



**SOS-TORTURE/BURUNDI**

"Celui qui sauve une vie sauve l'humanité toute entière"

*Candidates victims of intimidation, threats, and various forms of pressure*

**Report by SOS Torture Burundi on irregularities observed during the local elections of August 25, 2025**



*Citizens gather in front of a polling station to denounce irregularities (IWACU newspaper)*

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SOS TORTURE BURUNDI

## 1. Introduction

Since the political crisis of 2015, Burundi has been facing a situation marked by the closure of civic space, systematic repression of dissenting voices, and a significant weakening of democratic institutions. The ruling party, CNDD-FDD, has gradually strengthened its control on all governance mechanisms, including electoral processes, significantly restricting political pluralism.

Local elections, as provided for in the Constitution, are in principle a crucial step in participatory democracy, as they allow citizens to directly elect their local representatives for local administration. They should therefore be a key moment for stimulating citizen participation, transparency in public management, and proximity between those who rule and those who are governed, by allowing local concerns to be expressed directly.

However, the experience of previous legislative, communal, and senatorial elections in June and July 2025 showed a recurring tendency for the authorities to manipulate the elections, with the support of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), whose impartiality is widely questioned by many national and international observers.

It was in this context of widespread mistrust, a climate of fear, and political domination by CNDD-FDD that the local elections were held on August 25, 2025. This report highlights the irregularities documented in several provinces and communes to witness serious malfunctions that marred the integrity of this election and to contribute to the collective memory and advocacy efforts for free, fair, and credible elections in Burundi.

## 2. Irregularities observed

Many irregularities were observed in several provinces, where candidates were intimidated, threatened, and subjected to various forms of pressure in order to withdraw from the electoral process. These acts included the confiscation of voter's cards and votes cast by proxies, threats against those who refused to hand over their cards, and clashes between candidates in some polling stations, requiring the intervention of the police.

The following few illustrative cases describe this harmful situation:

### 2.1. Butanyerera Province

#### a) *Busoni commune – Shore zone*

- Many candidates initially ran in elections, including: Miburo Abel, Ndizeye Jean-Baptiste, Nyabenda Bernard, Myandagaro Léonard, Nsavyumugwanwa Leonidas, Uwizeyimana Jeanette, and Niyonzima Léocadie. Arbitrary disqualification: Nsavyumugwanwa Leonidas was disqualified by CENI on the grounds of illiteracy, without any transparent procedure or possibility of appeal.

Pressure and intimidation: Myandagaro Léonard, a popular candidate, was forced to withdraw under threat. He reportedly signed his withdrawal forcibly, causing outrage and a feeling of injustice among his supporters.

*b) Kiremba commune (formerly Nyamurenza)*

- Confiscation of voter's cards and proxy votes.
- Threats against those who refused to hand over their cards.
- Clashes between candidates in some polling stations, requiring police intervention.
- Candidate lists pre-established by CNDD-FDD, preventing any independent candidates from running.
- A local CENI official confirmed that these practices had been "decided at the highest level."

*c) Murungurira zone (formerly Ntega)*

- Public protests against the election of Ascension Manirambona, accused of abuse of power during her previous term of office

## **2.2. Bujumbura Province**

*a) Kamenge quarter, Mirango II*

- Arbitrary control of voters and unjustified interference by local officials.

*b) Cibitoke Commune*

The candidate Nshimirimana Alphonsine ("Fofu") was run in elections though she was imprisoned in Mpimba, questioning the legality and impartiality of the process. Rumors suggest an early release specifically arranged for her candidacy.

*c) Quarter 7 (Mutakura / now Nyamwiza)*

- Adelin Ndikumasabo, the outgoing quarter head since 2015, obtained nearly 100% of the vote in 13 polling stations.
- Reliable testimonies indicate serious fraud: bribing polling station officials (250,000 BIF each), distributing pre-filled ballots, and ballot box stuffing.
- In some polling stations, the number of votes cast exceeded the number of registered voters (e.g. 201 votes for 107 registered voters).
- Ndikumasabo is accused of serious misconduct (intimidation, extortion, violence, sexual abuse, and enforced disappearances), which casts serious doubt on the legitimacy of his re-election.

*e) Kanyosha Zone*

- Unexpected withdrawal of Ferdinand Minani, who was declared the winner despite his official withdrawal.

### *f) Gihosha Zone*

At Gihosha School polling station, four CECI members were caught filling out ballots for *the* candidate Chançard Nimbona.

