

**Beyond Samuragwa's sweet and sour  
succession:**

a closer look at Burundi's 2020 elections

Stef Vandeginste



Comments on this Discussion Paper are invited.

The IOB Discussion Papers (ISSN 2294-8651) are peer reviewed. Publication as an IOB Discussion Paper does not constitute prior publication, and does not preclude publication elsewhere. The findings and views expressed in the IOB discussion papers are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the IOB as an institute.

Instituut voor Ontwikkelingsbeleid en -Beheer  
Institute of Development Policy

Postal address:	Visiting address:
Prinsstraat 13	Lange Sint-Annastraat 7
B-2000 Antwerpen	B-2000 Antwerpen
Belgium	Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)3 265 57 70  
Fax: +32 (0)3 265 57 71  
e-mail: [iob@uantwerp.be](mailto:iob@uantwerp.be)  
<http://www.uantwerp.be/iob>

**DISCUSSION PAPER / 2021.04**

**Beyond Samuragwa's sweet and sour succession:**  
a closer look at Burundi's 2020 elections

**Stef Vandeginste\***

**August 2021**

\* Associate professor at the Institute of Development Policy (IOB), University of Antwerp.

e-mail: [stef.vandeginste@uantwerpen.be](mailto:stef.vandeginste@uantwerpen.be)

website: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/burundi>



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>FROM BULLETS TO BALLOTS: THE LITERATURE ON ELECTIONS AFTER VIOLENT CONFLICT</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>THE 2020 ELECTIONS: BASIC FACTS AND FIGURES</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1.	The presidential election	6
3.2.	The elections for the national assembly and the senate	7
<b>4.</b>	<b>THE 2020 ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN BURUNDI</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1.	The meaning of the 2020 elections for the dominant party CNDD-FDD	9
4.2.	The 2020 elections and the electoral institutions	11
4.3.	The political opposition after the 2020 elections	13
<b>5.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>15</b>
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>17</b>

## ABSTRACT

Unlike the 2015 elections, Burundi's 2020 general elections did not plunge the country into chaos. They rather illustrate how elections can be used for authoritarian consolidation. As expected, they enhanced the ruling party's control on the state, thus consolidating a decade of gradual return towards a *de facto* single-party regime. A closer look at the elections sheds light on some important political governance developments and challenges. Despite the sudden death of outgoing president Nkurunziza, the elections allowed for an orderly succession at the level of the presidency. The ruling party leadership, a group of generals with a shared *maquis* experience, left the shadows and is now at the front scene of the state institutions. Both the electoral commission and the constitutional court, the main institutions in charge of organizing the elections and of electoral dispute settlement, were perceived as serving the interests of the ruling party. Opposition party CNL has been able to mobilize large crowds of supporters from diverse backgrounds. It contested the electoral results through the institutional channels and now faces the challenge of taking up its role as parliamentary opposition.

## KEY-WORDS

Burundi – elections – governance – political parties – CNDD-FDD – CNL

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On 20 May 2020, Burundi held presidential, legislative and municipal elections. Despite outgoing President Nkurunziza's sudden death shortly after the election of his successor, neither the process nor the outcome of the general elections came as a surprise. The ruling party CNDD-FDD (*Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie – Forces de défense de la démocratie*, National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy) further consolidated its grip on the state. The opposition and civil society in exile cried foul over electoral fraud. Human rights organizations documented and denounced repression of opposition supporters. Neither the election campaign nor election day were violently disturbed and, despite fears expressed by International Crisis Group (2020b) and other analysts, there was no violent contestation of the results. Foreign diplomats welcomed the high voter turn-out and took note of the electoral results. Although they might therefore at first sight appear as a non-event, a closer look at the 2020 general elections sheds light on critical political governance developments and challenges in Burundi.

These were Burundi's fourth post-conflict elections, after general elections held in 2005, 2010 and 2015. This analysis therefore starts with a brief state of the art of the literature on post-conflict elections. This overview of the literature provides relevant angles and tools to understand Burundi's 2020 elections. However, the true meaning of Burundi's general elections is obviously not a function of one or the other election theory. It can only be understood on the basis of contextualized empirical analysis that connects the dots between power configurations, political actors and electoral institutions. This paper is based on a combination of documentary analysis and conversations with Burundian and foreign stakeholders involved in the 2020 elections and also on two decades of political analysis, which is helpful to understand longer-term dynamics and trends. After a presentation of the main election results, I analyze the meaning of the 2020 general elections for the ruling party CNDD-FDD, for Burundi's electoral institutions and for the political opposition.

## 2. FROM BULLETS TO BALLOTS: THE LITERATURE ON ELECTIONS AFTER VIOLENT CONFLICT

Under the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, elections constitute(d) a centerpiece of efforts to pacify, stabilize and legitimize the exercise of post-war authority (Paris, 2000). This paradigm guided the design of Burundi's transition from war to peace which was laid down in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement (APRA) of August 2000. However, initial optimism among scholars and policy-makers about

the democratizing and pacifying effect of successive multiparty elections (Bratton, 1998; Van Ham and Lindberg, 2018) waned rather rapidly. For post-conflict incumbents, elections can be an instrument of regime reproduction and autocratization rather than of democratization (Schedler, 2013; Lindberg, 2009; Cheeseman and Klaas, 2018). Focusing on the evolution in Burundi between 2010 and 2015, Leclercq (2018) analyzes how international statebuilding efforts to promote pluralist democracy can be subverted. Furthermore, elections are an additional source of uncertainty in fragile environments. In combination with an irresponsible leadership and fearful electorates, they may trigger violence and instability (Cheeseman, 2015). Sequencing, timing and the institutional environment of elections became increasingly important on the academic research agenda and a crucial dilemma for foreign state-building interventions in fragile post-conflict situations (Lake, 2016). Elections held before criminal trials or vetting processes may not only legitimize warlords responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity but also negatively affect electoral integrity (Greenstein and Harvey, 2017). More generally, rushing into early elections may induce conflict recurrence if not preceded by institution building (Fores and Nooruddin, 2012).

