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YET INVISIBLE !**

CHALLENGE OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BURUNDI



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CHALLENGE OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BURUNDI

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2015, the decision of the late President Nkurunziza to run for a third term as head of Burundi despite constitutional rules triggered a popular protest unprecedented in the history of the small country in the Great Lakes region. Since then, between the repression of pro-democracy voices and any political opposition, the persecution of human rights defenders and the closure of civic space, Burundi has not been able to get out of the rut.

As committed citizens, civil society actors, and activists who are victims of political violence, women have paid a particularly heavy price in this crisis. The decline of the democratic project has also resulted in a stagnation of their rights for them.

Although they are central actors in economic and social life, representing more than 50% of registered voters for the 2025 legislative and local elections¹, their participation in political decision-making positions remains limited. Despite a national and international legal framework guaranteeing equality between men and women in politics and the existence of a 30% quota for women's representation introduced in 2005, the figures show a worrying stagnation in women's representation, which reflects an almost non-existent political influence. The persistent obstacles to their participation, both socio-cultural and due to a closed political system, and the pressures that women face reflect a patriarchal political context where a feminist agenda cannot emerge.

In this study, Let's Turn the Page Burundi sheds a harsh light on the reality of Burundian women's participation in political life and identifies the obstacles that hinder their engagement.

Finally, Let's Turn the Page Burundi makes concrete recommendations to promote women's real participation in political life and the effective realization of their civil and political rights.

I.1. Main findings

I.1.1. Formal but insufficient legal recognition

Burundi's legal framework and international commitments recognize equality between men and women in political participation.

- **International instruments** : Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

- **National legislation** : The 2018 Constitution imposes a 30% quota for women in the various bodies in political life in Burundi. (Government², National Assembly³, Senate⁴, Magistracy⁵, Communal Council⁶). The 2024 Electoral Code⁷ and the Law on Political Parties reaffirm this quota⁸.

However, this legal recognition does not translate into effective equality. The quota is still seen as a maximum target that should not be exceeded, and mechanisms to ensure that women have a real influence in politics are non-existent.

I.1. 2. Stagnant digital participation

- **Government** : 30 per cent of ministers are women, but only 10 per cent of permanent secretaries.
- **Parliament** : 36% women deputies, 41% women senators.
- **Provincial administration** : 16% female governors, 11% chiefs of staff, 34% female councillors.
- **Diplomacy** : 17 % of ambassadors are women.

These figures show that women remain poorly represented in positions where no quota is imposed, which confirms that without legal constraints, they are systematically excluded from spheres of power.

I.1.3. Almost non-existent political influence

The problem lies not only in the number of women in politics, but also in their ability to influence decisions. Their influence remains limited by several factors :

- **Submission to political parties** : The majority of elected or appointed women must toe the party line and cannot champion a feminist cause without risking sanctions.
- **Lack of engaged leadership** : Few women in politics take a stand on issues crucial to women's rights, such as inheritance law reform, while women's access to land ownership remains a major issue.

I.1. 4. Persistent obstacles

There are three main categories of barriers that prevent women from achieving full political participation :

- **Socio-cultural factors** : Negative perception of female leadership, heavy family burden, economic dependence of women.
- **Closed political system** : Marginalization of women in parties, lack of domestic support to promote a feminist agenda.
- **Political repression and intimidation** : Women engaged in politics are often threatened, limiting their participation.

1. <https://burundi-eco.com/elections-2025-la-ceni-satisfaite-du-taux-denrolement/> , publié le 8 novembre 2024 par BurundiEco
2. Article 128 de la Constitution de la République du 07 juin 2018
3. Article 169 de la Constitution de la République du 07 juin 2018
4. Article 185 de la Constitution de la République du 07 juin 2018
5. Article 213, al.3 de la Constitution de la République du 07 juin 2018
6. Article 12.25 et 27 de la loi communale du 19 février 2020
7. Articles 16 et 38 du code électoral du 07 juin 2024
8. Articles 16 et 38 du code électoral du 07 juin 2024

II. WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BURUNDI: STATE OF PLAY, CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS

II.1. General introduction

• Context

Between June and August 2025, Burundi will hold legislative and local elections. The number of voters is already known. On the eve of these elections, in which women represent more than half of the registered voters (3,233,002 out of 6,022,268)⁹, a key question arises: will this massive participation of women as voters result in a significant increase in their presence in positions of power?

This study analysing women's political participation during the parliamentary term that is coming to an end soon allows us to outline the beginnings of an answer.

The study comes ten years after the start of the serious political crisis triggered in 2015 by President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term in violation of the Constitution and the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. This crisis marked a turning point in Burundi's political history, leading to a violent crackdown on opponents, activists, and civil society.

Women have been particularly affected by this repression, not only as citizens engaged in public life, but also as mothers, sisters and pillars of society. They have suffered political violence, arbitrary arrests and abuses, amplifying their vulnerability in a context where their political participation remains limited.

Ten years later, Burundi remains mired in this crisis, with limited democratic space and persistent inequalities between men and women in decision-making spheres.

II.2. Objectives of the study

The balanced participation of women in political positions is essential. There are several reasons for this assertion.

First, policy choices affect all aspects of society and all segments of the population, including women. They should therefore be involved in these choices through their political participation, in order to be able to promote and defend their rights and assert their interests.

