



Burundi 2011 Crime and Safety Report

Anti-American sentiment; Burglary; Carjacking; Riots/Civil Unrest; Crime; Elections; Extortion; Fraud; Insurgencies; NGO; Stolen items; Terrorism; Theft; Threats

Africa > Burundi > Bujumbura

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Threats

The overall security situation in Burundi is stable, but violent crime and isolated incidents of targeted political violence remain pervasive. Poverty, lack of resources, and omnipresent corruption incubate criminality, which often occurs with impunity. Individuals wearing police or military uniforms commit many of the crimes in areas outside Bujumbura and sometimes within the city. Police, military, violent criminals, and numerous demobilized fighters make or supplement their living through robbing and extorting money from Burundi's population.

There are daily incidents of armed robbery that result in fatalities and serious injury. Most robberies take place during the hours of darkness and outside the city centers; the vast majority does not involve foreigners. That said, criminals do sometimes target western NGOs and businesses and seem increasingly willing to conduct attacks during daylight and in central Bujumbura and sometimes in proximity to U.S. Embassy Bujumbura residential areas. The most common crimes are thefts, highway robberies, and home invasions. 2011 has seen a resurgence in armed robberies. The most common weapons used by criminals are AK-47s, grenades, knives, and machetes.

Burundi also experiences frequent violent attacks, including politically-motivated grenade attacks. During the elections in the summer of 2010, there were more than 150 grenade attacks against bars, hotels, and private residences of political figures, government officials, and others that resulted in numerous injuries and deaths. As a result, the embassy restricted the movement of its personnel during non-daylight hours. In January 2010, several individuals were attacked, allegedly for defecting from, or openly criticizing, the ruling party. In October 2010, an unidentified armed group attacked the senior government official's Bujumbura



residence, located less than two miles from the nearest embassy residence. Security forces and the armed group exchanged gunfire for almost an hour.

American interests have not yet been the focus of this kind of attack, but U.S. citizens should remain cautious and avoid potential political targets, such as party headquarters or politically-affiliated public meeting places.

Road Safety

The incidence of ambush and highway robbery increased country-wide in 2010. Travel outside major towns during the hours of darkness is extremely risky, prohibited for official Americans, and highly discouraged by a Travel Warning. Official Americans are required to be part of a minimum two-vehicle convoy with first aid and additional communication equipment for any travel outside a 30-km radius of Bujumbura, a policy recently reaffirmed by the embassy's Emergency Action Committee. National highways are in fair to good condition with a few exceptions country-wide. Most other roads in the interior of the country are in poor condition. The terrain is quite mountainous and takes its toll on older vehicles. Travelers should anticipate mechanical problems and incorporate additional time so they can address any problems that occur and still be off the roads before dark. Traffic laws exist but are randomly enforced and generally not followed by the majority of drivers. Travelers to Burundi are much more likely to be injured in a traffic accident than by crime or political violence.

Political Violence

Historical Perspective

Burundi was plagued by a civil war from 1993 to 2006 that involved non-governmental and non-combatant targets. In December 2008, the government and the last rebel group, the PALIPEHUTU–FNL, signed their final cease-fire agreement. During 2009, the rebels demobilized in accordance with the terms of the agreement and registered as an officially-recognized political party, the National Liberation Forces (FNL).

Between May and September 2010, Burundi held a series of elections covering all elected offices. However, some opposition parties claimed that the first elections, in May, were tainted by massive fraud and boycotted the subsequent presidential, legislative, and local elections.



Some leaders of the main opposition parties, including the FNL, are now in self-imposed exile at unknown locations; thus, the potential for continued political conflict remains elevated.

Burundi's human rights record remains poor. The period during the 2010 elections and its immediate aftermath saw numerous allegations of extra-judicial killings and torture by the police and the National Intelligence Service (SNR) as well as the imprisonment or detention of political opponents and journalists.

Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

The Somali terrorist organization al-Shabaab continues to threaten to attack Burundi and Uganda, the two countries that have provided troops to the African Union peacekeeping operation in Somalia (AMISOM). Since al-Shabaab's successful July 2010 terrorist attack in Uganda, the government of Burundi and the international community have been concerned that Burundi may be the next target. The border with Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a potential area of concern for criminal activity related to smuggling, particularly of weapons and illicit minerals.

International and Transnational Terrorism

Al-Shabaab constitutes the major transnational terrorism threat for Burundi. U.S. interests in Burundi may be targeted due to support of the mission in Somalia. The interests of the African Union, UN, and other nations that provide support to AMISOM may also be targeted. Areas where expatriates congregate may be targeted as well. Wide-spread corruption, extreme poverty, and limited law enforcement capabilities create easily exploitable pathways for terrorists to deploy in Burundi.