The design of electoral institutions – here broadly defined as the set of formal rules that govern the organization of recurrent cycles of general elections and the behaviour of key actors (electoral management board, political parties, electoral courts, etc.) involved – gradually gained more attention. Majoritarian voting systems increase the stakes, the uncertainty and the risk of exclusion and are therefore more likely to induce violence (Fjelde and Höglund, 2016). Parliamentarism (rather than presidentialism) with proportional representation systems may lead to more political inclusion and reduce the number of spoilers (Bogaards, 2013). It has been advocated in particular for countries opting for the consociational accommodation of ethnic diversity after ethnic civil strife (Lijphart, 2004), as happened in Burundi (King and Samii, 2020; Vandeginste, 2017). Other authors suggest centripetal systems, encouraging ethnic moderation of political leaders and cross-ethnic voting, are better suited to depoliticize ethnicity (Stojanovic and Strijbis, 2019). Bogaards rightly notes the coexistence of consociational and centripetal elements in Burundi (Bogaards, 2019). Of significant relevance for the legitimacy of elections, also in the case of Burundi as shown below, is the functioning of electoral management bodies and electoral dispute settlement mechanisms (Lyons, 2004). Amongst other attempts at institutionally engineering democracy and rule of law, presidential term limits stand out as a tool to end ‘big man’- rule. Considered by some authors as the face of the institutionalization of political power in Africa (Tull and Simons, 2017), the term limit was the trigger for Burundi’s 2015 electoral crisis (Vandeginste, 2016). Finally, the transformation of rebel movements to political parties has also been singled out as a critical institution-building process (Curtis and Sindre, 2019). While, as manifested in the case of Burundi, participation in elections is a carrot for rebel movements to lay down arms, registration as a political party and participation in post-conflict elections does not suffice for a successful transformation of rebel movements to political parties and for the demilitarization of governance (Rufyikiri, 2017).

### 3. THE 2020 ELECTIONS: BASIC FACTS AND FIGURES

On 20 May 2020, for the first time since the end of the civil war, Burundi organized presidential, legislative and municipal elections on the same day. Senators were elected indirectly on 20 July, by provincial electoral colleges made up of newly elected municipal councilors. Local elections at the level of the hill (or *quartiers* in the former capital city Bujumbura<sup>1</sup>) were held on 24 August. Notwithstanding the Covid-19 crisis, all elections took place in accordance with the electoral calendar published by the national electoral commission (CENI) in July 2019. According to the CENI, voter turnout (the percentage of registered voters<sup>2</sup> casting their vote) reached 87%, which was considerably higher than during previous general elections.

#### 3.1. The presidential election

Seven candidates, all male, ran for president, an unprecedented number in the history of

[1] In early 2019, Gitega became the new capital city. For the 2020 elections, Bujumbura ‘Mairie’ (City) remained an electoral circumscription on its own, at the same level as the 17 other provinces.

[2] At the time of voter registration, some 300,000 Burundian refugees – most of whom fled during the 2015 electoral crisis – resided in Tanzania, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda.

Burundi. Among them were former president Domitien Ndayizeye<sup>3</sup>, former national assembly speaker Léonce Ngendakumana<sup>4</sup>, outgoing first vice-president Gaston Sindimwo<sup>5</sup> and two independent candidates, Francis Rohero and Dieudonné Nahimana. Two other candidates, Evariste Ndayishimiye and Agathon Rwaswa, gathered large crowds of supporters during the electoral campaign. The similarities between them are striking. At the age of 25, Agathon Rwaswa, born in 1964, joined the Palipehutu (*Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu*, Party for the liberation of the hutu people) rebel movement based in Tanzania after studying psychology (Alfieri, 2016). After several internal succession struggles, Rwaswa became the leader of the main Palipehutu wing in early 2001. In June 2006, he signed a first peace agreement with the government of Burundi, represented by its chief negotiator Evariste Ndayishimiye. Rwaswa was a presidential candidate in 2015 and, after five years as vice-chair of the national assembly, again ran for president in 2020, on behalf of his party now named CNL (*Conseil national pour la liberté*, National Council for Liberty), which was officially registered in February 2019. At the age of 27, Evariste Ndayishimiye, born in 1968, narrowly escaped the ethnic cleansing against Hutu students at the national university where he studied law. He briefly joined Palipehutu before becoming active in CNDD-FDD, the other main Hutu-dominated rebel movement that was established in 1994 (BHRI, 2020). He rose through the ranks and, after CNDD-FDD signed a peace agreement in 2003 and won the first post-conflict elections in 2005, Ndayishimiye held various senior positions in government and in the party leadership. In August 2016, he became CNDD-FDD secretary-general. During his electoral campaign, he presented himself as outgoing president Nkurunziza's *samuragwa* (heir in kirundi).

On 4 June, the constitutional court announced that Ndayishimiye won 68,70% of the votes, against 24,18% for Rwaswa. All other candidates obtained less than 2%. As explained in more detail below, Rwaswa rejected the results. On 8 June, president Nkurunziza died, officially because of a heart failure (while first lady Denise Bucumi was being treated for Covid-19 in Nairobi, fueling speculations that Nkurunziza succumbed to the virus the government did not take seriously until after his funeral). In order to avoid an institutional vacuum, the constitutional court ruled that the new president should be sworn in as soon as possible. On 18 June, Ndayishimiye took the oath for a 7-year term. The constitution of 7 June 2018, the implementation of which was set in motion by the 2020 election, not only extends the presidential term from 5 to 7 years. More importantly, it also enhances presidential powers. Compared to the APRA-based constitution of 18 March 2005, the new constitution makes Burundi's polity more presidential, less parliamentary (Vandeginste, 2020). Ndayishimiye appointed Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni (CNDD-FDD, Hutu), the outgoing minister of public security, as prime minister. Former intelligence chief Gervais Ndirakobuca (CNDD-FDD, Hutu) became the powerful minister of the interior, public security and community development, thus combining what used to be three ministerial portfolios. For the first time since the (re)introduction<sup>6</sup> of multipartyism in Burundi, only one of the parties represented in parliament takes part in the government.

### 3.2. The elections for the national assembly and the senate

The legislative election of national assembly members was organized on the basis of a proportional representation system in 18 provincial electoral circumscriptions. Seventeen independent candidates and 13 parties – many of them small satellite parties supportive of CNDD-FDD – took part, some in all provinces, most of them in a limited number of provinces. Provisional results were announced by the CENI on 25 May, during an official ceremony in the presence of foreign diplomats.<sup>7</sup> Three days later, unable to explain several inconsistencies and mistakes, the CENI withdrew them, fueling critiques that the electoral results were fabricated, rather than based on the ballot box. Final results were announced by the constitutional court on 4 June. CNDD-FDD won 68,01% of the votes, against 22,42% for CNL and 2,43% for UPRONA (*Unité pour le progrès national* – Unity for national progress), the party of outgoing first vice-president Gaston Sindimwo (Tutsi). Other parties and candidates obtained less than 1%. In order to respect

[3] A leading member of FRODEBU (Front pour la démocratie au Burundi, Front for Democracy in Burundi) at the time of his (interim) presidency, he now ran for KIRA Burundi.