Secondly, women represent half of the world's population. In Burundi, women are at 52.4% compared to 47.6% of men).¹⁰ It would therefore be expected that this numerical importance would be reflected in the level of political representation.

Third, women's political participation is one of the key indicators of gender equality and democratic development¹¹.

Despite the recognized importance of women's political participation, it is important to emphasize that political power has long been and remains largely the preserve of men alone. Although Burundian women gained citizenship at independence (the right to vote was granted to them in 1961), it was not until 1982 that the first woman was elected as a parliamentarian¹².

Following the signing of the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi in 2000, and at the end of the Burundian civil war, women's political participation began to improve. The 2005 Constitution established a quota of at least 30 per cent representation of women in the Government, the National Assembly and the Senate. However, and beyond the numbers, inequalities and barriers to women's political participation persist in multiple forms.¹³

The full and complete participation of Burundian women in political life is an issue that goes beyond the mere question of respect for their rights; on the contrary, it concerns the whole of Burundi and is a *sine qua non* condition for the advent of the rule of law and democracy.

The objective of this study is therefore to assess the current state of Burundian women's participation in political decision-making positions and to make recommendations to strengthen their commitment and contribute to effectively combating all gender-based discrimination. More specifically, it is a question of analysing current trends in women's participation in political institutions; identify the main barriers to women's political engagement (cultural, economic, legal, structural and political); to collect women's perceptions on the issues of their participation and to produce recommendations.

II.3. Methodological approach

From a methodological point of view, the study was mainly based on a wide range of documents dealing with the issue of women's participation in politics (international and national legal instruments, journal articles, decrees, etc.). Interviews were also conducted with certain categories of women (civil society activists, civil servants, women politicians).

It should be noted that for practical reasons, but also because of the restriction of freedom of expression and the climate of fear in a context of political repression, it has not been possible to evaluate all spheres of representation and political functions. The analysis was limited to the level of Parliament and the Government at large (minister, permanent secretariat assistant, governors, ambassadors).

9. <https://www.rtnb.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=9/0/57> visité le 24 janvier 2025

10. Décret No 100/032 du 27 mars 2025 portant présentation des résultats du Recensement Général de la Population de l'Habitat, de l'Agriculture et de l'Elevage au Burundi, édition 2024 (RGPHAE, 2024)

11. P. MINANI, Intégration des femmes en politique au Burundi : quand le nombre n'est pas synonyme d'influence, Université d'Ot-tawa, 2011, pp. 30-31.

12. <https://1000peacewomen.org/en/network/1000-peacewomen/colette-samoya-kirura-147> consulté le 4 mai 2025

13. <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/la-participation-politique-des-femmes-laisse-a-desirer/> consulté le 30 décembre 2024 ; <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/femme-et-politique-une-participation-toujours-a-la-traine/> consulté le 30 décembre 2024.

II.4. Plan

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter reviews the legal framework providing the legal basis for women's political participation in Burundi. The second chapter is devoted to the quantified state of play of the implementation of this political participation of women in the above-mentioned spheres of power. Finally, the third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the main obstacles to the political participation of Burundian women, both descriptively and substantively. A general conclusion with recommendations closes the study.

III. CHAPTER I. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BURUNDI

The participation of women in politics is recognized in Burundian law in the same way as that of men: on the one hand, in the international instruments for the protection of human rights to which Burundi is a party and, on the other, in Burundi's domestic legal texts.

III.1. Women's political participation under international human rights instruments

The legal term for political participation is «*the right to take part in the conduct of the public affairs of one's country*». This right is enshrined in several international human rights instruments binding Burundi.

i. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹⁴ states that «*everyone has the right to take part in the conduct of the public affairs of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives*».

Moreover, according to the same Declaration, «*everyone may enjoy all the rights and freedoms proclaimed in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status*»¹⁵ and that «*All are equal before the law and are entitled without distinction to equal protection of the law. Everyone has the right to equal protection against any discrimination that violates this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.*»¹⁶

Under all these provisions, the principle is that women, on an equal footing with men, have the right to take part in the conduct of the public affairs of their countries. No discrimination based on sex, among other things, is permitted.

Due to the non-binding nature of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁷, this principle has had to be incorporated into a large number of international human rights instruments, which are unquestionably binding in nature. This is the case with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

ii. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted in 1966 by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 2200 A(XXI).¹⁸

The ICCPR entered into force in Burundi, in accordance with the requirements of Article 49, paragraph 2, three months after its accession on 9 May 1990.¹⁹

Like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR enshrines the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of political rights. Article 25 of the Constitution stipulates that «*Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the discrimination referred to in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:*

a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives ;

b) To vote and be elected, in periodic, genuine elections, by universal and equal suffrage and by secret ballot, ensuring the free expression of the will of the voters ;

c) To have access, under general conditions of equality, to the public service of his country».

Among the forms of discrimination referred to in article 2 of the Covenant that are prohibited are those based on sex.

iii. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

As its name suggests, this Convention is particularly and exclusively concerned with discrimination against women. Indeed, despite the existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it has nevertheless been noted that women continue to be victims of numerous discriminations. Hence the need to set up an instrument specifically dedicated to the fight against discrimination against them. It is in this context that this Convention was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Na-

14. Adoptée le 10 décembre 1948 par l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies.

15. Article 2.1.

16. Article 7.

17. S. VANDEGINSTE, *Stones Left Unturned: Law as a Source and Instrument of Transitional Justice in Burundi*, Antwerp, 2011, p. 285.

