



## Burundi 2016 Crime & Safety Report

Travel Health and Safety; Transportation Security; Stolen items; Theft; Burglary; Financial Security; Extortion; Religious Terrorism; Political Violence; Racial Violence/Xenophobia; Landslides and mudslides; Oil & Energy; Drug Trafficking

Africa > Burundi; Africa > Burundi > Bujumbura

4/29/2016

### Overall Crime and Safety Situation

2015 saw a dramatic economic decline in Burundi, a fuel shortage, and political instability. The overall security situation is stable, but violent crime and incidents of targeted political violence occur. Poverty, lack of resources, and omnipresent corruption promote criminality that often goes unpunished.

Post Crime Rating: High

### Crime Threats

The most common crimes are thefts, highway robberies, and home invasions. The most common weapons used by criminals are AK-47s, grenades, knives, and machetes. Foreigners most often are the victims of street crimes.

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There are daily incidents of armed robbery that result in serious injury and fatality. Most robberies take place during the hours of darkness and outside the city centers, which is where the police presence is concentrated. There was a large increase of day time robberies of ATMs, banks, currency exchanges, and stores. Although the vast majority of robberies do not involve foreigners, criminals do sometimes target Westerners. Attacks have occurred during all hours within the confines of central Bujumbura and sometimes in proximity to U.S. Embassy residential areas.

Credit card and identity theft is rare, and there is an overall lack of sophisticated technological and counterfeiting skills. The police have almost no capability to investigate these types of crimes.

Individuals wearing police or military uniforms commit crimes, and many police, military, criminals, and demobilized fighters make or supplement their living through robbing and extorting Burundi's population.

#### Other Areas of Concern

The neighborhoods of Musaga, Ngagara, Mutakura, Cibitoke, and Nyakaibga are off-limits to American diplomats. The Embassy limits non-essential travel to the neighborhoods of Kamenge and Gasenyi to daylight hours only and prohibits walking outside during the hours of darkness and walking down Avenue de Marche next to the burnt down market. Approval by the Regional Security Office is required for any employees traveling more than 30 kilometers

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outside of Bujumbura. Official Americans are required to travel during daylight hours with first aid and communication equipment for any travel outside a 30km radius of Bujumbura.

The border with the DRC remains an area of concern for criminal activity related to smuggling, particularly weapons and minerals.

Also of concern is the potential for smuggling operations through the countries bordering Lake Tanganyika.

## **Transportation-Safety Situation**

### **Road Safety and Road Conditions**

National highways are in fair to good condition with a few exceptions. Most roads in the interior are in poor condition. These roads can be particularly treacherous during the rainy season. The terrain is quite mountainous and takes its toll on older vehicles. Travelers should anticipate mechanical problems and incorporate extra time to address any problems and yet be off the roads before dark.

Incidences of ambush and highway robbery were markedly lower during 2015. Travel outside major towns during the hours of darkness is extremely risky, prohibited for official Americans,

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and highly discouraged in the Travel Warning.

Travelers are much more likely to be injured in a traffic accident than by crime or political violence. Emergency rescue and quality medical care are not readily available, leading to a high traffic accident mortality rate. Traffic laws exist but are randomly enforced and generally not followed by the majority of drivers. Many drivers are inexperienced or not trained properly. Large, overloaded, underserviced trucks present an additional hazard especially on the descent toward Bujumbura. Motorcycle taxis, bicycle taxis, street vendors, and pedestrians regularly dart through traffic; these and other hazards complicate driving and make alertness and patience necessities.

If you choose to self-drive, always have your keys ready as you approach your vehicle and be on the lookout for individuals who are waiting close to your vehicle. Check the seats of your vehicle before entering and lock your doors immediately after entry. Maintain awareness when entering/exiting your vehicle. Do not allow others to control your movement or box you in. Always leave enough space between you and the vehicle ahead of you so that you can take evasive action. Make sure your doors are locked and windows are up and 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.

Police and military checkpoints check sobriety and paperwork and conduct searches for weapons or wanted individuals. It is not uncommon for officials to request bribes. If stopped at a military/police roadblock, crack your window in order to speak to the officers. Display the copy of your passport (do not give it to them), do not get out of your car, and do not unlock your doors. Obey instructions of police/military and do not try to push through or disregard checkpoints.

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## Public Transportation Conditions

Official Americans are prohibited from using public transportation. Local transportation is poorly regulated and poorly maintained. This, coupled with treacherous mountain roads and total 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 nationwide. Government-owned public transportation has been targeted by armed groups, and petty crime occurs regularly. As a result, use of public transportation is highly discouraged because of Embassy concerns about the quality of vehicle maintenance, safe driving practices, and petty crime aboard crowded buses/taxis.

## Aviation/Airport Conditions

Tourist visas must be obtained prior to travel. Immigration authorities will not issue visas on arrival.

## Other Travel Conditions

High-level government officials travel with police and military escorts and road closures are common when officials are traveling through the city and countryside.

