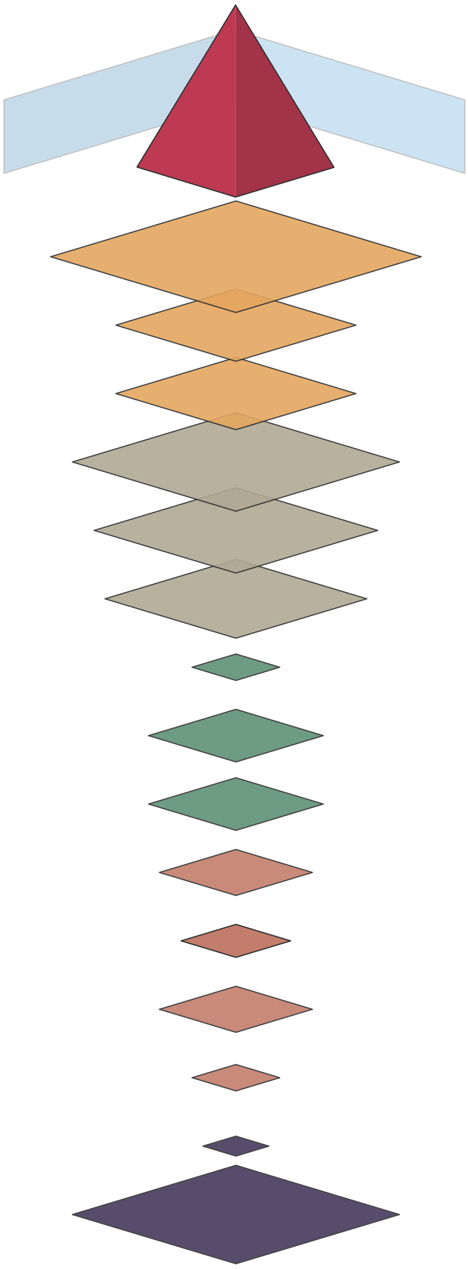
GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX

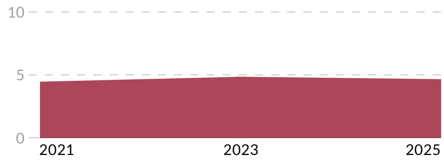
GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

BURUNDI



4.73 ↘0.13 CRIMINALITY SCORE

118th of 193 countries ↘12
37th of 54 African countries ↘5
7th of 11 Central African countries ↘1



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**4.67**	↗0.03
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.50	0.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	5.50	↘1.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	5.50	↗1.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	7.50	↘0.50
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	6.50	↗1.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	0.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.00	0.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	4.00	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.50	↗0.50
COCAINE TRADE	2.50	0.00
CANNABIS TRADE	3.50	0.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	2.00	↘1.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1.50	↘0.50
FINANCIAL CRIMES	7.50	↗1.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**4.80**	↘0.30
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	1.00	↘1.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	4.00	↘0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.50	↘0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50	↗0.50
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	6.00	0.00

This project was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State.

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Funded by the European Union

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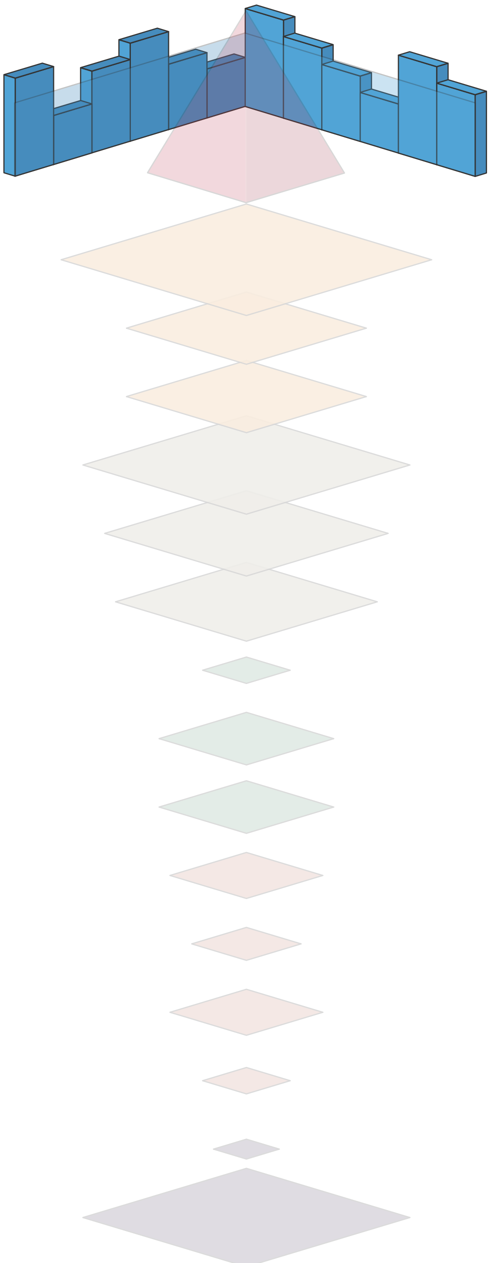
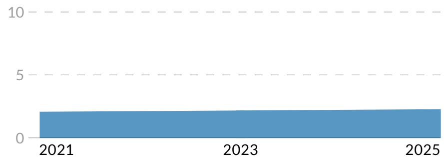
BURUNDI