[4] He ran as presidential candidate for FRODEBU.

[5] He ran as presidential candidate for UPRONA.

[6] Before the monarchy was abolished in November 1966, Burundi already experienced a short period of multipartyism.

[7] An overview of all candidates per province and of the provisional and final results is available here: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/centre-des-grands-lacs-afrique/droit-pouvoir-paix-burundi/elections/elections-generales-2020/>

ethnic and gender quota laid down in the constitution (60% Hutu, 40% Tutsi, 3 Twa; a minimum of 30% women) the CENI coopted 23 national assembly members (20 Tutsi and 3 Twa) in addition to the 100 elected representatives.

As a result, the composition of the national assembly, elected for a 5-year term, looks as follows:

*Table 1: composition of the national assembly*

		Hutu				Tutsi				Twa	
		men		women		men		women		men	women
		elect	coopt	elect	coopt	elect	coopt	elect	coopt	coopt	coopt
CNDD-FDD	<b>86</b>	28	-	19	-	15	6	10	8	-	-
CNL	<b>32</b>	20	-	5	-	-	2	2	3	-	-
UPRONA	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
										2	1
Total	123	48	0	24	0	16	9	12	11	2	1
	<b>123</b>	<b>48</b>		<b>24</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>23</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>123</b>	<b>72</b>				<b>48</b>				<b>3</b>	

*source: author's compilation*

The constitution includes a two third quorum requirement for national assembly sessions. For the adoption of legislation an ordinary majority is required, except for organic laws (for instance the electoral code) for which a three fifths majority is required. With 86 seats in the national assembly, CNDD-FDD has all required majorities, except for a constitutional review, which requires a four fifths majority in the national assembly. The 2018 constitutional change has shown, however, that this qualified majority requirement can easily be circumvented via a referendum. For the first time, CNDD-FDD has total control over the national assembly. Early August, the new national assembly elected its bureau, in a session boycotted by opposition party CNL. Gelase Ndadirababw, a former spokesperson of the CNDD-FDD rebel movement, was elected as speaker.

Senators are indirectly elected, by provincial electoral colleges composed of municipal councilors. Each province is entitled to two senators, one Hutu and one Tutsi. In addition, 3 Twa senators are coopted. Under the 2005 constitution, all former heads of state were senators-for-life. The 2018 constitution removed this position after the former presidents had spoken out against President Nkurunziza's third term candidacy in 2015. CNDD-FDD won 34 out of 36 elected seats, thus securing total control over the entire legislature. An UPRONA Tutsi candidate obtained a seat in Bururi province. Quite remarkably, in Bubanza province, a relatively unknown CNL Hutu candidate defeated Pascal Nyabenda, CNDD-FDD candidate and outgoing national assembly speaker. Outgoing president Nkurunziza allegedly preferred Nyabenda for his own succession but most CNDD-FDD generals, including army chief of staff Prime Niyongabo supported Ndayishimiye, a general, rather than Nyabenda, a civilian (Nantulya, 2020). Emmanuel Sinzohagera, a member of the CNDD-FDD directorate, was elected as chair of the senate.

#### **4. THE 2020 ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN BURUNDI**

What can we learn from the general elections? The process and the outcome of the 2020 elections provides some important insights in political governance trends and challenges in Burundi, most of which are closely related to aspects highlighted in the above state of the art of the literature on post-conflict elections. The insights are thematically clustered in the following three sections. A first section looks at how the 2020 elections relate to the transformation (or lack of it) of CNDD-FDD and the transition of leadership within the dominant party. Next, I take a look at the performance of electoral institutions. A third and final section focuses on the opposition.

To avoid confusion, I wish to clarify that this paper neither assumes nor analyzes the freedom



and fairness of the 2020 elections. Electoral results as officially proclaimed by the Constitutional Court are used. A negative trend over the three earlier post-conflict election cycles is, however, worth recalling. Whereas both national and international observers were by and large positive about the integrity of the 2005 elections (Union Européenne, 2005), Burundi's 2015 elections obtained the third lowest score in a global comparative study on perceived electoral integrity (Norris and Grömping, 2019). During the 2020 elections – which, as a demonstration of national sovereignty, were funded by so-called 'voluntary' contributions by the population (International Crisis Group, 2020a) – only a few national organizations, generally considered as close to the CNDD-FDD, deployed electoral observers, in addition to some foreign diplomats who visited a small number of polling stations. The catholic church, however, issued a highly critical statement denouncing some serious irregularities: ballot box stuffing, voter intimidation by local administrative officials, the failure to respect the secrecy of the ballot, votes cast on behalf of deceased persons and refugees, the presence of non-authorized persons during the actual vote counting (combined with a denial of access to observers during the counting process), etcetera (CECAB, 2020). Not mentioned by the catholic church, the CNC (*Conseil national de la Communication* – National Media Council) imposed a code of conduct prohibiting the publication by the media of exit polls or partial results other than those communicated by the CENI. After listing all irregularities they observed, Burundi's catholic bishops rhetorically asked whether this might perhaps have a negative impact on the results (CECAB, 2020). In May 2021, newspaper *La Libre Belgique* referred to the work of (anonymous) Burundian researchers who concluded, on the basis of a significant sample of official polling station records, that the CENI did not announce the correct results and that a second round of presidential elections (between Ndayishimiye and Rwaswa) was – in all likelihood – the 'true' outcome of the first round (Cros, 2021).