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## Terrorism Threat

Post Terrorism Rating: Medium

### Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

The Somali terrorist organization al-Shabaab continues to threaten to attack Burundi, Uganda, and Kenya for their participation in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Since al-Shabaab's July 2010 attack in Uganda, September 2013 attack at Nairobi's West Gate Mall, and the 2015 Garissa University attack in Kenya, the government and the international community have been concerned that Burundi may be a prime target. The U.S. and its interests may be targeted due to support of AMISOM. Facilities and personnel of the African Union, UN, and other nations that provide support to AMISOM may also be targeted. Areas where expatriates congregate may be targeted. Widespread corruption, extreme poverty, and limited law enforcement capabilities create a vulnerable environment for terrorists to exploit.

### Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

There is very little anti-American sentiment, but due to the current political instability, visitors should be aware that the government is paying closer attention to any foreigner who enters Burundi. Visitors are cautioned to avoid large crowds, public gatherings, or demonstrations.

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## Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Burundi was plagued by a civil war from 1993-2006 with the government and last rebel group signing their final ceasefire in 2008. In 2009, the last rebel group, the National Forces for Liberation (FNL), demobilized in accordance with the terms of the agreement and registered as a political party.

In April 2015, President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a third presidential term, an act that many opposition figures believed was contrary to the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and the Constitution. This decision triggered protests in many neighborhoods of Bujumbura, and police responded with disproportionate force and violence. After several weeks of unrest, General Godfroid Niyombare attempted to stage a coup d'état but was quickly repelled by security forces after one day of fighting. Despite the political unrest, refusal of domestic and international observers to legitimize the process, and the eventual boycott by most opposition candidates, the government moved forward with elections and Nkurunziza won a third term. Violence continued after the inauguration, as the Nkurunziza administration identified all opposition as insurgents and refused to negotiate with anyone outside its circle of influence.

On December 11, two military bases in Bujumbura were attacked by rebel forces, and heavy fighting lasted for several hours. Military forces reportedly repelled the attackers, resulting in 12 deaths and 20 arrests. In the aftermath, security forces conducted searches in several neighborhoods (Cibitoke, Musaga, Ngagara, Nyakabiga) and reported that another 87 people had been killed in confrontations with security forces. Civil society, witnesses, and victims

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from these neighborhoods reported that the actual numbers of victims could be closer to 150-200 and that the bodies were taken to unknown destinations and placed in mass graves.

Conflicts have continued between regular and irregular security forces and opposition forces on a nearly nightly basis but have largely remained in the neighborhoods of Cibitoke, Mutakura, Musaga, Nyakabiga, Jabe, Ngagara, and Bwiza. Most of these attacks involve exchanges of gunfire and grenades, but mortars have been used on occasion. Targeted attacks against government officials, civil society, opposition members, and the media occur regularly.

Two main opposition groups have declared themselves: Republican Forces of Burundi (FOREBU, Les Forces Republicaines du Burundi) is a militarized rebel group, and CNARED, a political coalition comprised of nearly all opposition political parties as well as civil society leaders. Both groups continue to speak publicly about a needed regime change and/or mediation between parties.

Fearing the worst, approximately 236,000 Burundians have fled to Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania.

There were 419 cases of extrajudicial killings by police, intelligence service, military, and/or local government officials reported between January 1, 2015 and January 1, 2016 by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCR).

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Post Political Violence Rating: High

### Civil Unrest

Public protests are small, infrequent, and usually quickly and violently put down by the police. All public protests require the permission from the government, and the government usually only permits ruling party groups or associations this liberty. Often, participants of government-sponsored public protests are paid a stipend to attend or, if they are government workers, are required to participate. The government does not hesitate to disperse gatherings with violence.

### Religious/Ethnic Violence

There was a large amount of attention focused on ethnic violence during 2015 with civil society and non-governmental organizations reporting that young Tutsi males are particularly targeted during operations by security forces. The government denies these reports.

### Post-specific Concerns

### Environmental Hazards

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Burundi is a mountainous, land locked country; it is common for heavy rains to cause disruption and to present hazards to logistics routes. Extended downpours during the rainy season have caused mudslides, resulting in property damage and washed out roads and highways.

While earthquakes are infrequent, Bujumbura is close to an active fault line that could result in a large-magnitude earthquake.

Given limited response capabilities, any natural disaster should be considered a dangerous situation.

### Critical Infrastructure Concerns

Burundi experienced a shortage of fuel for most of 2015 and suffers from year-round power outages.

### Privacy Concerns

The lack of technological resources prevents the government from closely monitoring individuals with their main focus being members of the opposition or political parties.

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However, the influence of the Chinese within the telecommunications sector is very apparent. Burundi announced the implementation of a unique telecommunications gateway that would allow it to track all international telecommunications originating in Burundi. The gateway is not yet active.

### Personnel-Background Concerns

In general, gender, race, nationality, and disability have not been causes for security concerns. Due to the current political situation, Rwandan citizens are often highly scrutinized.

