 2025, CSOs reported unexplained account freezes and delays in approvals, creating operational uncertainty and reinforcing a climate of mistrust. Withdrawals at the official exchange rate—far below the market rate—further erode the real value of funds, undermining project viability. These practices foster legal insecurity and self-censorship, contravening international standards under Article 22 of the ICCPR and Article 10 of the African Charter.

Articles 35 and 69 of Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 offer significant advantages: the government may grant non-profit associations recognised as being of public utility certain facilities, including tax and customs benefits, sureties, and bank guarantees, and even subsidies to support their missions. Furthermore, income from membership fees, donations, and subsidies is not taxable, and CSOs are permitted to engage in profitable activities provided proceeds are used to achieve their objectives. However, these provisions are largely aspirational and rarely operationalised. In practice, the framework for consultation that should define eligibility criteria for these benefits remains opaque and inconsistently applied, leaving most organisations unable to access these facilities. Empirical evidence from 2025 shows that only a handful of government-aligned associations received subsidies or tax relief, while independent CSOs—particularly those working on governance and human rights—continued to face bureaucratic hurdles and political scrutiny.

While the funding framework aims to ensure transparency, its vague language and discretionary enforcement foster legal insecurity and self-censorship. Mandatory routing of foreign funds through the Central Bank, burdensome reporting, and lack of tax incentives collectively undermine CSO autonomy and sustainability. These dynamics collectively create an environment where resource accessibility is not merely constrained but systematically controlled, weakening democratic accountability and civic resilience.

3.2 | Effectiveness of Resources

Donors impose conditions that are often highly prescriptive, shaping not only the use of funds but also the scope of activities. Most funding for Burundi CSOs in 2025 was earmarked for specific sectors such as health, humanitarian response, and gender equality, leaving little room for flexible allocation. For example, [Gavi's grants](#) required CSOs to focus exclusively on vaccination outreach and monitoring systems, with strict eligibility criteria including prior

collaboration with national health programmes. These conditions, combined with government-imposed controls such as mandatory routing of foreign funds through the Central Bank and prior project authorisations, [significantly restrict](#) CSOs' operational autonomy.

Funding conditions are rarely aligned with the goals and priorities of CSOs. Instead, they tend to be donor-driven, forcing organisations to adapt their missions to fit external agendas. Empirical evidence from 2025 shows that several governance-focused CSOs scaled down advocacy programmes or rebranded activities under “community development” to meet donor compliance requirements and avoid political backlash. Similarly, [UNICEF's 2025–2027 work plan](#) prioritised multisectoral emergency response and child protection, compelling local partners to divert resources from long-term governance initiatives to short-term humanitarian interventions. This trend undermines CSOs' ability to pursue independent strategies and reinforces dependency on donor agendas.

The flexibility of donors in adapting funding to evolving contexts remains limited. While some agencies, such as [UNHCR](#) and [WFP](#), introduced “soft earmarking” to allow minor adjustments within humanitarian programmes, most funding streams remained tightly earmarked, leaving CSOs unable to reallocate resources during crises. For instance, during the 2025 floods and [cholera outbreak](#), local organisations reported delays in donor approvals for budget revisions, forcing them to suspend planned governance activities to address urgent health needs. This rigidity contrasts sharply with the [volatile](#) operational environment marked by inflation, currency crises, and security threats.

Donor responsiveness to CSO security concerns is uneven and often reactive rather than proactive. While humanitarian actors like [UNICEF](#) and [IOM](#) integrated gender-based violence prevention and psychosocial support into refugee response plans in 2025, governance and rights-based CSOs reported minimal donor engagement on mitigating risks such as surveillance, harassment, and arbitrary arrests. In a context where civic space remains [severely restricted](#) and pre-election violence escalated in 2025, the lack of structured security protocols in donor agreements exposes CSOs to heightened vulnerability.

3.3 | Sustainability of Resources

Civil society actors in Burundi have very limited access to a diverse and reliable pool of funding sources. Most organisations rely heavily on foreign donors, with minimal domestic philanthropy due to the absence of tax incentives and a weak local giving culture. This dependency creates vulnerability: when major donors withdraw or shift priorities—as seen with the abrupt [USAID funding freeze](#) in 2025—CSOs face severe operational disruptions. The freeze left Burundi with an [estimated \\$80 million shortfall](#), forcing organisations to suspend programmes and lay off staff. Over-reliance on a single funding stream undermines autonomy and exposes CSOs to political pressure, as government controls on foreign funds—such as mandatory routing through the Central Bank—further restrict flexibility.

Funding cycles are fragmented and unpredictable, creating gaps that severely impact programme continuity and staff conditions. Empirical evidence from 2025 shows that many CSOs experienced months-long delays between grant phases, leading to project interruptions and unpaid salaries. Short-term, project-based funding dominates the landscape, leaving little room for core support that could stabilise operations. These structural gaps hinder long-term planning and exacerbate staff turnover, as organisations cannot guarantee job security beyond the lifespan of individual projects.

The resource environment significantly limits CSOs' ability to achieve long-term programmatic goals and engage in strategic planning. Most funding remains tightly earmarked for donor-driven priorities, leaving little flexibility for organisations to adapt to emerging needs or invest in institutional development. This rigidity undermines sustainability and perpetuates a cycle of reactive programming rather than strategic, long-term interventions.