#### 4.1. The meaning of the 2020 elections for the dominant party CNDD-FDD

For the fourth time in a row, CNDD-FDD won the elections. In the past, the 2005 constitution, rooted in the APRA, mitigated the impact of its electoral victory through a number of typically consociational power-sharing provisions. The constitution, for instance, required the appointment of two vice-presidents belonging to different political parties (and different ethnic identity groups). In 2005, 2010 and 2015, cooptation of additional national assembly members was done in equal numbers, rather than proportionately (as in 2020), which had the effect of watering down the weight of an electoral victory. The 2005 constitution also guaranteed the inclusion of all parties obtaining more than 5% of the votes in a government of national unity. Not surprisingly, because these provisions systematically benefitted other parties than CNDD-FDD, the dominant party initiated a constitutional review process which removed a number of legal 'obstacles' to the consolidation of its dominant political position. Not surprisingly and as detailed above, the 2018 constitution implemented through the 2020 elections, marked the end of the coalition government and consolidated the establishment of a *de facto*<sup>8</sup> single party government. The 2018 constitution also (re)introduced the position of the prime minister. While, in 1993, the first democratically elected president Melchior Ndadaye (Hutu, FRODEBU – *Front pour la démocratie au Burundi*, Front for Democracy in Burundi) appointed a female, Tutsi prime minister of UPRONA, president Ndayishimiye appointed another leading CNDD-FDD general, Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni. In summary, a first meaning of the 2020 elections for CNDD-FDD is that they enhanced the control by the party on state institutions. This is in line with CNDD-FDD's gradual ideological transformation. Its initial Hutu grievances based strive for a more inclusive state has gradually been replaced by a greed driven focus on state capture and wealth accumulation by the party's elite, involving systemic corruption<sup>9</sup> and other government practices 'akin to those that has led it to take up arms in the first place' (Burihabwa and Curtis, 2019, p. 559).

Secondly, the elections triggered a change of leadership at the level of the presidency (of the party and of the state). Fears that this might induce an implosion of the party did not materialize (Wilén, 2020). Over the past 25 years, CNDD-FDD has been the scene of a series of internal succession struggles which often led to the creation of dissident wings, both at the time of the rebellion and after its registration as a political party (Rufyikiri, 2017). The 2015 crisis around president Nkurunziza's third term as well divided

[8] The government includes one minister of a small, pro-CNDD-FDD party and two ministers officially without political party affiliation, including – for the first time in the history of Burundi – a minister belonging to the Twa ethnic minority.  
[9] In this context, Nicaise (2019) refers to the subversion of corruption control mechanisms for the benefit of private interests.

the party in two wings, with many *frondeurs* (CNDD-FDD cadres opposed to Nkurunziza's candidacy) leaving the party and fleeing the country after a failed coup d'Etat attempt (Daley and Popplewell, 2016). When a constitutional amendment process was launched in 2017, it was widely assumed that this was meant to allow Nkurunziza to run for a fourth term, thus mirroring developments in neighbouring Rwanda. Quite surprisingly, when promulgating the new constitution on 7 June 2018, Nkurunziza solemnly announced that, in 2020, he would support the new CNDD-FDD presidential candidate. Despite initial skepticism, and while hoping to secure his life-long influence as the party's 'eternal supreme guide'<sup>10</sup>, Nkurunziza stood by his pledge. The Covid-19 crisis offered a unique opportunity to postpone elections – as happened in many other countries – but Nkurunziza's position was too weakened to seize that opportunity.<sup>11</sup> The Nkurunziza government rather denied that Covid-19 constituted a health problem in Burundi and, on 12 May 2020, expelled 4 senior World Health Organization (WHO) officials. Although, as noted above, Nkurunziza initially did not 'nominate' the party's secretary-general for his succession, he ostensibly campaigned for *samuragwa* Ndayishimiye after the party congress. In summary, despite earlier experiences with internal rivalries and instability around leadership replacements, the change of party leadership did not result in the creation of a new dissident party wing. Coincidentally, the 2020 general elections also averted a serious leadership struggle which would in all likelihood have erupted after Nkurunziza's death but which was now avoided by the timely election of his successor.

A third aspect adds an important nuance to the previous paragraph. Although the 2020 elections paved the way for a new head of state, they did not at all give rise to a change of political personnel at the party's senior level. The elections – for now – did not disconnect CNDD-FDD from its own roots as a rebel movement. The party leadership continues to be part of the same generation, born in the late 60's or early 70's. They identify themselves as orphans of the 1972 genocide against Hutu and many of them fled the ethnic cleansing against Hutu students at the *Université du Burundi* in 1995. The 2020 elections have not paved the way for a new generation of CNDD-FDD leaders. Furthermore, the militarization of the party leadership has now become more institutionalized and more visible. Important eye-witnesses of internal party developments, Ruyfikiri (2017), a former vice-president, and Nkurunziza (2019), a former chief of staff of the interior minister, describe how, over the past decade, a nucleus of CNDD-FDD generals, former leaders of the military wing of the rebel movement, gradually expanded their influence within the party, sidelining the civilian, more moderate wing. Meetings of the official party structures became 'nothing more than simple occasions to endorse decisions made by a small circle of individuals operating in the shadows and parallel structures dominated by some ex-FDD generals' (Ruyfikiri, 2017, p. 234). According to Wittig, CNDD-FDD formally resembles a political party but in reality continues to be ruled by informal *maquis* era practices (Speight and Wittig, 2018). After the 2020 elections, the generals – Burundi's 'big men' (Van Acker, 2018b, p. 82) – no longer operate behind the curtains. They are now at the front scene of the state institutions, as president, prime minister, interior minister, chief of staff of the army, chief of staff at the president's office and head of the intelligence service. Former national assembly chairman Nyabenda's non-election as senator for Bubanza province (see above) symbolizes the internal defeat of the civilian wing.<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that the group of generals is a monolith. Compared to the hawks surrounding him, president Ndayishimiye – who has no track record of personal involvement in human rights violations and grand corruption (BHRI, 2020) – is rather seen as a dove by international diplomats.<sup>13</sup> In the aftermath of the 2015 electoral crisis, international sanctions were imposed on a number of individuals, including Bunyoni (by the United States) and Ndirakobuca (by the European Union and the United States). As of June 2021, these sanctions continue to apply. The appointment of Bunyoni and Ndirakobuca at first sight might have suggested that restoring smooth relations with international donors was not a top priority for Ndayishimiye and/or that the new president did not have the power to decide otherwise. However, as far as the aid sanctions – also imposed after the 2015 elections – are concerned, EU Ambassador Claude Bochu on 21 June 2021 announced that there was unanimity among EU member states to launch a process that should lead towards the end of the aid sanctions.<sup>14</sup> Future developments in political governance - including Burundi's international relations - may

[10] Furthermore, in March 2020, parliament adopted a law elevating Nkurunziza as supreme guide of patriotism.

[11] Interview with a former presidential advisor.

[12] On 25 August 2020, Nyabenda was appointed as second vice-governor of the national bank.