Civil Unrest

Public protests are small, infrequent, and usually quickly controlled by the police. All public protests must be permitted by the government of Burundi. The government of Burundi does not hesitate to disperse objectionable or unruly gatherings with decisive action.

Post-Specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards



Burundi is a mountainous, land-locked country; it is common for heavy rains to cause disruption and hazards to logistics routes. Large magnitude earthquakes are infrequent, but Bujumbura is close to an active fault line. Given limited response capabilities, any natural disaster could create a dangerous situation.

Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Local transportation is poorly regulated and poorly maintained. This, coupled with treacherous mountain roads and ignorance of, or disregard for, the rules of the road, makes local public transportation extremely risky. Fatalities regularly occur as a result of vehicle collisions in the city and country-side. US Embassy personnel are prohibited from using public transportation.

Kidnappings

Kidnappings have not been an issue in Burundi.

Drug and Narco-Terrorism

Drugs and narco-terrorism have not affected Burundi.

Police Response

Due to its lack of training and resources, the Burundian National Police find it challenging to conduct traditional police responsibilities such as resolving traffic accidents or emergency response to a residence. The investigative capacity of Burundian law enforcement is very limited. Any crime perpetrated against a foreigner, especially theft, is not likely to be sufficiently investigated or appropriately adjudicated. If an American is the victim of a serious crime, contact the Regional Security Office, which will coordinate with the police and assist in any investigation. Preventive precautions against crime are the best defense.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If detained or harassed by the Burundian National Police, U.S. citizens should identify themselves as such, and immediately contact U.S. Embassy Bujumbura.

Medical Emergencies



Medical services in Burundi are very limited, and ambulance services are virtually non-existent. In Bujumbura, the preferred medical facility is BUMEREC 22 275 636 or 22 275 632 or 79 519 243. In the case of emergency, contact the embassy for assistance in facilitating a medical evacuation or medical attention.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

All travelers should avoid travel outside provincial capitals at night. At night, travelers should avoid the Bujumbura communes of Kinama, Kamanga, Cibitoke, and Matakura to the north, and Kanyosha to the south. For information about travel outside Bujumbura, contact local authorities to identify problem areas. Criminals are active throughout Burundi. A few simple guidelines and common sense security practices will keep visitors safe while not precluding them from enjoying most aspects of Burundi. Vary your schedule, including routes and times. Program emergency numbers into your cell phone, and always carry it with you. Always carry a copy of your passport. Know the danger areas and plan your routes and activities to avoid them. Remain aware of your surroundings at all times. Depart or change direction if you see suspicious persons or activity. Do not carry items or sums of money you are not willing to lose or give up. If you are threatened with violence over money or your belongings, the RSO recommends complying with demands and attempting to end the confrontation as quickly as possible.

Do not leave valuables or large amounts of cash in your house. These items are best kept locked in a secured area at work. Only give house keys to a trusted person. Do not leave them in possession with others, such as guards. Do not leave your keys in the door. Keep your doors and vehicle locked even when you are at home. Keep your phone within earshot when you are at home. Identify a secure lockable area away from windows where you can hunker down in case of an intruder. Alarms, guards, and dogs are outstanding deterrents to criminals.

Always have your keys ready as you approach your car and be on the lookout for individuals who are waiting close to your car. Check the front and rear seats of your vehicle before entering, and lock your doors immediately after entry. Maintain awareness at all times when entering and exiting your vehicle. Do not allow others to control your movement or box you in while driving. Always leave enough space between you and the car ahead so that you can take evasive action. Make sure your doors are locked and windows are up at all times while driving. Wear your seat belt. Never leave valuables in your vehicle. Try to park in guarded areas at night, and do not park far from your destination. Move directly from your car to your destination.



If stopped at a military or police roadblock, crack your window in order to speak to the officers. Display the copy of your passport (but do not give it to them), do not get out of your car or unlock your doors.

Never walk around Burundi after 1800. Try to walk in groups. Change direction or depart the area if you notice suspicious people, groups, or activity. Never display cash or jewelry, and do not carry large amounts of cash or valuables. Secure valuables (i.e. cameras, phones, wallets and purses) tightly in crowded areas. Beware of street children. Avoid areas such as dark alleyways and overgrown brush where assailants can easily conceal themselves.

Contact Information

Main Embassy telephone number: (257) 22-207-000

Marine Security Guard: (257) 22-207-318

Duty Officer: (257) 79-938-841

Regional Security Office: (257) 22-207-307

Medical Unit: (257) 22-207-227

Consular Affairs: (257) 22-207-225

Political/Economic Section: (257) 22-207-310

OSAC Country Council Contact Information

There is currently no Country Council in Burundi. The Kampala Country Council in Uganda is the nearest Country Council.