2.33 ↗0.17

RESILIENCE SCORE

174th of 193 countries ↗8
44th of 54 African countries ↗6
7th of 11 Central African countries ↗3



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	**3.00**	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	**1.50**	↗0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	**2.50**	0.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	**3.00**	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	**2.00**	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	**1.50**	0.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	**3.00**	0.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	**2.50**	↗1.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	**2.00**	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	**1.50**	0.00
PREVENTION	**3.00**	↗0.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	**2.50**	0.00

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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Human trafficking in Burundi involves domestic and foreign victims who are exploited by networks for labour and sex work. Vulnerable groups include the Batwa minority, border communities and young women, often recruited fraudulently for labour or sex trafficking in east African and Gulf countries. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified trafficking and domestic cases have risen. Efforts to regulate recruitment agencies that facilitate the market are undermined by corruption. Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries are at high risk of exploitation, while foreign actors and state-embedded individuals are implicated in trafficking networks. Despite international support and increased government initiatives, trafficking persists, and Burundi is ranked as highly vulnerable to modern slavery.

Despite limited data and a lack of distinction from human trafficking on the part of authorities, human smuggling is prevalent, facilitated by criminal networks and sometimes border officials. Smuggling activity surged amid political turmoil and border closures, particularly with Rwanda. However, incidents have decreased after the closure of a major smuggling route through Serbia, which cancelled visa-free entry for Burundians. In response, new routes are emerging, notably via the Philippines.

The extortion market, dominated by the Imbonerakure militia – close to the ruling party – primarily targets citizens for payments related to basic services. This market, though smaller and less profitable than those in regional counterparts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), still burdens local communities. Before the 2020 election, the Imbonerakure wielded substantial power, often exceeding that of the police, and enforced financial contributions through violence and intimidation. Despite recent law enforcement actions, including the arrest of key militia leaders, the group's extortion activities continue.

TRADE

Burundi is a transit and destination country for small arms, driven by regional conflicts and criminal networks, particularly linked to the DRC. Despite disarmament campaigns and legal measures, the illicit trade persists, fuelled by the availability of AK-pattern rifles and locally manufactured weapons. While the arms market is less prevalent and lucrative than human trafficking or drug smuggling, it significantly affects security and stability. Regional dynamics, including arms embargoes and strained relations with Rwanda, influence trafficking trends. Recent indications suggest a decline in trafficking, attributed to political stability and public awareness initiatives.

The high prevalence of Burundi's counterfeit goods market is driven by a weak manufacturing sector, porous borders and inadequate legal frameworks. The market primarily involves counterfeit clothing, electronics, pharmaceuticals and beverages. Some items are produced locally but available information indicates that Burundi is among the largest global importers of counterfeit goods. Regional law enforcement collaborations have achieved some success, including notable seizures, but persistent challenges such as corruption and weak intellectual property enforcement allow the market to thrive. The trade is linked to broader regional criminal networks, including arms and drug trafficking, undermining legal markets and tax revenue.

Burundi has faced increasing challenges with illicit trade in excisable goods. Alcohol and coffee are the primary smuggled commodities, often sourced from neighbouring Tanzania and Rwanda. Smuggling is facilitated by corrupt state actors and blurred lines between political and economic interests. Small businesses may rely on illicit trade to maintain competitiveness, distorting legal markets and reducing government revenue. Proxy indicators suggest a high risk of illicit trade, as the country performs poorly in governance and corruption controls.