[13] Based on conversations with several, in particular European, diplomats.

[14] <https://twitter.com/UEauBurundi/status/1406951147395502081>

well depend, above all, on the balance of power at the top of CNDD-FDD, a party which, since its inception, has always been marked by severe internal rivalries (Burihabwa, 2017). The government sworn in after the 2020 elections essentially reflects an internal power-sharing deal between president Ndayishimiye (and the generals supporting him, including the army chief of staff) and prime minister Bunyoni (and his allies). After Nkurunziza's sudden death – who, as noted above, passed away after Ndayishimiye's election but prior to the appointment of the government – the deal proved to be fragile. According to diplomatic sources, former Tanzanian president Kikwete – one of the very few foreign dignitaries who attended Nkurunziza's funeral – mediated to safeguard the power-sharing agreement between Ndayishimiye and Bunyoni. In the absence of eternal supreme guide Nkurunziza, also known as *umuhuza* (the movement's unifier) during the armed struggle, the sustainability of their power-sharing deal is uncertain. So is the winner in case the deal collapses.

## 4.2. The 2020 elections and the electoral institutions

New electoral legislation was adopted in May 2019. As under the previous electoral code, two institutions were in charge of organizing the elections and of electoral dispute settlement: the electoral commission (CENI) and the constitutional court. Their legitimacy was crucial for the credibility of the elections, even more so in the absence of international election observers monitoring the 2020 elections. Both institutions have been criticized – openly by opposition party CNL and by political actors and civil society in exile, off the record also by members of the diplomatic corps – for a number of input (with regard to their composition) and output (with regard to their performance) legitimacy deficits.

A first concern relates to the composition of the two bodies. Burundi opted for the model of an electoral management body that operates outside the ordinary government administration. This institutional configuration is, in theory, favourable for the electoral commission's autonomy, independence and legitimacy (Mozaffar, 2002). Equally important, in particular in post-conflict situations, is a widely shared political support for (and trust in) the electoral commission. This broad political support existed in 2005 but waned considerably by the time of the 2010 elections (Ntaganda, 2014). In October 2018, at the fifth session of the Inter-Burundian Dialogue – a mediation effort led by the East-African Community after the 2015 electoral crisis and facilitated by former Tanzanian president Mkapa – a large number of opposition actors requested the establishment of an electoral commission of mixed national and international composition and an *ad hoc* electoral dispute settlement mechanism disconnected from Burundi's judiciary (République du Burundi, 2018). However, the fifth (and final) session of the Dialogue was boycotted by the Burundi government, which instead went ahead with organizing the elections. Two months earlier, on 31 August 2018, a CENI loyal to CNDD-FDD had been appointed. Among its members were Philippe Nzobonariba, until then the government spokesperson and Pierre-Claver Kazihise, leader of the pro-government civil society group ACOPA (*Association pour la consolidation de la paix au Burundi*, Association for the consolidation of peace in Burundi), who was appointed as chairperson. The composition of the constitutional court was not negotiable either. The constitution of 7 June 2018 stipulated that the members of the constitutional court remained in office until after the installation of newly elected institutions. This clearly was a 'reward' for the loyalty the Court had shown when confirming the legality of president Nkurunziza's third term candidacy in 2015 (Vandeginste, 2016). Shortly after the 2015 elections, president Nkurunziza appointed constitutional court chair Charles Ndagijimana on the board of directors of Brarudi, Burundi's largest brewery and taxpayer and a subsidiary of the Heineken group.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after the 2020 elections, president Ndayishimiye appointed Ndagijimana on the board of directors of Socabu, Burundi's largest insurance company.<sup>16</sup> Burundi thus illustrates Fombad's argument (2014) that the selection of constitutional judges is one of the most effective means that the executive branch can use to influence the behaviour of the judiciary. But by openly monetizing the loyalty of the chief electoral judge, the Burundi case raises executive interference to a higher level.

Also in terms of their performance, both electoral institutions were contested. In the run-up to the elections, opposition party CNL repeatedly denounced a number of irregularities and fraudulent practices of which it accused the CENI and its provincial and local branches. These included a lack of concertation

[15] Presidential decree of 10 October 2015.

[16] Presidential decree of 1 September 2020.

with political parties, the refusal to accredit CNL observers in polling stations, the chaotic and last minute distribution of voting cards, the illegal involvement of local administrative authorities in the process, the refusal to publish voters' lists at all polling stations, the failure to investigate irregularities reported by CNL, CENI's silence vis-à-vis acts of violence and intimidation of CNL members by CNDD-FDD youth (*Imbonerakure*), etcetera.<sup>17</sup> The announcement of the electoral results constituted the most serious blow for the legitimacy of the CENI. First, it did not publish a national overview of the results of the municipal elections. Nor did it publish a breakdown of the results of the legislative and presidential elections per municipality (rather than per province). This fueled speculations that the CENI wanted to avoid a comparative analysis between the official results and the results mentioned on the minutes signed by electoral agents and parties' observers at the level of each voting station, of which pictures circulated on social media. Secondly, as noted above, in a press statement on 28 May 2020, three days after reading out the provisional results of the presidential and legislative elections during a formal ceremony attended by state authorities and foreign diplomats, and confronted with several mistakes and internal inconsistencies, the CENI chair had no other option but to withdraw the results. The withdrawal made a mockery of CENI's electoral management. The next day, 'corrected' provisional results – which in the meantime had been submitted to the constitutional court – were published on the CENI website.<sup>18</sup>