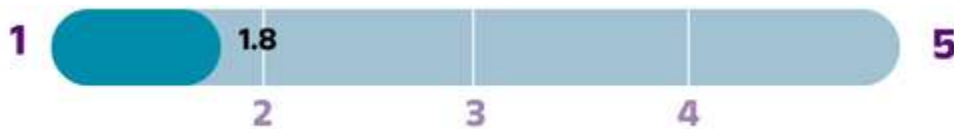
Self-reliance among CSOs remains extremely limited. While Articles 35 and 69 of Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 theoretically allow non-profit associations to receive government subsidies and exempt donations from taxation, these provisions [are rarely operationalised](#). Few organisations generate income through membership fees or commercial activities, and volunteer engagement is minimal due to economic hardship.

In 2025, only a handful of government-aligned associations accessed subsidies or tax relief, while independent CSOs continued to face bureaucratic hurdles and political scrutiny. Without structural reforms to incentivise local giving and enable income diversification, CSOs remain trapped in a cycle of dependency and fragility.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

4. Open and Responsive State

Score:



Burundi's governance framework provides formal guarantees for transparency, participation, and accountability, but implementation remains weak and highly politicised, creating structural barriers for civil society engagement. Transparency is undermined by the absence of a comprehensive Freedom of Information law, poor proactive disclosure of budgets and policies, and opaque administrative practices, despite constitutional provisions and draft reforms. Participation mechanisms, including the consultation framework under Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 (Articles 46–49), exist on paper but function selectively, privileging pro-government actors while excluding independent CSOs from critical policy dialogues. Accountability is the weakest pillar: there are no systematic feedback loops, public documentation of consultation outcomes, or spaces for CSOs to monitor government adherence to commitments, leaving recommendations largely ignored.

These deficits collectively shrink civic space, erode trust, and limit evidence-based advocacy, reinforcing a governance model where engagement is procedural rather than substantive. Without structural reforms to institutionalize transparency, inclusive participation, and enforceable accountability, Burundi's enabling environment for civil society will remain fragile and vulnerable to authoritarian consolidation.

4.1 | Transparency

Burundi's legal framework does not explicitly guarantee the right of individuals or organisations to access public information. The 2018 Constitution omits a direct provision for freedom of information (Fol), leaving the right only implicitly derived from Article 31, which guarantees freedoms of expression, religion, and opinion. This ambiguity forces CSOs to rely on secondary legislation, such as that of [Law No. 1/ Of July 2024](#) Amending Law No. 1/019 of 14 September 2018, which grants journalists access to sources of information (Article 52) and mandates fair media access for civil society (Article 66). However, these provisions are sector-specific and do not establish a universal right to information for all citizens or organisations.

The absence of a comprehensive Fol law creates a structural gap that weakens transparency and accountability.

Although a draft access-to-information law modelled on African Union standards [is under review](#), implementation remains stalled. As of 2025, most ministries and public institutions failed to proactively publish essential information—such as budgets, procurement notices, and administrative decisions—on digital platforms. During the 2025 electoral cycle, critical data on voter registration and campaign financing was [delayed or incomplete](#), fuelling mistrust among civil society and opposition actors. This opacity undermines informed participation and creates fertile ground for corruption and elite capture.

Public institutions are not legally compelled—or at least not effectively enforced—to publish comprehensive decision-making information such as draft laws, policies, budgets, and audit reports in accessible formats. While the National Assembly publishes agendas and some legislative drafts online, budget transparency remains extremely low on [the Open Budget Survey](#). Audit reports from the Supreme Audit Institution are rarely released within legal timeframes, and procurement processes lack clarity, creating opportunities for corruption and elite capture. This opacity undermines accountability, limits informed public debate on resource allocation, and limits CSOs' ability to monitor governance effectively.

Procedures for filing access-to-information requests are either absent or highly opaque. Although the draft law proposes clear mechanisms and oversight, current practice offers no standardised process, reasonable fees, or guaranteed timelines for response. Requests are often ignored, and vulnerable groups lack waivers or support to exercise this right. Training initiatives by [UNESCO](#) and civil society in 2025 sought to build capacity among journalists and CSOs to navigate these barriers, but systemic obstacles persist. Without institutionalised procedures, access remains discretionary and politicised.

Legal protections against unjustified denial of access to information remain largely theoretical. While Burundi's Constitution enshrines freedom of expression, there are no effective sanctions for non-compliance or clear appeal mechanisms when requests are denied. In practice, information is often withheld for political reasons, particularly from CSOs critical of government policies. CSOs indicated that in 2025, there were selective disclosure of electoral data and budgetary information, reinforcing patterns of favouritism and eroding public trust.

The absence of a comprehensive Fol law, weak enforcement of transparency obligations, and politicised access to information collectively undermine civic space. CSOs cannot effectively monitor governance, advocate for accountability, or engage citizens in informed dialogue. This opacity perpetuates corruption risks, limits donor confidence, and constrains evidence-based programming. Without structural reforms to institutionalise proactive disclosure and enforceable access rights, Burundi's enabling environment for civil society will remain fragile, reactive, and vulnerable to authoritarian control.