18. M. BOSSUYT, « Les travaux préparatoires », E. DECAUX (dir.), *Le Pacte international relatif aux droits civils et politiques*, Commentaire article par article, Economica, Paris, 2011, p. 9.

19. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_fr

tions in its resolution 34/180 of 18 September 1979²⁰.

As far as Burundi is concerned, this Convention will be ratified on 8 January 1992²¹ and will enter into force in the same year.

With regard to combating all forms of discrimination against women in political matters, article 7 of the Convention formally states: *«States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to them, on equal terms with men, the law :*

a) To vote in all elections and in all public referendums and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies ;

b) To take part in the formulation of State policy and its implementation, to hold public office and to exercise all public functions at all levels of government ;

c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country».

iv. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women

Following the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women on March 31, 1953 (which entered into force on July 7, 1954).²²

Burundi ratified it on 18 February 1993.²³

The main objective of this Convention is to ensure equality between women and men with regard to political rights, in accordance with the articles of the Charter of the United Nations and those of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To achieve this, the Convention establishes three principles that must be respected by the signatory states

First principle : Women will have, on equal terms with men, the right to vote in all elections, without any discrimination.

Second principle : Women shall, on equal terms with men, be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies constituted under national law, without any

discrimination.

Third principle : Women shall have the equal right as men to hold all public offices and to perform all public functions established under national law, without any discrimination²⁴.

v. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

The enshrinement of fundamental human rights has not been limited to the universal level solely under the aegis of the United Nations. Regional political spaces have also taken an interest in this issue and have in turn set up instruments dedicated to human rights.²⁵

This is the case of the African regional space. Indeed, the 18th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity²⁶ adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which entered into force on October 21, 1986²⁷.

Burundi ratified it on 28 July 1989.²⁸

Like the UDHR, the ICCPR, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the African Charter on Human Rights also enshrines the right of women, on an equal footing with men, to participate in the conduct of public affairs in their countries (art. 15).²⁹

Thus, all citizens have the right to participate freely in the conduct of the public affairs of their countries, either directly or through freely chosen representatives, in accordance with the rules laid down by law.

It goes without saying that women are among the citizens, since all the rights guaranteed by the Charter are enjoyed without discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on the basis of sex (section 2).

vi. The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance

Alongside the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, another regional legal instrument recognizing the importance of women's engagement in public affairs is the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Adopted on 30 January 2007 in Addis Ababa by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union³⁰, this charter states that States Parties recognize the vital role of women in the promotion and strengthening

20. 4&chapter=4&clang=_fr<https://www.ohchr.org/fr/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women> visité le 24 janvier 2025.

21. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_fr

22. https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVI-1&chapter=16&clang=_fr visité le 24 janvier 2025.

23. https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XVI-1&chapter=16&clang=_fr visité le 24 janvier 2025.

24. https://treaties.un.org/doc/source/docs/A_RES_640_VII-F.pdf visité le 24 janvier 2025

25. A l'échelle européenne, on parle de la Convention européenne de sauvegarde des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales adoptée en 1950 ; à l'échelle américaine, on parle de la Convention interaméricaine des droits de l'homme adoptée en 1969. Seuls les continents asiatique et océanien n'ont pas encore d'instrument régional des droits de l'homme.

26. Remplacée par l'Union Africaine le 9 juillet 2002

27. Nairobi, Kenya, 27 juin 1981

28. <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/centre-des-grands-lacs-afrique/droit-pouvoir-paix-burundi/droits-de-l-homme/commission-africaine-droits-de-homme/>

29. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_f.pdf

30. <https://au.int/fr/treaties/charte-africaine-de-la-democratie-des-elections-et-de-la-gouvernance> visitée le 24 janvier 2025.

of democracy and thus create the necessary conditions to ensure full and effective participation in decision-making processes and structures at all levels. as an essential element in the promotion and practice of a democratic culture (Article 29(1) and (2).

Burundi signed the Charter on 20 June 2007 but has not yet ratified it.³¹

III.2. Women's Political Participation in Burundian Domestic Legislation

At the national level, the right of Burundian women to take part in the conduct of public affairs is enshrined in the Burundian Constitution and other sub-constitutional legal texts.

a. The Constitution of 7 June 2018

The right of women to take part, on an equal footing with men, in the conduct of public affairs is enshrined in the Burundian Constitution of 7 June 2018.

On the one hand, article 51 of the Constitution stipulates that *«Every Burundian has the right to participate, either directly or indirectly, through his representatives, in the direction and management of the affairs of the State, subject to legal conditions, in particular age and capacity»*.

By the expression «all Burundians», it should logically be understood that it refers to both women and men, since the Constitution recognizes equality among Burundians and prohibits any discrimination based on sex, among other things. Article 13 stipulates that *«All Burundians are equal in merit and dignity. All citizens enjoy the same rights and are entitled to the same protection of the law. No Burundian shall be excluded from the social, economic or political life of the nation on account of his race, language, religion, sex or ethnic origin.»* Article 22 corroborates this fact by stipulating that *«All citizens are equal before the law, which guarantees them equal protection. No one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of, inter alia, origin, race, ethnicity, sex, colour, language, social status, religious, philosophical or political beliefs, or physical or mental disability, or being a carrier of HIV/AIDS or any other incurable disease.»* Finally, Article 19 gives constitutional value to the rights guaranteed by the international human rights instruments ratified by Burundi. However, it was pointed out that several of the instruments ratified by Burundi recognized the equal right of men and women to take part in the public affairs of their country.