## **2.3. Burunga Province**

### a) Rumonge

Specific cases:

- Kibimba Hill (Mabanda Zone): Electoral officials were caught filling out ballots for absentees. The presidents of the concerned polling station were arrested and replaced.
- Rumbaga Hill (Rukeco zone, Ngozi commune): CNDD-FDD members directed voters and used fictitious voter's cards.
- Kirundo Commune: Arbitrary removal of some candidates from the electoral lists, restricting citizen participation.
  - Nine persons arrested for ballot stuffing, illegal possession of voter's cards, bribery, and attempted influence.

### b) Muhuta Commune – Ecofo Buranirwa polling center

- The center's president was caught red-handed while personally filling out approximately fifty ballots.

## **2.4. Gitega Province**

In Mwaro Commune

- In many hills (Miterama, Gatwe, Kivuzo, Murama – Nyabihanga commune), the vote took place peacefully despite some delays in the opening of polling stations.
- In the President of the Republic's native hill, the vote was marked by strong political symbolism but without major incidents.

A clear violation of the electoral code was noted, particularly **Article 173, paragraph b**, stipulating that: "*A candidate for a hill or quarter council must live legally on the hill or quarter permanently.*"

However, candidate Isidore Mbayahaga ran in the hill elections on his native hill of Gihinga, though he has no permanent residence there and therefore does not meet the legal residency requirements.

## **3. Analysis**

The observed irregularities reflect a worrying and systematic dynamics:

- Use of CENI to disqualify popular candidates.
- Repeated electoral fraud: ballot stuffing, forced voting, and list manipulation.
- A widespread climate of fear and intimidation orchestrated by the authorities, the police, and the Imbonerakure.

- Political Lockdown: CNDD-FDD domination reducing all pluralism

### **3.1. Instrumentalization of electoral institutions**

The **Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI)**, far from playing the role of a neutral arbiter, appears to function as an auxiliary body of the regime. Cases of arbitrary disqualification, tolerance of illegal candidacies, and leniency in the face of blatant fraud illustrate its partiality. The lack of possibilities of appeal stresses this authoritarian drift.

### **3.2. Repression and intimidation as an electoral strategy**

The forced withdrawal of some candidates (through threats), the confiscation of voter's cards, and clashes between party members show an atmosphere of systematic intimidation, orchestrated party by the police and the Imbonerakure (the youth wing of the ruling party). This climate prevents any free and fair electoral competition.

### **3.3. Widespread electoral fraud**

Testimonies of ballot box stuffing, pre-filled ballots, multiple voting, and corruption among election officials indicates a deliberate attempt to rig the results to ensure victory for candidates supported by CNDD-FDD. These practices undermine not only the legitimacy of elected officials, but also that of the State itself.

### **3.4. Weakening of political pluralism**

By preventing the emergence of independent or critical candidates and promoting controversial candidates sometimes accused of serious violence, the regime reduces democratic space to a sham. The lockdown of the base of local power allows increased vertical control of the State apparatus, from the top down.

### **3.5. Legal violations and lack of accountability**

Clear violations of the electoral code (e.g. the failure to comply with the residency requirement) demonstrate that the law is interpreted speculatively, often to the advantage of those in power. This institutionalized impunity weakens the rule of law and fosters governance based on arbitrariness.

## **4. Conclusion**

The local elections of August 25, 2025, in Burundi, far from strengthening local democracy, have confirmed a **process of institutional disintegration**, where electoral mechanisms are used to **consolidate authoritarian power** to the detriment of people's sovereignty.

The repetition of organized fraud, systematic intimidation, and serious violations of political rights reflect a shift in the voting process, where voting has become a tool to legitimize the status quo, rather than an instrument of political change or citizen participation. These practices, far from being marginal, have seriously compromised the integrity of the election, undermined the credibility of the results, and questioning the legitimacy of elected local institutions.

An independent, impartial, and credible investigation is urgently needed to establish accountability and restore citizens' confidence for their fundamental political rights. Without

this, electoral cycles will continue to reproduce the domination of a closed regime, to the detriment of social peace and inclusive development.

## **5. Recommendations:**

### **To the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI)**

- Operate with the institutional independence guaranteed by law against political exploitation by the ruling power.
- Guarantee transparency and fairness of the electoral process

### **To the Government and local authorities**

- Respect the principles of political neutrality and end its interference in the functioning of the CENI
- Guarantee a peaceful, impartial, free, and democratic electoral process

### **To civil society and the media**

- Continue to monitor and document electoral processes
- Inform national and international opinion on the violations against free and transparent elections and make relevant recommendations to influential actors capable of positively reversing the trend.

### **To regional and international partners**

- Encourage and provide technical and financial support to independent observation missions.