ENVIRONMENT

Burundi's role in flora crimes is minor and there is limited evidence of illegal activities. Reports indicate that such crimes are typically small-scale and have minimal economic and social impact. Charcoal production from illegal logging occurs in areas such as the Rusizi and Kibira national parks, driven by subsistence needs rather than organized crime.

The country has emerged as a transit hub for illegal ivory trade and a base for elephant and rhino poaching, targeting wildlife in neighbouring countries. Criminal groups involving domestic and foreign actors exploit porous borders to perpetrate wildlife crimes, often facilitated by corruption. Recent reports of confiscated ivory hint at potential institutional corruption linked to government-held stockpiles. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, particularly in Lake Tanganyika, drives concerns about the effect of increased fauna crimes on fish populations and biodiversity. Most fauna crimes in the region, and IUU specifically, are reportedly perpetrated by unorganized groups.

Burundi plays a role as a transit hub for illicit gold from neighbouring DRC to Tanzania. Despite government efforts to centralize mineral trade under the Central Bank and restrict private gold trading, issues related to non-renewable resource exploitation are present. Cross-border criminal networks exploit porous borders to smuggle illegally mined resources, often in collaboration with foreign actors.

DRUGS

Burundi is a transit hub in the regional heroin trade, driven by its strategic location and largely unregulated borders. Recent arrests of domestic and foreign actors highlight its role in transnational drug operations, often linked to Kenyan criminal networks using Mombasa as a key entry point. While data on trafficking volumes is limited, heroin is an emerging concern and youth frequently combine it with other substances. Despite this, heroin trafficking is less profitable than other illicit activities, such as human and arms trafficking. Burundi is also a transit hub for cocaine trafficking into eastern Africa and European markets, foreign actors exploiting its strategic location and limited enforcement capacity. Local cocaine consumption is low due to high prices and widespread poverty, though crack cocaine use is rising due to affordability. Despite proactive measures, Burundi's role as a conduit persists.

Burundi is a key transit route for cannabis, with trafficking usually moving from the DRC to Rwanda via Burundi. Despite police operations targeting smuggling, comprehensive data on local cannabis use and trade is limited. Reports suggest a possible lack of prevalence or underreporting of cannabis use, but broader drug consumption, particularly in urban centres such as Bujumbura and Gitega, is reportedly on the rise. Synthetic drug use appears minimal and limited evidence points to a relatively small market.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Burundi has not experienced major cyber-dependent incidents, largely due to low internet penetration, which limits exposure to such threats.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Burundi faces pervasive financial crime driven by high-level corruption and informal networks, with a slight increase reported recently. Tax evasion and misuse of public funds are socially accepted, generating significant profits. High-level political elites in Burundi violate free market principles for personal gain, particularly in areas such as forex trading, where state officials implement restrictive measures to profit from the resulting chaos. The economy is largely controlled by military leaders, and army officials monopolize the pharmaceutical market, in particular. Government procurement is influenced by state authorities and their associates, while tax incentives are misappropriated and given to those willing to bribe officials.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Criminal networks operate with fluid structures and engage in human trafficking, politically driven violence, and financial crimes such as embezzlement and tax evasion. These networks reportedly benefit from state protection and are active nationwide, often targeting victims for recruitment to foreign destinations, including Gulf states. Their activities reflect a complex interplay between local actors and transnational criminal demands, particularly in labour exploitation and illicit financial flows. There is no evidence to suggest that mafia-style groups are operating in Burundi.

State actors are deeply implicated in organized crime, often operating in coordination with the Imbonerakure militia. This group engages in extortion, notably coercing payments for public services and forcibly collecting pre-election 'donations', contributing to political violence. Security and intelligence services have supported these operations, reflecting institutional complicity. Human trafficking networks openly operate recruitment agencies linked to ruling party elites. Corruption is entrenched, especially among border officials who solicit bribes and enable smuggling. Financial crimes, including embezzlement and illicit transactions, involve high-level officials, prompting targeted police training on money laundering. Recent law enforcement actions, including high-profile arrests, suggest incremental progress in curbing bribery-related activities and reflect growing pressure on entrenched criminal structures.

Foreign actors are involved in organized crime, including cross-border drug and arms trafficking, wildlife crimes and exploitation of non-renewable resources. The resource trade in Burundi is heavily influenced by foreign companies and political elites, with armed groups contributing to instability, while foreign nationals, particularly from Asia and east Africa, contribute to illicit wildlife trafficking and human smuggling networks.