4.2 | Participation

Burundi's legal and policy framework contains provisions that, on paper, promote citizen and civil society participation. Article 51 of the 2018 Constitution affirms the right of every citizen to participate in the direction and management of state affairs, and Article 4 of Decree No. 100/125 (31 August 2018) facilitates engagement between civil society and the electoral management body. Similarly, Articles 46–49 of Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 establish a formal consultation framework within the ministry responsible for approving associations, with

the stated purpose of strengthening partnerships and monitoring implementation of the law. Article 47 assigns tasks such as issuing opinions on implementing texts, processing appeals, and recommending support measures for the voluntary sector, while Article 48 requires at least two meetings annually, and Article 49 allows associations to create their own conciliation mechanisms. These provisions represent a positive step toward institutionalizing dialogue and creating structured spaces for engagement.

However, the practical impact of these measures remains limited due to weak enforcement and politicisation. Empirical evidence from 2025 shows that the consultation framework rarely convened and, when it did, participation was [dominated by government-aligned organisations](#), excluding independent CSOs such as *Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile (FORSC)* and *Observatoire de l'Action Gouvernementale (OAG)* ([EurAc Report](#)). Meetings were often ad hoc, with opaque agendas and last-minute invitations, leaving little time for meaningful input. Furthermore, the framework's opinions are advisory rather than binding, allowing policymakers to disregard CSO recommendations without consequence.

While the government organises consultations on policy and development frameworks, these processes are largely tokenistic and selective. Organisations close to the ruling party enjoy privileged access, while independent or critical actors face systematic exclusion and, in some cases, intimidation. For example, during [the 2025 consultations](#) on electoral reforms and the National Development Plan, governance-focused CSOs were denied participation despite their technical expertise. Even when CSOs are consulted, their input rarely influences final decisions, reinforcing perceptions of procedural engagement rather than substantive dialogue.

Participation opportunities are further constrained by logistical and technological barriers. Consultations are predominantly held in Bujumbura, limiting access for rural and grassroots organisations. Digital mechanisms remain virtually absent, and ministry websites rarely publish draft policies or consultation schedules, making online engagement ineffective. In-person forums often require prior security clearance, which independent CSOs struggle to obtain, and invitations are frequently issued at the last minute, preventing evidence-based contributions.

Overall, the legal framework provides a foundation for participatory governance, but its selective and inconsistent implementation undermines inclusivity and accountability. While Articles 46–49 of Law No. 1/02 of 27 January 2017 create a formal space for dialogue, the lack of binding authority, procedural clarity, and non-discriminatory practices reduces these provisions to symbolic gestures. This entrenches state dominance, marginalises independent voices, and weakens civic space. Without structural reforms to institutionalise early-stage engagement, guarantee equal access, and leverage digital platforms, participation will remain superficial—compromising governance quality, donor confidence, and civil society's ability to advocate effectively.

4.3 | Accountability

In 2025, government feedback loops to civil society were thin to non-existent. There were no systematic, public summaries explaining how civil society submissions were used in policy or electoral decisions, and documentation of consultation outcomes was either absent or highly selective. This pattern is consistent with Burundi's [Open Budget Survey \(OBS\) 2023 scores](#)—0/100 for public participation, 14/100 for transparency, and 26/100 for budget oversight—which indicate that neither formal channels nor reporting practices allow citizens or civil society actors to see how inputs influence final budget choices or execution. The same dynamic was visible around the 5 June 2025 legislative and communal elections, where authorities provided

little to no public rationale for ignoring concerns raised by civil society and opposition, despite a landslide outcome for the ruling party amid allegations of intimidation and censorship detailed in the [Human Rights Watch, *Elections Without Opposition*, June 12, 2025](#) and [OHCHR press release, Sept. 1, 2025](#).

Where government did not adopt civil society feedback, clear explanations were generally not provided, and avenues for challenge were weak. International reporting in 2025 highlighted the authorities' refusal to engage with UN mechanisms (including the Special Rapporteur), and a broader pattern of non-response to civil society critiques during the electoral period—conditions that leave CSOs without meaningful recourse when inputs are disregarded. Parallel [analyses by international observers](#) describe restricted political space and tokenistic consultation, further shrinking accountability options and making post-hoc justification rare.

Formal spaces in which CS actors can track whether and how their input is integrated remain limited. Budget and audit practices offer partial entry points but rarely close the accountability loop. Although the [Court of Accounts \(Cour des Comptes\)](#) maintains a public website and issues technical opinions on proposed budgets, timely publication and follow-up reporting are inconsistent, and audit findings have weak traction in policy adjustment. The OBS 2023 shows low scores for audit/legislative oversight and public access to fiscal information, reinforcing the conclusion that civil society actors cannot reliably monitor whether feedback translates into decisions or spending. Even where some fiscal transparency improvements were noted (e.g., publishing enacted budgets and year-end reports), [major gaps persist](#) in executive budget proposals and off-budget accounts, limiting civil society follow-up.

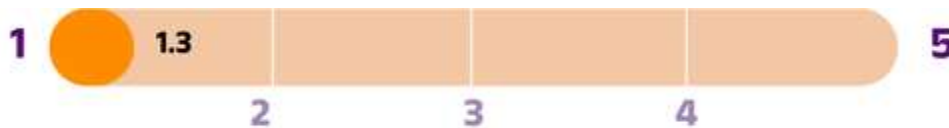
In 2025, [external monitoring](#)—by domestic civil society in exile and international mechanisms—substituted for internal accountability. Civil society coalitions urged continued UN scrutiny and [documented](#) human rights violations, while domestic channels for monitoring government commitments remained constrained.