### Drug-related Crimes

Traditional narco-violence is largely absent. However, many petty crimes are committed by criminals who are under the influence of drugs, usually marijuana or alcohol, and Burundi is known as a transit point for drugs going to Europe.

### Kidnapping Threat

Kidnappings have not been an issue, but a June 2011 incident involving the illegal detention of a foreigner by criminals highlights the potential threat. In the latter part of 2015, Burundians reported a ransom business conducted by security forces: a police officer would detain an individual – often subjecting the person to physical abuse – but would release the person after

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the payment of a fine. The amount of the fine appears to depend on the person's ability to pay. There have been no reports of foreigners being subjected to this.

## **Police Response**

The Burundian National Police (BNP) is widely seen as a corrupt and increasingly political tool of the governing party. Police receive little training and lack the resources to respond appropriately to emergencies, crimes, or conduct investigations. Morale is thought to be low, and command and control is weakening.

### How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

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

### Crime Victim Assistance

Any crime perpetrated against a foreigner, especially theft, is not likely to be sufficiently investigated or appropriately adjudicated. Preventive precautions against crime are the best defense. If a U.S. citizen is the victim of a serious crime, they should contact the police and the Consular section of the U.S. Embassy for guidance.

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## Police/Security Agencies

The army defends the country against exterior invasion and protects the high institutions of the republic. It can also assist the police with logistics and specialized skills. The army is under the authority of the Ministry of Defense.

The police are in charge of security and law enforcement. They maintain order in the country and its borders and conduct investigations. They fall under the authority of the Ministry of Public Security.

The National Intelligence Service (SNR, Service National de Renseignement) is in charge of intelligence. The mission of the SNR is to gather and analyze threat information against the president and the country. The SNR is under the authority of the president.

## Medical Emergencies

Medical services are very limited, and ambulance services are virtually nonexistent.

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## Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

In Bujumbura, the preferred medical facility is Hospital BUMEREC 22 275 636 or 22 275 632 or 79 519 243.

## Recommended Air Ambulance Services

Contact the U.S. Embassy for assistance in facilitating a medical evacuation or medical attention.

## Recommended Insurance Posture

You are strongly encouraged to contract private med-evac insurance, as most medical issues will require evacuation to a neighboring country.

## Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

For additional information on vaccines and health guidance, please visit the CDC at: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/burundi>

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## **OSAC Country Council Information**

The Burundi OSAC Country Council is active and meets regularly to exchange security information and discuss relevant criminal trends. Membership is open to any American-owned not-for-profit organization or enterprise incorporated in the U.S., as well as organizations that employ Americans and foreign missions. For further information on membership please contact [RSOBujumbura@state.gov](mailto:RSOBujumbura@state.gov). To reach OSAC's Africa team, please email [OSACAF@state.gov](mailto:OSACAF@state.gov).

## **U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information**

### Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

No. 50 Avenue Des Etats Unis, 110-01-02, Bujumbura, Burundi

Consular Section Hours (General): Mon-Thur 7:30-18:15 and Frid 7:30-12:30

### Embassy Contact Numbers

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Switchboard: (257) 22-207-000

Marine Security Guard (24x7): (257) 22-207-318

Duty Officer (24x7): (257) 79-938-841

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

Assistant Regional Security Officer Michelle Dube, [dubemm@state.gov](mailto:dubemm@state.gov)

Medical Unit: (257) 22-207-162

Consular Affairs: (257) 22-207-225

Political Section: (257) 22-207-310

Economic Section: (257) 22-207-264

Website: <http://burundi.usembassy.gov/>

## Embassy Guidance

U.S. Embassy Bujumbura strongly recommends that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Burundi enroll in the Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the U.S. Embassy to contact you in an emergency. If you do not have Internet access, enroll directly with the

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nearest U.S. embassy or consulate

Regularly monitor the State Department's Travel Website, where you can find current Travel Warnings, including the Travel Warning for Burundi and Travel Alerts. Read the Country Specific Information for Burundi.

## **Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

### Situational Awareness Best Practices

U.S. citizens should remain cautious and avoid potential political targets (large public gatherings, party headquarters, any publically-affiliated meeting places).

Vary your schedule, routes, and times. Program emergency numbers into your cell phone. Always carry your phone with you. Always carry a copy of your passport. Do not carry items or money you are not willing to lose or give up. If you are threatened with violence over your belongings, the RSO recommends complying with demands and attempting to end the confrontation as quickly as possible. If you feel you are in danger of being killed or injured regardless of your compliance with demands, you should weigh your options based on the situation; resistance is an option.

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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 your keys to a trusted person; do not leave them with others (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.

Never walk around Burundi during hours of darkness. Try to walk in groups. Know the danger areas and plan your routes and activities to avoid them. Remain aware of your surroundings. Change direction/depart an area if you notice suspicious people, groups, or activity. Secure valuables tightly while in crowded areas. Beware of street children. Avoid areas (dark alleyways and overgrown brush) where assailants can conceal themselves.

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