While evidence is vague, private transport companies and banks are implicated in criminal activities, exploiting Burundi's role as a transit point in the regional criminal economy. Some transport firms engage in smuggling, while certain banks facilitate illicit financial transfers and money laundering. These actors also participate in illegal mining, particularly in the gold sector, where criminal consortiums involving organized crime groups, corrupt officials, private sector entities and foreign actors collaborate for mutual benefit. Private sector entities collude with political figures to commit crimes such as abusing exemption policies and human trafficking. Corruption, identified as a major barrier to direct investment, permeates licensing and concession processes which are characterized by opacity, bribery and cronyism. Even so, the government recently shifted its stance and openly criticized corrupt government officials and businesspeople.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Burundi's approach to organized crime is inconsistent, marked by limited enforcement and fragmented political will. Despite occasional government statements and the establishment of financial oversight mechanisms in 2022, implementation of anti-organized crime initiatives is weak due to institutional fragility and limited resources. Similarly, recent legislation has aimed to address organized criminal activity, yet illicit markets persist, including arms and drug trafficking, smuggling and extortion. Political unrest since 2015, rooted in ethnic tensions and power disputes, has further undermined governance. Human rights abuses, electoral irregularities and the dominance of the ruling party contribute to instability, and organized crime exploits porous borders and weakened state control.

Despite legislative reforms, Burundi faces systemic transparency and accountability challenges rooted in weak institutional capacity, political interference and impunity for state actors. Key legal measures against organized crime, including anti-bribery provisions and penal code reforms, are undermined by limited enforcement and selective application. Oversight institutions exist but are constrained by political dominance, restricted media and harassment of the opposition. Government agencies often withhold economic data, and constitutional asset declaration requirements are widely ignored. The dissolution of anti-corruption bodies in 2020 and irregular prosecutions fuel public distrust.

Burundi has ratified major international conventions targeting organized crime, corruption and drug trafficking, though implementation is limited by institutional and capacity constraints. Legislative measures target human trafficking, arms and financial crimes, and counterfeit goods, often in collaboration with regional and international partners. Extradition and cross-border asset seizures are rare. Diplomatic tensions with Rwanda, involving mutual accusations of harbouring fugitives and supporting armed groups, complicate regional cooperation. The Burundian constitution prohibits extradition of its nationals, further hindering bilateral efforts. Despite past friction with Western entities – such as arrests of UN staff and withdrawal from the International Criminal Court – Burundi has pursued diplomatic reintegration through reforms aimed at attracting aid and improving regional security coordination. Nevertheless, recent actions, including controversial remarks and political repression, indicate limited progress as far as promised reforms and better regional relations are concerned.

Burundi's legal framework targets 'traditional' forms of organized crime – drug, human, arms and wildlife trafficking, as well as extortion – but may fall short in addressing newer forms of organized crime, such as cybercrime. Legislative developments include a 2021 amendment to the environmental code and biodiversity and reforestation initiatives, though implementation is hindered by limited resources. In 2022, cybercrime legislation defined offences and penalties after thousands of reported cases. Existing penal provisions address fraud and digital system interference. Measures to counter arms trafficking include a voluntary surrender initiative. Aligned with peace agreements, this programme has successfully mobilized communities to participate in efforts against arms trafficking. Despite efforts to control resource-based crime and restrict gold trade through central oversight in order to reduce illicit exploitation, enforcement capacity is a persistent challenge.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Despite constitutional provisions ensuring judicial independence in Burundi, institutional structures lack jurisdictional authority, allowing executive influence to dominate judicial processes. The justice system is subject to political, administrative and military interference, including clandestine directives to judges. This influence intensified after the 2015 political crisis, during which the government sought the extradition of exiled individuals accused of state crimes. Legal reforms have expanded presidential control over court decisions, while internal dissent in the judiciary is absent. Specialized units address organized crime but are hindered by limited resources. Harsh prison conditions – marked by overcrowding, poor sanitation and prolonged pretrial detention – are compounded by politically motivated abuse and restricted legal access, despite recent efforts to ease congestion.