Without documented feedback loops, transparent rationales for non-adoption, and accessible follow-up spaces, civil society inputs rarely translate into policy change, and stakeholders cannot verify whether advice was considered in good faith. The accountability deficits evidenced in 2025—spanning budget processes, electoral management, and human rights oversight—signal a structural imbalance: oversight is episodic and externally driven, while domestic channels remain opaque and discretionary. This environment erodes trust, weakens evidence-based advocacy, and reduces donor confidence, leaving civil society actors reactive rather than strategic. Strengthening accountability would require routine publication of consultation reports with decision rationales, time-bound responses by ministries, regular release of audit and in-year budget execution reports, and institutionalised avenues for civil society follow-up (e.g., hearings or dashboards that track the status of recommendations)—all of which current data indicate are largely absent or under-performing.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

5. Supportive Public Culture and Discourses on Civil Society

Score:



Public discourse and civic engagement in Burundi remain deeply constrained by structural, cultural, and political factors. In 2025, official narratives continued to frame independent CSOs as foreign-influenced or destabilizing, while pro-government media amplified negative stereotypes, eroding trust and limiting constructive dialogue. Evidence-based contributions from CSOs were rarely integrated into policy debates, and consultations were largely tokenistic, reinforcing procedural rather than substantive participation. Citizen confidence in influencing decisions remains extremely low, with civic education almost absent and fear of reprisals discouraging engagement in governance processes. While Burundi's Constitution guarantees equality, and quotas have improved women's representation in parliament, marginalised groups—including persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and ethnic minorities—face systemic barriers and legal discrimination, such as the criminalisation of same-sex relations under Penal Code Article 590 of Burundi's Penal Code (as revised in 2017). These dynamics collectively shrink civic space, weaken pluralism, and limit CSOs' ability to mobilise citizens for accountability and reform. Without reforms to foster inclusive dialogue, strengthen civic education, and dismantle discriminatory laws, Burundi's enabling environment will remain fragile and dominated by state-controlled narratives.

5.1 | Public Discourse and Constructive Dialogue on Civil Society

In 2025, official framing of independent civil society remained ambivalent: authorities applauded community-service NGOs while casting governance and rights-focused CSOs as destabilising or "foreign-influenced." Election-period statements and practices—alongside [non-cooperation with UN mechanisms](#)—reinforced a narrative that critical civil society voices threaten sovereignty and order, rather than serve as essential accountability stakeholders. Such securitised framing shrinks civic space by delegitimising watchdog roles and discouraging substantive engagement with civil society evidence.

Media and information ecosystems were marked by censorship, intimidation, and selective coverage, especially around the 5 June 2025 polls; pro-government outlets amplified scepticism toward independent civil society while limiting critical reporting, and cases like journalist Sandra Muhoza illustrated punitive messaging effects. [UNESCO noted](#) efforts to support legal reforms and safer reporting, but systemic pressures persisted. Media environments that penalise scrutiny erode public trust in civil society contributions and minimise their visibility.

A polarised culture—marked by intimidation, hate speech, and “last-minute” communication practices—restricts civil society actors’ ability to contribute constructively. UN experts documented spikes in violations during the 2025 electoral cycle and continued hostility toward HRDs and journalists, [echoed in broader debates at HRC60](#). A dialogue culture that normalises derision and fear narrows civil society participation to safe, apolitical niches, weakening evidence-based problem-solving and donor confidence.

In summary, public discourse frameworks in 2025—political messaging, media conditions, and engagement norms—systematically reduced space for independent civil society voices. Unless authorities institutionalise respectful, transparent, and early-stage dialogue that values CS evidence, participation will remain symbolic and policy outcomes poorer.

5.2 | Perception of Civil Society and Civic Engagement

Public perception of civil society in Burundi remains polarised. Development-focused CSOs, particularly those delivering health and education services in rural areas, are generally viewed positively, while governance and human rights organisations face suspicion, often fuelled by official rhetoric portraying them as foreign-influenced or destabilising. Empirical evidence from civil society consultations in 2025 shows that pro-government media amplified narratives framing independent CSOs as “agents of external agendas,” reinforcing mistrust among segments of the population. This negative framing erodes legitimacy and limits CSOs’ ability to mobilise citizen support for governance reforms.

Citizen confidence in influencing political decisions is extremely low. The 2025 electoral cycle, marked by intimidation and lack of genuine competition, reinforced perceptions of powerlessness. Participation in formal political processes remains minimal, while engagement in community initiatives is largely confined to non-political activities such as agricultural cooperatives or faith-based groups. Fear of reprisals and the absence of institutionalised consultation mechanisms discourage citizens from engaging with governance-focused CSOs, further shrinking civic space.

Civic education is almost non-existent in formal curricula and community programmes. Schools rarely provide comprehensive instruction on political rights, responsibilities, or the importance of civic engagement, and government-led initiatives prioritise patriotic messaging over democratic participation. In 2025, CSOs attempted to fill this gap through localised awareness campaigns, but these efforts faced resource constraints and political resistance, particularly when linked to governance or accountability themes. The absence of structured civic education perpetuates low awareness and reinforces a culture of disengagement.