Finally, the Constitution of 7 June 2018 includes the

minimum threshold of 30% of women's participation in senior decision-making bodies provided for the first time in the 2005 Constitution. This is the case in the National Assembly³², the Government³³ and the Senate³⁴.

1. The Electoral Code of June 2024

The last Electoral Code to be promulgated in Burundi is Organic Law No. 1/12 of 5 June 2024 amending Law No. 1/11 of 20 May 2019 on the Electoral Code.

In line with the provisions of the Constitution, this Code includes the requirement of a minimum threshold of 30 per cent of women in the National Assembly and the Senate, while providing for the practical arrangements to ensure compliance, up to and including co-optation³⁵. Moreover, the Electoral Code has extended this quota of at least 30% of women to the level of the Communal Council.³⁶

2. The Law on Political Parties

The law of 10 September 2011 on the organization and functioning of political parties also provides for a quota of at least 30% of women's representation at the level of the governing bodies at the national level.³⁷

As a result of these developments, the right of women to participate on an equal footing with men in the conduct of public affairs is largely supported by an international and national legal framework.

The question remains as to whether this formal recognition has been followed by effects both in terms of numbers and influence. This is the subject of the second chapter.

IV. CHAPTER II. STATE OF PLAY OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN KEY DECISION-MAKING BODIES

IV.1. Unequal participation in terms of numbers and functions

As already pointed out, the figures that will be presented here are limited to the ministries, the National Assembly, the Senate, the diplomatic representation and the provincial administration. The latter two levels were chosen to illustrate the level of women's participation figures in areas where the 30% quota is not compulsory. The same is true at the level of senior ministerial officials other than ministers.

31. <https://au.int/fr/treaties/charte-africaine-de-la-democratie-des-elections-et-de-la-gouvernance> visitée le 24 janvier 2025.
32. Article 169.
33. Article 128.
34. Article 185.
35. Article 108 alinéa 1 et 2 pour l'Assemblée nationale et article 142 pour le Sénat.
36. Article 183 et article 195.
37. Article 30.

IV.1.1. Ministers and other senior departmental officials

At the level of the various ministries, the gender representation at the top of the ministry (Minister-Assistant to the Minister-Permanent Secretary) is as follows :

• *Table on the representativeness of women and men within ministerial bodies*

No.	Ministry Name	Minister	Assistant to the Min	Permanent Secretary
1	Ministry of the Interior, Community Development and Public Security	M	M	2M
2	Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs	M	M	M
3	Department of Justice	F	F	M
4	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation	M	M	M
5	Ministry of Finance, Budget and Economic Planning	M	M	M+F
6	Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research	M	M	2M
7	Ministry of Public Health and the Fight against AIDS	F	F	M
8	Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture and Livestock	M	M	2M
9	Ministry of Infrastructure, Equipment and Social Housing	M	F	M
10	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Employment	M	M	M
11	Ministry of Hydraulics, Energy and Mines	M	M	M
12	Ministry of Trade, Transport, Industry and Tourism	F	F	F
13	Ministry of East African Community Affairs, Youth, Sports and Culture	M	F	M
14	Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights and Gender	F	F	M
15	Ministry of Communication, Information Technology and Media	F	M	M
Total women		5/15	6/15	2/19

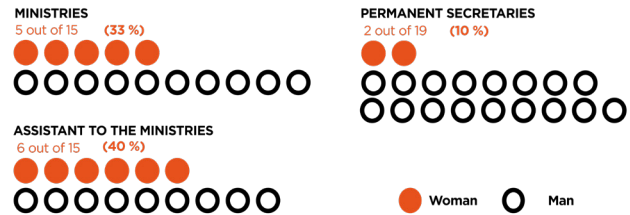
By TLP-Burundi, situation of November 2024.

The table shows that there are five women ministers out of a total of fifteen, representing a representation rate of 33%. For the position of assistant to the minister, there are a total of six women out of fifteen men, i.e. a rate of 40%. As for the position of permanent secretary, there are two women out of a total of 19, which makes a rate of about 10%. In addition, it is noted that only 1 sovereign ministry is the responsibility of women, namely the Minister of Justice, and that there is too little overall representation of women in technical functions within the ministries.

Graphically represented, the gender ratio at the level of these three key positions in the various ministries

is as follows:

Women holding senior positions in government ministries



By TLP-Burundi, situation of November 2024

VI.1.2. At the level of parliament

During the 2020-2025 legislature, the lower house of the Burundian Parliament has 123 deputies. According to an updated list as of September 4, 2024 available on the website of the National Assembly of Burundi, there are 45 women out of a total of 122 deputies, a rate of 37%.

The upper house of parliament, meanwhile, has 39 senators, 16 of whom are women, a rate of 41%.

In both cases, there is a female member of the bureau who has three people, namely the president of the Assembly or the Senate as well as the first and second vice-presidents.

In the National Assembly, the female member of the bureau holds the position of first vice-president of the Assembly. The same is true for the Senate.

IV.1.3. At the level of the provincial administration

In the post of provincial governor, out of the 18 provinces in the country, only three women are governors (provinces of KARUSI, MAKAMBA and RUYIGI), i.e. a rate of about 16%.

At the level of the governors' advisers, each province has a chief of staff and 4 advisers, i.e. a counsellor in charge of legal affairs, an adviser in charge of development, an adviser in charge of administration and finance and an adviser in charge of socio-cultural affairs. In the various provinces, the situation of Chiefs of Staff and advisers according to gender is as follows:

• **Table on the representativeness of women and men at the level of Chiefs of Staff and Advisers**

Province	Chiefs of Staff		Advisors	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
BUBANZA	1	-	3	1
BUJUMBURA	1	-	3	1
BURURI	1	-	3	1
CANKUZO	1	-	2	2
CONCLUSION	1	-	3	1
GITEGA	1	-	3	1
KARUSI	1	-	2	2
KAYANZA	1	-	3	1
KIRUNDO	1	-	2	2
MAKAMBA	1	-	3	1
MURAMVYA	1	-	3	1
MUYINGA	-	1	3	1
MWARO	1	-	3	1
SKIN	1	-	2	2
RUMONGE	1	-	3	1
RUYIGI	1	-	2	2
RUTANA	-	1	3	1
BUJUMBURA MAIRIE	1	-	1	3
Total	16	2	47	25

By TLP-Burundi, situation of November 2024

The gender representation in the positions of Governors, Heads of Cabinet of Governors and Advisors to Governors is graphically presented as follows:

Representation of men and women holding the highest offices in the provinces

GOVERNORS

84 %



16 %

CHIEFS OF STAFF TO GOVERNORS

89 %



11 %

GOVERNORS' ADVISORS

66 %



34 %



Woman Man

By TLP-Burundi, situation of November 2024

The table and graph above show that, out of the 18 provinces, only two have female chiefs of staff to the governor. These are the provinces of RUTANA and MUYINGA. The representation rate of women in the position of chief of staff of the governor is 11%. With regard to the positions of governors' councillors, there are a total of 25 women council-

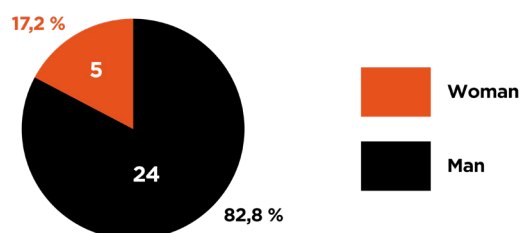
lors out of a total of 72 councillors. The representation rate of women at this level is about 35%.

IV.1.4. Diplomatic representation

Burundi has thirty-one (31) embassies and consulates abroad, including sixteen (16) in Africa, eight (8) in Europe, five (5) in Asia and two (2) in North America. As of November 30, 2024, data from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation indicate that two positions out of the thirty-one were not filled³⁸. Of the 29 ambassadors/consuls posted at that time, only five were women, representing a representation rate of 17%.

The graph of diplomatic representation by gender is as follows:

Diplomatic representation by gender



SERVING AMBASSADORS/CONSULS

By TLP-Burundi, situation of November 2024

IV.2. Analysis of the results

IV.2.1. A numerically low turnout

An analysis of the foregoing developments reveals several observations :

- The formal equality between men and women enshrined in international and national legal instruments is far from being real equality if we consider the level of participation of women in decision-making positions. The figures speak for themselves.
- The constitutional and legal requirement of a minimum threshold of 30% representation of women in certain spheres of decision-making, which dates back to 2005, is still respected. But what we notice is that the level of representation of women still oscillates around this quota and does not detach itself from it to achieve parity. This is in line with other studies that have already shown that, in most cases, this quota is considered a maximum to be reached.³⁹
- In decision-making positions where there is no constitutional requirement of a minimum threshold of representation for women, their absence is flagrant and reveals structural discrimination. This is the case of their representation at the level of ambassadors, at

38. Il s'agit de l'ambassade de Kigali et de celle de La Haye.

39. S. BRAND, Political participation of women in Burundi. Case study, MDF Training and Consultancy, Ede, 2018, p. 8

the level of governors, at the level of assistants and permanent secretaries of ministers. This means that, when the level of women's representation is not set in stone in legal texts, the political leaders responsible for appointing women to the various positions reduce women's numerical participation to the bare minimum.

IV.2.2. Limited influence

It is essential not only to consider the digital participation of women in politics, but also to examine another fundamental aspect: their real influence on improving the living conditions of other women. Because, even though there is not yet parity in Burundi, the 30% quota has considerably improved the threshold for women's representation in politics, so much so that Burundi is ranked among the countries in Africa with one of the highest rates of women in parliament.⁴⁰ Moreover, at the executive level, women occupy strategic positions such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights and Gender.

But beyond considerations of formal representation, it is necessary to question the room for manoeuvre of women, once appointed to high political positions or strategic ministries, to really influence the issues that are the most important for them.

To answer this question, we will highlight an emblematic area where Burundian women continue to suffer discrimination in the deafening silence of the women who are supposed to represent them. This is the issue of access to land ownership.