The constitutional court rendered 18 judgements in relation to the 2020 elections. In 14 cases, individual petitioners seized the court. This suggests that, despite the serious blow to the legitimacy of the court after its 2015 ruling permitting president Nkurunziza's third term, electoral dispute settlement regarding the legislative and presidential elections is increasingly institutionalized. While an exhaustive overview of the court's electoral jurisprudence is beyond the scope of this paper, two unprecedented decisions are worth mentioning. First, after the CENI had rejected the candidacy of former president Domitien Ndayizeye (and three other candidates), on appeal the court allowed Ndayizeye to run for president. Second, the court did not just rubber stamp the provisional results of the legislative elections submitted to it by the CENI. On 18 May 2020, two days before election day, the prosecutor general informed the CENI that 59 CNL candidates had been arrested and/or indicted and urged the CENI to remove them from the list of candidates for the legislative and municipal elections.<sup>19</sup> The CENI followed these instructions. As a result, a former CNL minister, Pélate Niyonkuru, and a CNL candidate from Bujumbura rural province, Cathy Kezimana, also known for her activism during the anti-Nkurunziza demonstrations in 2015, were removed from the list of elected national assembly members. In its judgment of 4 June 2020, after the media cried foul<sup>20</sup>, the constitutional court overruled the CENI and announced the election of Niyonkuru and Kezimana. More importantly, however, all other irregularities put forward by opposition party CNL were rejected. According to the court, they were either mere allegations not substantiated by any evidence or, worse even, based on falsified minutes of the voting operations (Cour Constitutionnelle 2020). Quite remarkably – but, at the same time, quite conveniently if it did not want to annul the electoral results – the court did not undertake any effort to investigate the alleged irregularities, in particular the alleged falsification of the minutes of the voting operations. It merely relied on the evidence submitted by the plaintiff. While the organic law on the constitutional court and the electoral code remain extremely vague on the court's investigative powers in electoral matters, its earlier jurisprudence suggests that the Court can definitely play a more pro-active role in order to discover the truth (*"en vue de la découverte de la vérité"*) (Cour Constitutionnelle, 2015, p. 2182) of the ballot box, if it wishes to do so. Although this strategic behaviour of the constitutional judge is by no means unique to the case of Burundi, the 2020 case-law suggests that the legislator should clarify the substantive and procedural powers of the Burundi constitutional court in electoral matters before the next general elections.

It is important to note that, despite these important (input and output) legitimacy deficits, the electoral results were only contested through the electoral institutions. After the constitutional court

[17] Several letters, press releases and declarations by CNL are available here: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/centre-des-grands-lacs-afrique/droit-pouvoir-paix-burundi/partis-politiques/palipehutu-fnl/>

[18] A detailed overview of the subsequent announcements of electoral results is available here: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/centre-des-grands-lacs-afrique/droit-pouvoir-paix-burundi/elections/elections-generales-2020/>

[19] Letter [available here](#)

[20] "La CENI contre la Constitution?" on the IWACU newspaper website (<https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/la-ceni-contre-la-constitution/>).

ruling on the regularity of the elections, which it called a ‘parody of justice’<sup>21</sup>, CNL did not organize popular demonstrations in the streets of Bujumbura or other urban centres. Interestingly, as part of what looks like a deal between both protagonists eager to avoid violent confrontations between their supporters, CNDD-FDD did not publicly celebrate its electoral victory either. The absence of non-institutional contestation of the electoral results is not necessarily due to a great trust in the institutional mechanisms. It may well primarily be based on fear among potential protestors and/or on their rational cost-benefit analysis. The 2015 demonstrations did not yield any results, so why take the risk of protesting again?

### 4.3. The political opposition after the 2020 elections

The 2020 elections also shed light on the nature and the role of the political opposition in Burundi. This section looks at that aspect from four different angles. First, the 2020 elections did not oppose political parties along ethnic lines. Secondly, the 2020 elections drastically reduced the number of political parties. Thirdly, opposition party CNL, which turned out to be quite popular during the campaign, faces a number of difficulties. Finally, the 2020 elections also reveal that there is no unified opposition among Burundian diaspora.

A first finding relates to the de-ethnicisation of Burundi’s electoral competition. After the introduction of multi-partyism in 1992, Burundi’s political (and, in 1993, electoral) competition was largely determined by the ethnic factor. While former single party UPRONA was associated with the Tutsi demographic minority, newcomer FRODEBU’s leadership was to a large extent composed of members of the Hutu demographic majority. During the civil war, a Tutsi dominated army faced Hutu dominated rebel movements. And during the Arusha peace process, the negotiating parties were also largely opposed along ethnic lines. Research on voter expectations and voter behaviour in the run-up to the 2005 elections confirmed the importance of ethnic factor (Nimubona, 2005). However, research on the 2010 and 2015 elections already suggested a gradual de-ethnicisation of political mobilization and of electoral violence (Colombo et al, 2019; Van Acker, 2018b). Twenty years after the signature of the APRA, electoral competition no longer coincides with ethnic boundaries. Both the dominant party and the only meaningful opposition party have their historical roots in Hutu dominated rebel movements. Also in electoral terms, both are predominantly Hutu parties. This is demonstrated by the fact that both parties ranked mostly Hutu candidates in a favourable position on their (closed) electoral lists. As a result, as shown in the table above, all of the CNDD-FDD and CNL Hutu national assembly members were elected, while almost half of their Tutsi national assembly members (19 out of 46) were coopted by the CENI in order to ‘correct’ the electoral results in accordance with the required constitutional ethnic quota. In other words, the difference between the ruling party and the opposition is not ethnic. What explains this – at first sight – remarkable evolution? First of all, two predominantly Tutsi parties have been sidelined. The old UPRONA party has been the scene of internal divisions, the main one as a result of a deliberate government policy of ‘nyakurisation’, the orchestrated creation of a CNDD-FDD friendly UPRONA wing. This UPRONA wing – the only one legally registered – has become a small satellite party of CNDD-FDD. A newcomer on the political scene, MSD (*Mouvement pour la solidarité et le développement*, Movement for Solidarity and Development) was registered in 2009, but suspended in 2017. Its founder and chairperson, former journalist Alexis Sinduhije, currently living in exile, is accused of involvement in the 2015 military coup attempt. Secondly, in a deliberate attempt to de-ethnicize politics, the APRA rejected the idea of ethnic political parties. As a result, there is a – clearly centripetal – legal requirement that electoral lists in Burundi must be ethnically mixed. In other words, in order to respect the constitutional ethnic quota, a predominantly Tutsi opposition (or ruling) party is no longer needed. Raffoul refers to Burundi as an ‘associational model’ of power-sharing, where ethnic conflict is transformed by the depoliticization of ethnicity (Raffoul, 2020).

Secondly, the elections may well create the context which allows for a reduction of the number of (meaningful) political parties in Burundi. In 2005, 33 political parties were registered in Burundi (Union Européenne, 2005). This number rose to 44 at the time of the 2010 elections (Palmans, 2011). After the 2020 elections, only three parties are represented in parliament. This may give rise to a reconfiguration of the political party landscape ahead of the next legislative elections (scheduled for 2025). Given its

[21] Declaration of 11 June 2020 [available here](#)

above-mentioned orchestrated transformation into a CNDD-FDD ally, it is extremely unlikely that UPRONA plays a meaningful role as opposition party. In a next paragraph, I will take a closer look at CNL, the only opposition party. Before doing so, however, an interesting novelty is worth pointing at. As a result of the 2020 elections and the new constitution adopted in 2018, Burundi will, for the first time, have a real parliamentary opposition. The APRA institutionalized the government of national unity as a political pacification mechanism.<sup>22</sup> This cake-sharing arrangement was anchored in the 2005 constitution and guaranteed a proportionate number of ministerial positions to every party obtaining five percent of the votes at the national assembly elections.<sup>23</sup> In other words, in combination with an electoral threshold of two percent<sup>24</sup>, the likelihood of a strong parliamentary opposition was almost eliminated. Thus, after the 2015 elections, Abigenga Mizero Y'Uburundi, an *ad hoc* coalition movement composed of independent candidates loyal to Agathon Rwaswa and to the old – no longer officially registered – UPRONA, obtained 30 seats (out of 121) in the national assembly and 5 (out of 20) ministerial positions. Rwaswa was elected as vice-chair of the national assembly. The constitution of 7 June 2018 annulled this mandatory government of national unity. As a result, and as noted above, for the first time since the introduction of multipartyism, only one of the parties represented in parliament takes part in the government. This should enable and encourage CNL to fully take up its role as the sole opposition actor in parliament.

Thirdly, what do the 2020 elections tell us about opposition party CNL? Judging by the official results announced by the CENI, its electoral performance in the national assembly elections give us some more insights into its support base. CNL obtained its best scores in Rumonge province (29%), Mwaro province (32%), Bururi province (37,71%) and in Bujumbura city (47,09%), where – even according to the official results – it defeated CNDD-FDD. According to the official results, CNL obtained 'only' 28.76% of the votes in Bujumbura Rural province, where the FNL rebellion was socially embedded during the civil war (Van Acker, 2018a). Interestingly, CNL obtained its top four results in areas where, during the 2005 national assembly elections and the 2010 municipal elections<sup>25</sup>, CNDD-FDD was defeated by another party.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that CNL was able to attract votes from a diversity of CNDD-FDD opponents, including in areas that used to be electoral strongholds among Tutsi voters, like Bururi province (the power-base of the old UPRONA) and several neighbourhoods in Bujumbura city (the power-base of MSD during the 2010 municipal elections). This finding is also in line with the support that CNL gradually garnered on social media, quite remarkably also among Tutsi voices, during the electoral campaign. Shortly before election day, Teddy Mazina, a well-known photographer and civil society activist in exile, compared Rwaswa's 'imminent' victory with Ndadaye's electoral triumph in 1993.<sup>27</sup> Given their shared historical roots, it is somewhat ironical that CNL has transformed into the 'anti-CNDD-FDD' alternative. For CNDD-FDD, this geography of CNL support may read as a precursor of pockets of resistance against the government.<sup>28</sup> None of the CNDD-FDD ministers hails from these four provinces.<sup>29</sup> But for CNL itself, this new support base also reinforces the challenges it has faced in terms of ideological coherence since the end of the civil war (during which, for purposes of political mobilization, Tutsi were depicted as the enemy to be hated) (Alfieri, 2016). To give but one example: can Agathon Rwaswa, accused of human rights violations as former Palipehutu leader, and his new supporters develop a shared understanding on transitional justice and, in particular, on how to deal with war crimes committed by the former rebel movements? Other challenges as well are enormous. Indeed, notwithstanding its undeniable popular support and its capacity to attract large numbers of young and motivated militants, CNL remains

[22] Protocol II, Chapter I, article 7.

[23] Constitution of 18 March 2005, article 129.

[24] Constitution of 18 March 2005, article 169.

[25] After the municipal elections, the opposition parties boycotted the remainder of the 2010 elections, which makes it difficult to use the 2010 national assembly elections for comparative purposes.

[26] See the geographical mapping of the 2005 and 2010 electoral results by La Benevolencija, [available here](#)

[27] See Mazina's Facebook post on 17 May 2020 ([https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10221675598617396&id=1177556050](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10221675598617396&id=1177556050)) and on Twitter on 29 April 2020 (<https://twitter.com/TEDDYMAZINA/status/1255442300156743691>). See also MSD spokesperson Pancrace Cimpaye on twitter on 7 May 2020: <https://twitter.com/Cimpaye67/status/1258171277786873863>.

[28] The geography of the 2015 electoral protest movements supports this hypothesis (Nindorera and Bjarnesen, 2018).

[29] Coincidentally or not, in Bururi, Mwaro and Bujumbura, president Ndayishimiye appointed a member of the national defense and security forces as provincial governor. This also happened in Cibitoke and Kayanza, two north-western provinces bordering DRC and Rwanda. Under the 2005 Constitution, only civilians could be appointed as governors. This changed under the 2018 Constitution.

poorly institutionalized as a political party. Its leadership is in the hands of one man, Agathon Rwaswa.<sup>30</sup> Despite the repression they suffered, loyalty of CNL members (*inyankamugayo*) to Rwaswa was extremely high before the elections.<sup>31</sup> Will that remain the case after his electoral defeat? The CNL lacks trained cadres and does not have a party secretariat that, for instance, publishes written documents substantively outlining the party's alternative. Will it be able to take up its role as opposition party in parliament? Two thirds (21 out of 32) of the CNL national assembly members are newcomers. Most importantly, can CNL guarantee the safety of its members and supporters? The United Nations Commission of Inquiry, established after the 2015 crisis, documented the human rights violations committed against CNL members and supporters in the run-up to the 2020 elections (Nations Unies, 2020).