The combination of negative official narratives, weak citizen confidence in influencing decisions, and the near absence of civic education creates a hostile environment for participatory governance. CSOs struggle to build grassroots legitimacy and mobilise citizens for advocacy, while fear and misinformation limit constructive dialogue. Without systemic reforms—such as integrating civic education into national curricula, promoting inclusive public

discourse, and protecting CSOs from stigmatization—Burundi’s civic space will remain fragile, reactive, and dominated by state-controlled narratives.

5.3 | Civic Equality and Inclusion

On paper, Burundi’s 2018 Constitution embeds equality and affirmative-action safeguards—multi-ethnic lists, gender “equilibriums,” and a [minimum 30% quota](#) for women across institutions—creating real entry points for inclusion (e.g., women now [hold 39.6%](#) of lower-house seats). In practice, the quota architecture remains uneven: a 2025 review by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ([CERD](#)) [questioned](#) whether ethnic/gender quotas are consistently upheld across sectors, and independent analyses show the system has been politicised—producing representation but not necessarily influence, especially outside parliament and in “hard-power” portfolios (defence, security, foreign affairs). Legal protections also exclude groups from full civic equality: consensual same-sex relations are criminalised (Penal Code Art. 590), and same-sex marriage is constitutionally banned—measures enforced through [arrests and stigmatising rhetoric](#) in 2024–2025 that chill association and advocacy by LGBTQ-focused CSOs.

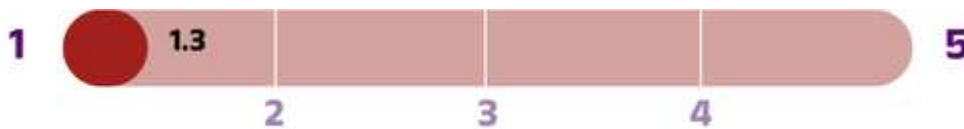
Structural [barriers intensified](#) in 2025: economic stressors (high inflation, shortages) compounded repression around the June elections, undermining political inclusion for opposition supporters, journalists, and youth, while humanitarian pressures (new refugee inflows) tested non-discrimination norms at borders and in local services. [CERD flagged concerns](#) about quota enforcement and alleged pushbacks of Congolese refugees, highlighting risks of profiling by ethnicity/language. Globally benchmarked disability-inclusion guidance launched at the Global Disability Summit 2025 underscores persistent gaps in [accessibility and participation facing](#) persons with disabilities—gaps Burundi must address to align with [CRPD practice](#) and avoid leaving OPDs at the margins of civic life. Meanwhile, continued criminalisation and hostile official messaging toward LGBTQ people signal low social tolerance and elevate risks of exclusion from civic organising.

Therefore, it can be noted that the enabling environment offers formal entry points (quotas) but lacks consistent, system-wide application; punitive laws and selective enforcement narrow who can safely participate, constraining pluralism and CSOs’ ability to represent diverse constituencies. Strong legal text and quotas coexist with high, intersectional barriers (ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation). Absent consistent enforcement, accessible infrastructure, and explicit protection of stigmatised groups, civic equality remains largely symbolic, limiting CSOs’ reach and weakening representative, evidence-based engagement.

PRINCIPLE SCORE

6. Access to a Secure Digital Environment

Score:



Burundi's digital environment in 2025 remains deeply restrictive, undermining civil society's ability to operate securely and inclusively. Internet shutdowns during politically sensitive periods, such as the June elections, disrupted CSO coordination and transparency efforts. State surveillance and censorship are pervasive, with critical media sites like *Iwacu* and *Yaga* frequently blocked and activists prosecuted for online expression, exemplified by journalist Sandra Muhoza's imprisonment over a WhatsApp message. Digital security is further compromised by spyware attacks and disinformation campaigns targeting CSOs, while the absence of enforceable data protection laws leaves no effective redress mechanisms. Accessibility challenges compound these risks: internet penetration stands at just 12.5%, with rural areas largely disconnected and 1 GB of data costing 13.6% of GNI per capita, making connectivity unaffordable for most. Low ICT literacy and minimal readiness for emerging technologies like AI further marginalise CSOs and citizens from digital governance opportunities. Collectively, these deficits shrink civic space, reinforce state control, and deepen inequality, signalling an urgent need for legal reforms, infrastructure investment, and inclusive digital literacy programmes to enable democratic participation.

6.1 | Digital Rights and Freedoms

Burundi's digital environment in 2025 exhibits a rights–security paradox that compresses the space for civil society online. While Article 31 of the 2018 Constitution formally protects freedom of expression, these guarantees are subordinated to broad public-order and national-security caveats that are applied expansively around high-stakes civic moments.

Precedents matter: Burundi has previously blocked social media platforms during unrest ([2015](#)) and [recorded platform interference in 2020](#) — an established repertoire that, in 2025, shifted towards administrative orchestration of content rather than visible nationwide shutdowns.

Although robust, nationwide network-measurement evidence of a total shutdown on 5 June 2025 election day is limited; the functional effect was akin to a real-time information choke for non-state monitors: [accreditation filters, editorial vetting, and localised access problems](#) diminished CSOs' ability to coordinate observers, publish rapid incident alerts, and share verified tallies. Precedent matters: Burundi previously blocked social platforms during unrest (2015) and [registered platform-level interference in 2020](#)—an established repertoire that, in 2025, shifted toward administrative orchestration of content rather than conspicuous, nationwide cuts.

The legal and policy backbone of this environment is securitised. Burundi [does not have](#) a comprehensive personal-data protection law or independent authority; digital governance is anchored in [Law No. 1/10 of 16 March 2022](#) on the Prevention and Repression of Cybercrime. Most notably, Article 2(8) defines personal data broadly as any information that can identify a natural person, aligning with global privacy standards and promoting data protection, though its vague enforcement mechanisms risk weak safeguards. Article 42-56 criminalise a wide range of activities (dissemination of “rumours” that may incite fear/violence, unauthorised access and interference with computer systems) and Art. 35 (digital identity usurpation)—with emphasis on state security rather than rights-based safeguards, remedies, or transparency. While very key in enhancing cybersecurity, its broad wording could be misused to target journalists and activists, creating tension between security objectives and digital freedoms in the civic space. The 2022 Digital Code strengthens privacy by defining personal data broadly under Article 3 and introducing penalties for misuse in Articles 34, 35, and 41–44, which enhances accountability and cybersecurity. However, its heavy emphasis on punitive measures without clear rights-based safeguards or independent oversight risks shrinking civic space by enabling state overreach and limiting digital freedoms. In addition, it does not constitute a comprehensive data protection law. Enforcement is opaque and politicised: around the 2025 polls, CENI/CNC practice substituted for a formal “internet freedom” policy by gatekeeping accreditation and channelling output through state premises; authorities publicly instructed journalists to avoid “alarmist” coverage, thereby aligning the administrative framework with narrative management rather than viewpoint neutrality (ministerial and CENI briefings reported by local media and observers.)

In 2025, multiple CSOs reported surveillance of WhatsApp groups and email correspondence, with activists summoned or detained for online posts critical of governance. Election-time reporting was [vetted centrally under the Ministry of Communication](#); observers and journalists were denied access to polling and counting centres; and opposition-linked actors faced harassment. RSF documented an upsurge in violence against journalists in April–May 2025 and [Burundi's 17 spots descent](#) to 125/180 in its 2025 Press Freedom Index—an aggregate indicator of the breadth and intensity of coercive practices affecting political content online. Administrative levers complemented direct coercion: the blogging collective [Yaga Burundi was temporarily suspended](#) on 27-28 March 2025 for alleged registration irregularities linked to its parent association, then reinstated on 14 April after archival proof was produced—illustrating rapid, targeted disruption of influential critical platforms with a non-trivial chilling effect. Such actions, even when reversed, increase transaction costs for CSOs (legal vetting, contingency planning) and degrade timeliness of watchdog outputs.

On the role of private platforms, the public record in 2025 shows limited transparency about platform takedowns or government requests; the more visible layer is network-side compliance by telecom operators and state-orchestrated media workflows that filter access

and distribution. Historically, operators have implemented social-app blocks under order (2015), and independent measurements captured interference in 2020. In 2025, platform reachability was less the bottleneck than who was allowed to produce and distribute content in real time via the synergy model and accreditation filters. Absent an independent oversight mechanism or a domestic transparency regime, accountability for content filtering and moderation—whether executed by ISPs or influenced at the editorial layer—remains weak, leaving CSOs without reliable redress when their content is suppressed or delayed.

Finally, detentions and persecution for online activities illustrate the deterrent architecture. Journalist Sandra Muhoza (La Nova Burundi) [was sentenced](#) to 21 months in prison in December 2024 for a WhatsApp message deemed to undermine territorial integrity and incite racial hatred; despite a May/June 2025 appellate ruling that Bujumbura courts lacked territorial jurisdiction—effectively voiding the conviction—she remained detained for months, signalling punitive persistence and a strong chilling effect on digital reporting. [RSF documented](#) Willy Kwizera’s violent assault and unlawful detention on 28 April 2025 while reporting on student conditions, amid multiple April incidents implicating security forces or allied groups. The OHCHR’s [September 2025 press release](#) catalogued serious violations between January 2024 and May 2025—including arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances of democracy defenders and opposition actors—situating online-expression prosecutions within a broader pattern of coercion that benefits the ruling party. For CSOs, the cumulative effect is a compressed operational space, elevated legal and personal risk, and degraded capacity to perform oversight exactly when it is most needed.

6.2 | Digital Security and Privacy

Digital threats against civil society actors in Burundi are systemic and politically motivated. Reports from 2025 indicate that government-linked actors deployed spyware and malware to infiltrate CSO networks and monitor encrypted messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Signal. These attacks intensified during the June 2025 elections, with activists reporting compromised email accounts and phishing attempts targeting organisations involved in election monitoring. The impact is severe: CSOs resort to self-censorship and avoid digital advocacy, undermining transparency and accountability efforts.

Burundi [lacks a comprehensive data protection law](#) aligned with international standards. While draft legislation has been discussed, it has not been enacted, leaving CSOs vulnerable to surveillance and data breaches. There are no independent oversight bodies or effective judicial remedies for victims of hacking or unlawful monitoring. This legal vacuum perpetuates impunity for digital rights violations and discourages CSOs from using online platforms for sensitive advocacy. Government-linked social media accounts and coordinated networks of bots actively spread disinformation and harass civil society actors online. In 2025, pro-regime influencers amplified narratives portraying independent CSOs as “foreign agents” and “destabilisers,” while smear campaigns targeted journalists and human rights defenders. These tactics polarise public opinion, delegitimise watchdog organisations, and create a hostile environment for evidence-based dialogue.

The absence of robust data protection laws, combined with pervasive surveillance and disinformation campaigns, severely undermines digital security and civic freedoms. CSOs operate under constant risk of infiltration and reputational attacks, limiting their ability to advocate effectively or mobilise citizens. Without structural reforms—such as adopting enforceable privacy legislation, establishing independent oversight, and curbing state-

sponsored online harassment—Burundi’s digital space will remain an instrument of repression rather than a platform for democratic engagement.

6.3 | Digital Accessibility

Burundi remains one of Africa’s least-connected countries, with internet penetration [estimated at 12.5%](#) in early 2025 with only 1.78 million users out of a population of 14.2 million. [Mobile connectivity dominates](#), yet 4G coverage reached just 32%, while rural areas—home to 84% of Burundians—rely largely on 2G. Affordability is a [major barrier](#): 1 GB of mobile data costs 13.6% of GNI per capita, and fixed broadband exceeds \$300/month. These constraints severely limit CSOs’ ability to share content online, especially in rural outreach and advocacy.

Digital literacy is critically low. [Global benchmarks](#) show only 35% of adults in developing countries possess basic digital skills, and Burundi aligns with this trend. CSOs [report difficulties](#) recruiting staff with ICT competencies, hindering adoption of secure communication tools and data-driven advocacy. Limited skills exacerbate vulnerability to misinformation and cyber threats, weakening CSOs’ operational resilience.

AI adoption in Burundi is nascent. While [global trends](#) highlight “Small AI” solutions for agriculture and health, local initiatives like [Hyphen Tech’s AgriHyphen AI](#) emerged in 2025 to support farmers with crop diagnostics. However, poor connectivity and low digital literacy impede scaling these innovations. Without targeted investment in infrastructure, skills development, and affordable access, CSOs and citizens risk exclusion from AI-driven opportunities, deepening the digital divide.

Overall, Burundi’s digital ecosystem is constrained by structural barriers—low penetration, high costs, weak ICT skills, and minimal readiness for emerging technologies. These gaps limit CSOs’ ability to leverage digital platforms for advocacy, service delivery, and citizen engagement. Closing this divide requires universal service policies, gender-sensitive digital inclusion programmes, and integration of digital literacy into education systems, alongside affordable connectivity solutions. Without these reforms, digital transformation will remain urban-centric and exclusionary, perpetuating inequalities in civic participation and weakening democratic accountability.

C) Recommendations

A) Recommendations to the Government

1. Guarantee Freedom of Association and Fair Administration

- Amend Law No. 1/02 (2017) to:
 - a) Codify objective and exhaustive grounds for refusal, suspension, or dissolution; require prior judicial authorisation for suspensions and dissolutions (ministerial decrees alone should not suffice).
 - b) Replace prior authorisation for CSO activities with a simple notification system; prohibit recurrent renewals that create risks of undue influence.
 - c) Establish clear timelines for the “silence implies consent” rule (e.g., 30 days) and introduce a one-stop shop to reduce discretionary power and delays; digitise workflows and publish dashboards tracking progress.
 - d) Make consultative bodies (Articles 46–49) procedurally binding: share agendas in advance, publish minutes, and provide written, reasoned responses to CSO contributions.
 - e) Amend Law No. 1/28 (2013) on public assemblies to guarantee peaceful meetings, including spontaneous ones, in line with the ICCPR.
 - f) Review laws on CSO financing and management to ensure free, transparent, and non-discriminatory access to resources.

2. Adopt a Comprehensive Freedom of Information (FOI) Law

- Align with the AU Model Law: proactive disclosure of draft legislation, budgets, procurement, and audits; maximum disclosure with limited exemptions subject to harm tests; independent appeals and sanctions for non-compliance.
- Mandate machine-readable publication and create a centralised FOI portal to address OBS gaps.
- Guarantee independence of regulatory bodies, including the CNC, through transparent and pluralistic appointment procedures.
- End arbitrary surveillance of communications and administrative manipulation of online content.
- Publicly recognise the legitimacy of civil society, independent media, and opposition, ensuring equitable access to public and digital spaces.
- Align national policies and practices with Burundi’s international commitments and fully cooperate with regional and international human rights mechanisms.

3. Institutionalise Participation and Accountability

- Legally require minimum public consultation periods (e.g., 30–60 days), early-stage green/white papers, and regulatory impact assessments with responses to comments.
- In budgeting, implement participatory budgeting pilots and regularise pre-budget statements and mid-year reports to improve OBS scores.

4. Protect Journalists and Human Rights Defenders; End Impunity

- Enact a law protecting human rights defenders and journalists (rapid remedies, safe haven provisions, sanctions for intimidation, and reparations).
- Guarantee independence of the National Communication Council; any media sanctions must respect due process and proportionality; publish decisions and enable expedited judicial review.
- Implement recommendations from the Special Rapporteur and HRW to address abuses by the Imbonerakure and ensure impartial investigations.
- Decriminalise press offences and revise Article 625 of the Penal Code on false information.

5. Digital Rights, Privacy, and Security

- Enact a modern data protection law (independent authority, purpose limitation, necessity/proportionality tests, breach notifications, and remedies).
- Amend Law No. 1/10 (2022) on cybercrime to clarify vague offences (e.g., “rumours”), codify judicial warrants for interception, and require transparency reports from state agencies; prohibit network disruptions without prior judicial authorisation meeting strict necessity criteria.

6. Digital Inclusion

- Implement a universal service and access policy to expand 4G/5G coverage in rural areas, reduce data tariffs (competitive spectrum/licensing), and equip schools with digital literacy programmes to close civic engagement and FOI gaps.
- Prioritise publishing government datasets in low-bandwidth formats (SMS/USSD, partnerships with community radio) while broadband infrastructure develops.

7. Equality and Non-Discrimination

- Repeal Article 590 of the Penal Code (decriminalise consensual same-sex relations); adopt anti-discrimination measures and guarantee equal access to registration and consultation bodies for all groups, including LGBTQ persons and persons with disabilities.

B) Recommendations to the International Community and Donors

1. Shift to Core and Multi-Year Funding

- Provide core support with flexibility clauses for crises (budget reallocation ceilings, accelerated approvals during shocks) and reduce compliance duplication through harmonised reporting. Link programming to measurable transparency and civic space criteria.

2. Large-Scale Civic and Digital Literacy

- Co-finance civic and media education in school curricula and adult training; support community legal education on FOI use and reporting safety. Use public radio and low-bandwidth channels to reach rural populations.

3. Cybersecurity and Actor Safety

- Fund CSO security measures (secure hosting, backups, endpoint protection), incident response funds, and holistic protection (legal + psychosocial + relocation). Include rapid-response windows during elections. Evidence shows rising risks for journalists and human rights defenders.

4. Accountability-Linked Aid

- Use governance agreements: trigger disbursements upon publication of pre-budget statements, mid-year execution reports, and audit follow-ups; require adoption of FOI law and establishment of independent appeals bodies.

5. Pluralistic and Secure Dialogue Platforms

- Organise multi-stakeholder forums with independent facilitation early in policy cycles; ensure fair invitations for independent CSOs (not only government-aligned ones). Publicly document responses to recommendations.

C) Recommendations to Civil Society

1. Compliance by Design and Risk Mitigation

- Establish internal governance and financial systems compliant with Law No. 1/02 and donor requirements (document control, related-party registers, conflict-of-interest policies). Maintain up-to-date legal records (registration, renewals, minutes) to prevent administrative pretexts.

2. Coalitions and Evidence-Based Advocacy

- Form sectoral coalitions (FOI, digital rights, defender protection) to pool legal expertise and coordinate parallel reporting (e.g., submissions to UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur (HRC/SR). Track implementation using public policy dashboards. Use the Reporters Without Borders/Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (RSF/OBS) indicators as a basis for advocacy.

3. Low-Cost Hybrid Outreach

- Combine offline methods (community listening groups, paralegal clinics, printed infographics) with low-bandwidth tools (SMS/USSD, WhatsApp channels) to reach rural audiences; build staff and volunteer skills in digital and AI literacy.

4. Digital Security Repository

- Adopt minimum security standards: multi-factor authentication, encrypted messaging policies, device hardening, secure backups, and phishing/compromise response

manuals. Where possible, use self-hosted evidence vaults with access logs; prepare legally for suspension/withdrawal scenarios. Past suspensions and prosecutions indicate high online risk.

5. Mainstream Inclusion

- Ensure governance reforms include women, youth, persons with disabilities, refugees, and LGBTQ persons; audit participation barriers; adopt protection and non-discrimination policies. Advocate for repeal of Article 590 and accessible formats for consultations.

D) Research Process

Each principle encompasses various dimensions which are assessed and aggregated to provide quantitative scores per principle. These scores reflect the degree to which the environment within the country enables or disables the work of civil society. Scores are on a five-category scale defined as: fully disabling (1), disabling (2), partially enabling (3), enabling (4), and fully enabling (5). To complement the scores, this report provides a narrative analysis of the enabling or disabling environment for civil society, identifying strengths and weaknesses as well as offering recommendations. The process of drafting the analysis is led by Network Members; the consortium provides quality control and editorial oversight before publication.

For Principle 1 - which evaluates respect for and protection of freedom of association and peaceful assembly - the score integrates data from the [CIVICUS Monitor](#). However, for Principles 2–6, the availability of yearly updated external quantitative indicators for the 86 countries part of the EUSEE programme are either limited or non-existent. To address this, Network Members convene a panel of representatives of civil society and experts once a year. This panel uses a set of guiding questions to assess the status of each principle and its dimensions within the country. The panel for this CFR was convened in December 2025. The discussions are supported by secondary sources, such as [V-Dem](#), the [Bertelsmann Stiftung Governance Index](#), the [RTI Rating from the Centre for Law and Democracy](#), and other trusted resources. These sources provide benchmarks for measuring similar dimensions and are complemented by primary data collection and other secondary sources of information available for the country. Guided by these deliberations, the panel assigns scores for each dimension, which the Network Members submit to the Consortium, accompanied by detailed justifications that reflect the country's specific context. To determine a single score per principle, the scores assigned to each dimension are aggregated using a weighted average, reflecting the relative importance of each dimension within the principle. This approach balances diverse perspectives while maintaining a structured and objective evaluation framework.

This publication was funded/co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

EU SEE

SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



Funded by
the European Union