Burundi's efforts to combat organized crime are significantly hampered by systemic issues in law enforcement, particularly corruption, political interference and resource constraints. Despite the existence of specialized units such as the National Intelligence Service, and assistance from the International Organization for Migration and similar groups, widespread public distrust undermines law enforcement credibility. Corruption is deeply entrenched and law enforcement is regarded as the country's most corrupt sector. Political influence – especially from the ruling party – has turned law enforcement into a profit-oriented system and high-ranking officials are allegedly involved in criminal enterprises. The Burundi National Police, largely made up of former rebel fighters, is frequently linked to serious abuses including arms and human trafficking, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, often targeting political opponents. Although legislative initiatives and campaigns have been introduced to address crimes such as human trafficking and smuggling, they have been largely ineffective due to institutional weaknesses and lack of political will.

Burundi's territorial integrity is challenged by occasional rebel activity and persistent security vulnerabilities due to porous borders and limited enforcement capacity, particularly along routes from Tanzania and the DRC. Cross-border trafficking, notably in small arms, is a concern. Organized violence occurred in early 2024, echoing past attacks linked to rebel groups. Subsequently, Burundi-Rwanda relations deteriorated after accusations of Rwandan support for Burundian rebels, leading to border closures and expulsions. Corruption and weak infrastructure hinder border security, despite international assistance.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Burundi is intensifying measures against financial crimes and money laundering by strengthening its Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), which coordinates efforts among security, customs and financial oversight bodies. As part of a broader regional strategy supported by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Maritime Security Programme, which promotes maritime and financial security across eastern and southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, FIU representatives recently conducted a benchmarking visit to Mauritius to adopt operational practices from established counterparts. Domestically, the FIU focuses on combating extortion and money laundering. However, before the June 2025 elections, revenue collection through coercive contributions by the ruling party raised concerns about the persistence of informal and illicit financial practices.

Burundi faces substantial economic and governance challenges. The economy is hampered by high inflation, foreign currency shortages and reliance on agriculture and informal mining, while long-term growth fails to match population expansion. Efforts to secure international support since 2020 have led to the lifting of some sanctions, but institutional weaknesses and corruption persist. Reforms seek to diversify exports, improve investment and privatize underperforming state enterprises, but property rights violations and weak legal protections undermine progress. Legislation addressing organized crime emphasizes fostering a lawful business environment and curbing illicit trade, but enforcement capacity is limited, particularly in the informal sector.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The country faces ongoing challenges, particularly in addressing human trafficking and drug abuse, and there is limited state involvement in victim and witness support. Due to concerns about official complicity, NGOs – mainly funded by international donors – play a central role in providing victim services, including education and healthcare through accommodation centres. However, restrictions on foreign funding since 2015 have reduced NGO capacity. Legislative efforts have led to the establishment of shelters and reintegration programmes, but significant implementation gaps persist. Witness protection is inadequate, raising concerns about the safety of individuals testifying about sensitive issues. Drug rehabilitation infrastructure is similarly limited, with only three centres and insufficient harm reduction strategies. Whistle-blower protection is intended to safeguard those reporting offences or assisting in investigations, but it lacks provisions for physical safety and protection against retaliation.

Burundi implemented strategies targeting key criminal markets, such as human trafficking, through its 2023–2027 National Action Plan. Other notable improvements in prevention efforts include increased consultations in the Anti-Trafficking Commission and awareness campaigns in partnership with civil society organizations. An interministerial committee was established to monitor recruitment agencies and prevent labour exploitation. Since 2019, several campaigns have been launched to combat drug use by reducing social acceptance and changing perceptions of legality. Initiatives by NGOs and the Ministry of Public Health and the Fight Against AIDS aim to educate the public about the dangers of cocaine and deter its consumption. Religious leaders are also involved in reinforcing societal disapproval of drug abuse, bolstering broader awareness campaigns. Despite the government's involvement, civil society is at the forefront of preventive efforts, since scarce public funding diminishes the effectiveness of anti-crime initiatives.

Civil society has operated under heightened political repression since 2015, exacerbated during the 2020 election by digital blackouts and arrests of opposition figures. Independent civil society organizations have been severely weakened and only a few remain active. Government policies have banned key NGOs, curtailed independent media and abolished oversight bodies such as the Ministry of Good Governance, reducing transparency and public participation in legislation. Recent laws addressing organized crime have instead been used to suppress dissent and target activists. Despite limited reform gestures, including prisoner releases, harassment and arbitrary arrests persist. A new law enacted in July 2024 improved conditions for journalism by partly decriminalizing press offences. However, journalists face censorship, violence and intimidation, while perpetrators enjoy impunity and state institutions suppress rather than support free expression.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.