Finally, the 2020 elections revealed the complete absence of a unified political opposition among Burundian diaspora. During and after the 2015 electoral crisis, many Nkurunziza opponents – political actors, journalists and other civil society members – left Burundi, many of them currently residing in Rwanda, Belgium, France and Canada. Established in July 2015, CNARED (*Conseil national pour le respect de l'Accord d'Arusha et la restauration de l'Etat de droit* – National council for the restoration of the Arusha Agreement and the rule of law) was the most significant attempt to unify the political opposition in exile. Its founding fathers included former presidents Sylvestre Ntibantunganya and Domitien Ndayizeye, senior CNDD-FDD dissidents (including former national assembly speaker Pie Ntavyohanyuma and former vice-president Gervais Ruffyikiri), former UPRONA leader Charles Nditije, MSD leader Alexis Sinduhije and FRODEDU leader Léonce Ngendakumana. CNARED rejected Nkurunziza's third term and, three years later, also the constitution of 7 June 2018. Faced with internal rivalries, defections<sup>32</sup> and leadership struggles, it lacked a common strategy in the run-up to the 2020 elections. In 2019, some members, including executive secretary Anicet Niyonkuru, returned to Burundi to take part in the elections. After the CENI rejected his candidacy, Niyonkuru expressed his support for CNDD-FDD presidential candidate Ndayishimiye (Nations Unies, 2020). Early 2020, other CNARED members, including former CNDD-FDD secretary-general Jérémie Ngendakumana, undertook a last minute attempt to return home but were denied access. MSD, on the other hand, repeatedly rejected the 2020 "electoral masquerade" and – to no avail – called for an inclusive dialogue and the establishment of a transitional government to prepare free and fair elections.<sup>33</sup> In summary, the 2020 elections accelerated the implosion of CNARED, marking the end of an attempted unification of Burundi's political opposition in exile. It is too early to anticipate on the potential effects of the 2020 elections on the capacity and strategy of the armed opposition. In the run-up to the elections, the term 'electoral masquerade' was also used by RED-Tabara, an armed rebel movement – the armed wing of MSD, according to Vircoulon (2017) – which, in the weeks after the 2020 elections, claimed responsibility for a number of clashes with the government's armed forces on Burundi territory.<sup>34</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

Since the end of the cold war, Burundi organized multi-party elections in 1993, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020. In 1993 and 2005, incumbents were voted out of office. By contrast, the 2020 general elections, organized by an increasingly hegemonic ruling party, confirmed a trend observed since 2010. Although the official results were not at all surprising and may be perceived as merely reinforcing the *status quo*, a closer look at the most recent elections sheds light on a number of political governance developments and challenges. This conclusion connects the dots between the literature on post-conflict elections and the Burundi 2020 elections.

Starting on a positive note, it is important to conclude, first of all, that a worst case scenario

[30] Other former Palipehutu and FNL leaders have been sidelined or joined dissident wings (Alfieri, 2019).

[31] Based on the confidential results of field research conducted by a local NGO in seven provinces in 2019.

[32] In January 2019, RDB (*Rassemblement des Démocrates Burundais* – Rally of Burundian democrats), KAZE-FDD and UPD-Zigamibanga (Union pour la paix et le développement – Union for Peace and Development) resigned from the CNARED platform.

[33] Source: <https://twitter.com/MsdBurundi/status/1217881960783237120>

[34] Source: twitter account [https://twitter.com/Red\\_Tabara](https://twitter.com/Red_Tabara)



has been averted. The 2020 elections did not lead to large-scale violence (unlike in 2015), nor to a relapse into renewed armed conflict, almost inevitably inducing new massive refugee flows in an already volatile sub-region. Furthermore, the elections allowed for an orderly succession at the level of the country's presidency. Despite the unanticipated death of outgoing president Nkurunziza, adding an extra dose of uncertainty to an already tense situation, there was no implosion or destabilization of the dominant party CNDD-FDD. The elections rather consolidated the leadership of the generals within CNDD-FDD, be it on the basis of a potentially fragile internal power-sharing deal between the new president, Evariste Ndayishimiye, and prime minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni and their respective allies.

Next, the 2020 elections further reduce the impact of the APRA - which was signed in August 2000 by a wide range of political actors but not the CNDD-FDD rebel movement - as foundational document of the post-conflict Burundi state. Admittedly, even after the entry into force of the 2018 constitution, some institutions designed in the APRA, such as the ethnic power-sharing quota for the composition of Burundi's elected institutions, continue to apply. But the new political reality after the 2020 elections puts an end to the APRA model of parliamentary consensus democracy, which was symbolized by the government of national unity. State capture by the ruling party CNDD-FDD is now complete. While electoral competition has been de-ethnicized, successive rounds of general elections thus failed to democratize the Burundian polity. After four successive electoral victories of CNDD-FDD, Burundi returned to a one-party system (this time *de facto* rather than *de iure*), with a hegemonic party controlled by a military junta of Hutu generals, a situation that is reminiscent of the one-party UPRONA state between 1966 and 1993 (then controlled by Tutsi military).

The analysis also reveals a number of outstanding challenges for the institutionalization of political power in Burundi. For the first time ever, there is a numerically strong opposition party in parliament. CNL, registered no earlier than in February 2019, demonstrated its capacity to mobilize members and rally voters from different backgrounds and constituencies. It now faces the challenge of developing its institutional capacity in order to be able to voice the people's social, political and economic grievances in the national assembly and to hold the government accountable. As regards CNDD-FDD, it is now clear that the transition from rebel movement to political party is unlikely to happen with the current leadership, of which the biography is marked by the repression experienced under the UPRONA regime, by a *maquis* mentality and by a lack of exposure to alternative governance models. There is no more internal, civilian voice possibly pressurizing the generals into a more accountable, demilitarized governance. This also raises a longer term challenge for CNDD-FDD. How can a next generation, not marked by Burundi's violent past and not inspired by current malpractices, be prepared to take over the party leadership?

Finally, the analysis of the electoral process shows that, behind the façade of more or less orderly functioning electoral institutions, their independence and their legitimacy remain very weak. True, the CENI has demonstrated its technical capacity to organize the elections in a timely fashion. And the constitutional court has overturned CENI decisions in a number of interesting cases. But, behind that façade, several factors, pertaining both to their composition and to their functioning, convincingly explain why the two bodies are widely perceived as serving, above all, the interests of the ruling party.



## REFERENCES

- Alfieri, V. (2016). Political parties and citizens political involvement in post-conflict Burundi: between democratic claims and authoritarian tendencies. *Civil Wars*, 18(2), 234-253.
- Alfieri, V. (2019). *Militants et combattants au Burundi. Sociogenèse d'une mobilisation partisane (1962-2012)*. PhD Diss, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.
- BHRI (Burundi Human Rights Initiative) (2020). *Party loyalist or reformer? The man who could become Burundi's next president*. Retrieved from [https://burundihri.org/english/april\\_2020.php](https://burundihri.org/english/april_2020.php)
- Bogaards, M. (2013). The Choice for Proportional Representation: Electoral System Design in Peace Agreements. *Civil Wars*, 15(S1), 71-87.
- Bogaards, M. (2019). Consociationalism and Centripetalism: Friends of Foes? *Swiss Political Science Review* 25(4), 519-537.
- