

"Burundi: An electoral process marred by serious irregularities and democratic restrictions".

Observation report of the legislative and communal elections of 5 June 2025



Voting at Musama Primary School in Gitega on June 5, 2025

June 17, 2025

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Political and institutional context	3
3. Analysis of the electoral campaign.....	3
4. Election Day Statements	4
6. Key Recommendations	5
7. Overall conclusion	5

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the observation conducted by SOS-Torture/Burundi monitors on the occasion of the legislative and communal elections held on June 5, 2025. It aims to assess the regularity, transparency and fairness of the electoral process and to make recommendations to strengthen democratic guarantees in Burundi.

2. Political and institutional context

The June 2025 elections took place in a deeply locked context, without the minimum conditions to guarantee a free, fair and competitive election. Since 2020, SOS-Torture Burundi has regularly warned in its publications that the regime of President Évariste Ndayishimiye was gradually consolidating the CNDD-FDD's control over key institutions such as the single parties, including the CENI, the judicial system, the security forces, and administrative control bodies.

As a result, the political opposition has been systematically marginalized. Parties such as the CNL and UPRONA and the "Burundi bwa bose" coalition have faced administrative obstacles, arbitrary deregistration's, prosecution and threats. The CENI has excluded several candidates on the pretext of technical or judicial non-compliance.

The Imbonerakure, a militia affiliated with the ruling party, were at the heart of the strategy of controlling the field: intimidation of voters, expulsion of observers, influence on electoral operations. Independent media were censored and prevented from covering irregularities. Several journalists have been threatened or denied access to information.

Under these conditions, the elections have further strengthened the hegemony of the CNDD-FDD party to the detriment of pluralism and democratic principles that guarantee the free exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms acquired since the 1990s.

3. Analysis of the electoral campaign

The electoral campaign was marked by:

- Unequal access to public space: The CNDD-FDD has extensively mobilized infrastructure and local authorities. The opposition has been prevented from organizing rallies in many localities.
- Intimidation by the Imbonerakure: Massively present on the ground, they dissuaded opposition sympathizers from appearing publicly.
- Harassment of activists: Activists have been arrested, summoned by the security services or forced into hiding.
- Biased media coverage: RTNB gave disproportionate coverage to the CNDD-FDD, broadcasting its speeches and activities at length, to the detriment of other parties and coalitions.
- Censorship of independent media: Several civil society initiatives to monitor the campaign were restricted independent journalists have been intimidated or censored.
- Lack of credible observers: Very few independent national or international observers were allowed to monitor the campaign.

4. Election Day Statements

4.1. Failure to comply with the official opening hours of polling stations

Several polling stations opened before 6 a.m., without observers or proxies being able to check the state of the ballot boxes. This facilitated cases of ballot stuffing.

4.2. Partisan Behaviours of Election Officials

CENI agents directed the vote, distributed ballots already ticked, or proceeded to vote in place of voters.

4.3. Infringements of the secrecy of the vote

Voters were accompanied to the polling booth. In some polling stations, Imbonerakure posted at the entrance imposed visible pressure, forcing some citizens to vote for the CNDD-FDD.

4.4. Cases of Multiple Vote Fraud or Spoofing

- Misuse of powers of attorney
- Votes cast on behalf of deceased or absent persons
- Illegal seizure of voter cards belonging to opposition supporters

4.5. Obstruction of election observation work

- Denial of access to national and international observers
- Expulsion of political party representatives
- Refusal of entry to African Union observers at the polling station of the International School of Bujumbura

4.6. Shortcomings during counting operations

Counting operations were carried out behind closed doors, in opaque conditions. Cases of ballot box substitution have been reported in Bururi. The results were not verified in the presence of all stakeholders.

5. General reading of the electoral process

From the preparation to the proclamation of the results, the June 2025 elections were characterized by a systematic exclusion of opponents, instrumentalization of electoral and judicial institutions, massive fraud, and widespread repression. The context of intimidation and political closure has seriously hampered the free choice of voters and emptied the process of any democratic credibility.

This is a clear violation of Burundi's international commitments to respect civil and political rights.

6. Key recommendations

❖ To the Government of Burundi:

- Restoring political pluralism and electoral inclusiveness
- End repression and intimidation
- Create an independent mechanism to investigate violations

❖ To international partners :

- Making cooperation conditional on clear commitments to reform
- Subordinate budgetary and technical support to measurable criteria (reform of the CENI, respect for public freedoms, fight against impunity)
- Strengthening international oversight by UN mechanisms
- Financially and technically support independent civil society
- Actively involve the African Union, the East African Community and the ICGLR in the political dialogue

Partners must demand concrete electoral reforms, support civil and political rights, and build the capacity of civil society as a lever for democratic change.

7. Overall conclusion

The election of 5 June 2025 did not meet the requirements of a free, fair and transparent electoral process. It took place under duress, in a climate of oppression and organized fraud, reinforcing political exclusion and further weakening democracy in Burundi.

SOS-Torture/Burundi calls for a firm reaction from the international community to undertake structural electoral reforms, restore the confidence of the Burundian people and guarantee respect for their fundamental rights.