According to the 2008 General Population and Housing Census, out of 80.2 per cent of landowners, 62.5 per cent are men and only 17.7 per cent are women⁴¹. This situation can be explained by the fact that among the various modes of access to land ownership recognized in Burundi, acquisition by subsidiary succession remains predominant. It is essentially based on custom⁴², which privileges only sons over daughters⁴³. Burundian inheritance law still does not include gender equality in inheritance. Also the colonial ordinance of 14 May 1886 of the Administrator-General of the Congo relating to the principles to be followed in judicial decisions (and applicable to Burundi) stipulates that **«When the matter is not provided for by a decree, an order, or an ordinance already promulgated, disputes which are within the jurisdiction of**

the courts of the Congo shall be judged according to local customs, general principles of law and equity». Customary norms therefore remain the majority reference.

While it is true that, compared to the original customary norms that enshrined the pure and simple absence of women's inheritance rights, the Burundian courts have played a significant role in changing these norms in the direction of recognizing their inheritance rights⁴⁴, the fact remains that, in general, women continue to suffer discrimination in access to land ownership in a patriarchal socio-cultural context.

However, both politicians and court officials do not hide their desire to see this discrimination perpetuated, such as Gélase Ndabirabe, president of the National Assembly, who on August 16, 2024, accused the educated female elites of wanting to distort «Burundian culture» by campaigning for an equal sharing of parental inheritance between girls and boys.⁴⁵ Emmanuel Gateretse, former President of the Supreme Court, also issued a note dated 16/08/2024 addressed to all heads of jurisdiction in Burundi³⁷ **«imperfections in the review of case law, particularly concerning the judgments that enshrine the equality of girls and boys in land inheritance in rural areas.»** According to him, the judgments of his own jurisprudence contradicted the traditional Burundian custom governing land inheritance (amatongo y'umuryango).⁴⁶

In order to put an end to discrimination in inheritance matters, the adoption of the Inheritance Act is urgently needed.

However, after these statements, neither the Minister of Justice, nor the Minister in charge of gender issues, nor the women parliamentarians deemed it necessary to protest or to propose a draft law governing inheritance and guaranteeing women's rights. The mere presence of women in the highest positions does not allow Burundi to advance women's rights today.

V. CHAPTER III. FACTORS EXPLAINING THE LOW POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN BURUNDI

The obstacles to women's political participation are of two kinds: socio-cultural obstacles and politi-

40. R. NDAYIRAGIJE, S. VANDEGINSTE, P. MEIER, Women's Descriptive Representation in Burundi: The Mixed Effects of Gender Quotas, Africa Spectrum, 2023, Vol. 58, p. 133.

41. REPUBLIQUE DU BURUNDI, Ministère de l'Eau, de l'Environnement, de l'Aménagement du Territoire et de l'Urbanisme, Description du Burundi : Aspects démographiques et socio-économiques du Burundi, mai 2012, p. 2.

42. Les femmes sont discriminées dans l'héritage dans leur famille biologique mais aussi souvent par alliance. Pour plus de détails, voy. A. MANIRAKIZA, Le principe d'égalité et de non-discrimination dans le droit familial burundais : état des lieux, défis de mise en œuvre et perspectives de lege ferenda, thèse, Anvers, 2020., pp. 197-208.

43. E. NUKURI, « L'apport du nouveau code foncier en matière de résolution des conflits au Burundi », KAS African Law Study Library 1, 2014, p. 737.

44. Idem, pp. 179-186.

45. <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/droit-de-succession-le-sieur-ndabirabe-souleve-un-tolle-chez-les-militantes-de-la-cause-feminine/> visité le 02 février 2025.

46. <https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/la-coutume-contre-la-loi-la-cour-supreme-met-les-droits-des-femmes-en-peril/> visité le 02 février 2025.

cal-security obstacles.

V.1. Socio-cultural barriers related to gender socialization

Like other societies governed by largely patriarchal cultures, traditional Burundian culture does not put men and women on an equal footing. This frame of reference, although it has partly evolved, retains a considerable influence on women's political participation. «Gender socialization» confines gender to the private and family spheres, leaving the public and decision-making spheres to men.

In the particular case of traditional Burundian society, boys and girls were educated according to the social expectations and roles socially constructed and expected by the community. The girl was educated in the prospects of marriage and motherhood. Thus, everything that belonged to the family and private sphere belonged to the woman and the girl, while the man or boy was allowed to work outside the family sphere⁴⁷. It is in the extension of this state of affairs that women have ended up internalizing this state of «social and political cadet» maintained by popular adages in Burundi such as: *nta jambo ry'umugore* (a woman's word does not deserve consideration) or *Nta nkokokazi ibika isake iriho* (woman is not allowed to speak as long as there is a man⁴⁸).

This long legacy of gender differentiation explains at least part of the obstacles to women's political participation, including the socio-cultural perception of women's incapacity in politics, the lack of solidarity between women, the burden of their family obligations and their low financial autonomy.

This state of affairs constitutes a «cultural» base (or considered as such) on which other factors of vulnerability or inferiorization are grafted that combine to limit women's political participation.

V.2. Socio-cultural perception of women and political engagement

Gender socialization produces a perception that women are incapable of doing politics insofar as their role is not to be interested in public affairs.

The internalization of this state of affairs by women themselves also limits female solidarity with those who nevertheless dare to get involved. Interviews with women highlight this lack of support. Thus, B. P.⁴⁹ points out that *«on the cultural level, Burundian women who engage in politics are not supported or understood in their community because of cultural barriers that suggest that politics belongs to men.*

Some women have difficulty asserting themselves (self-esteem, lack of confidence in other women)» N. G.⁵⁰ corroborates B.P.'s words by pointing out that *«there is a belief that women are not capable and even if they are embarked, they are relegated to subordinate roles»*. Highlighting the lack of solidarity between women, she said that *«women do not esteem each other, do not support each other and therefore cannot emerge in politics»*.

A.S.D., a woman member of the ruling political party, complained that women are not sufficiently consulted in the decisions to be taken at the level of the CNDD-FDD party or even at the level of the country's governance: *«Major decisions are generally taken in circles of which we know nothing, in a circle of high-ranking military and police officers who have fought in the maquis, without any consultation with women members, even though we hold decision-making positions within the CNDD-FDD party.»*

She also stated that sometimes they give suggestions, but they are not considered. She seems not to know where big decisions are made at the moment she is in the country's governing bodies!

V.3. The Burden of Family Obligations

Gender socialization also results in women disproportionately carrying the burden of the household and all aspects of care (childcare, education, husband and household maintenance), which is a major obstacle to their political participation. To be able to gain the «trust» of political parties, one must make oneself visible and available (taking up positions and participating in activist life) etc. This is complicated by their assignment to the home.

In addition, the image of the «public woman» can be taken into account. Thus, the times and places where political meetings take place can pose problems for women. A. N. G. makes it known: *«men meet in neighborhood bistros at late hours to do politics; Very few women can keep up with this pace without shirking family responsibilities. It could also be the cause of conflicts within households, as very few husbands would understand women who come home late at night.»*

V.4. Women's lack of financial autonomy

Doing politics in Burundi requires financial means: party dues, participation in mobilization costs, etc. etc. The precocity of unions (50% of women entering a union at the age of 20.3⁵¹), especially in rural areas, before women have acquired skills or are professionally established, limits their opportunity for financial

47. N. HAJAYANDI, La participation politique de la femme au Burundi, effet de socialisation de genre, p. 7.

48. Ibidem

49. B.P. est une femme qui vit dans la province de Makamba et évolue dans le milieu des organisations de la société civile

50. N. G est une femme qui travaille pour la fonction publique, elle vit à Kanyosha au sud de la capitale économique Bujumbura.

51. https://vcda.afdb.org/en/system/files/report/burundi_final_2024.pdf, consulté le 15 février 2025.

emancipation. The dramatic deterioration in the socio-economic situation since 2020 (27.0% official inflation in 2023⁵²) particularly affects women, who are also more likely than men to take on expenses related to health, education, food and the general interest as part of the well-being of the household. Less able to access formal remunerative jobs, having less access to credit than men, they accumulate characteristics of socio-economic vulnerability that accentuate their dependence on their spouses. This dependence limits their political participation. The reluctance shared by most Burundian men to allow their wives to get involved politically, and spend time outside the home⁵³, is explained by the financial dependence of their wives.

V.5. Political and security obstacles

In addition to socio-cultural obstacles, there are also political and security obstacles that explain women's low political participation.

V.5.1. The Party Political System

Burundi's political system is structured and dominated by the political party system and offers very few places for independent personalities. Independent candidacies are made extremely difficult, if not almost impossible. In the event of disagreement with the political party's line, even if you have been elected, there is a real risk of being expelled from the party and, by extension, of losing the quality of elected official⁵⁴. In this context, the emergence of «feminine» political demands can come up against the majority male conservatism. In fact, committed women carry the «demands of men» even if they contravene their most strategic rights and interests.

This omnipotence of political parties is likely to weaken independent political participation, let alone that of women.

On the one hand, political parties, like any other social institution, are riddled with macho biases and other prejudices of the illegitimacy of women in politics. This is becoming evident at the level of the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD (the majority presidential party), whose power is concentrated at the level of the so-called «**Council of Elders**», an all-male body⁵⁵. Moreover, the weight of the military system in political life must be taken into account. Thus, appointments to the various positions of the CNDD-FDD really take place in informal circles dominated by generals,

where women have an extremely marginal place⁵⁶.

On the other hand, women, who are often elected or appointed to decision-making positions, are not elected for their political contribution but as representatives of their political party, to which they must be absolutely loyal. Appointed for the purpose of «female foil», they cannot go against the vision of the male leaders of their political party and act for the rights of Burundian women.

B.P. is right when she says that « **currently, Burundian women engaged in politics do not set good examples that can inspire other women, because these women serve the interests of their party/party in power and care little for the good of the country and women's rights** ». Similarly, E.C.⁵⁷ explains that « **women in political positions are in the pay of the CNDD-FDD and cannot get involved in favor of other women.** »

V.5.2. The CNDD-FDD regime's repressive campaign

Since the CNDD-FDD party came to power in 2005, it has continued to adopt an authoritarian bent that has reached a paroxysmic level since 2015. Until today, this repressive campaign against opponents and other human rights defenders has not stopped.⁵⁸

The repression of opposition political parties, civil society organizations, and popular mobilizations has hit women hard (murders, sexual violence, exile, etc.). They were victims both as activists but also for their real or supposed proximity to political activists (father, brother, spouse) or for the simple fact that they live in protest neighborhoods.

The trauma of the violence suffered has a negative impact on the political participation of women who are afraid to get involved (especially those belonging to the opposition). According to B. P: « **The political terrain is currently mined, as a result of political intolerance, threats, arbitrary arrests and conspiracies. The majority of women are afraid to enlist for fear of suffering violations at a time when there is terror.** » According to her, « **there is intimidation by supporters of the ruling party against opponents, even against women, especially those living in protest neighborhoods who are constantly threatened or harassed.** »

52. <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Pays/BI/indicateurs-et-conjoncture>, consulté le 15 février 2025.

53. P. MINANI, op.cit., p. 53.

54. Pour plus de détails sur le caractère participatif du système politique burundais, voir A. MANIRAKIZA, Analyse critique de la loi organique n° 1/12 du 5 juin 2024 portant modification de la loi n° 1/11 du 20 mai 2019 portant code électoral, sur <https://tournonslapage.bi/burundi-analyse-critique-de-la-loi-organique-n-12-du-5-juin-portant-code-electoral/>

55. R. NDAYIRAGIJE et al. op.cit., p.149.

56. Ibidem.

57. E.C. est une activiste des droits humains qui a été contrainte à l'exil suite à son activisme. Elle vit en exil depuis 2016

58. Rapport du Rapporteur sur la situation des droits de l'homme au Burundi, 23 juillet 2024, p. 2.

58. Rapport du Rapporteur sur la situation des droits de l'homme au Burundi, 23 juillet 2024, p. 2.

VI. CONCLUSION GÉNÉRALE ET RECOMMANDATIONS

This study assessed the state of women's political participation in Burundi, ten years after the start of the serious political crisis that began in 2015. Despite a national and international legal framework guaranteeing equality between men and women in politics, reality shows that this equality remains largely theoretical.

VI.1. Limited and inefficient political participation

In quantitative terms, the 30% quota for women's participation in decision-making positions is respected where this quota is imposed (parliament, government, communal councils). However, this threshold is rarely exceeded and, in spheres where no obligation exists (diplomacy, provinces, senior ministerial officials), their representation remains marginal. This trend shows that, without legal constraints, politicians voluntarily limit women's access to key positions.

Qualitatively, the real influence of women in politics is weak. Although some occupy strategic positions, they often remain under the influence of political parties and struggle to defend policies that improve the status of women. The glaring example of the non-engagement of women politicians in the reform of inheritance law, which is crucial for women's access to land ownership, illustrates this lack of significant impact.

VI.2. Deep and Multiple Obstacles

The analysis highlighted several obstacles to women's political participation :

Persistent socio-cultural barriers : Gender stereotypes, low female solidarity, burden of family responsibilities and economic dependence prevent many women from fully engaging in politics.

A closed political system : Male dominance in parties, the exclusion of women from informal decision-making circles and the lack of political autonomy of elected women limit their action.

A climate of repression and intimidation : Since 2015, the repression against opponents, including committed women, has slowed down women's mobilization and accentuated the fear of political engagement.

A legal framework to be improved : While the 30% quota has made it possible to make progress, it does not guarantee real equality. The lack of measures to promote parity and the inaction of women in office in crucial reforms show that the current mechanism is insufficient.

In short, the political participation of Burundian women must not be a simple numerical objective, but a reality translated into influence and meaningful decision-making. Until structural, cultural and political barriers are removed, women will continue to be underrepresented and their voices reduced to a symbolic role. Burundi could not claim to be a true democracy without the full participation of women

in the management of public affairs. The time has come to embark on bold reforms to sustainably transform the place of women in politics and, by extension, in Burundian society as a whole.

VI.3. Recommendations for genuine political equality

In order to achieve lasting change that allows for effective political participation by women, recommendations have been made to several actors:

VI.3.1. To the Government of Burundi

- Initiate the revision of the Constitution in order to impose parity, i.e. a minimum of 50% of women presence in all political bodies;
- Promote civic education among young students (girls and boys) in parallel with programs to deconstruct gender stereotypes within schools throughout the Burundian national territory;
- Promote the inclusion of young women and women from marginalized populations (such as indigenous Batwa) in decision-making spaces from the local level to the national level;
- Ensure that institutions and the political environment are free from discrimination and violence;
- To ensure the recognition and visibility of women in decision-making positions.

VI.3.2. Civil society organisations

- Intensify awareness-raising and training campaigns on gender equality in Burundian society with a view to changing mentalities that perpetuate prejudices and negative stereotypes against women;
- Deploy advocacy campaigns to demand the revision of the Constitution in order to integrate parity in politics;
- Target discriminatory laws and provisions (including on inheritance and access to land) that impede women's socio-economic empowerment and deploy advocacy campaigns to decision-makers;
- Increase advocacy campaigns against the repression that targets opposition political actors and civil society actors, including women, and take particular account of the sexual violence of which they are victims.

VI.3.3. To Burundi's development partners

- To finance civil society organizations in their mission to raise awareness with a view to changing cultural mentalities unfavorable to women.

VI.3.4. Political parties

- To integrate into their statutes the principle of parity between men and women in all their bodies and in the composition of the lists of candidates;
- Encourage the political participation of women and young women by ensuring environments free of gender-based and gender-based violence;
- Promote the capacities of women and young women through training and leadership in political institutions.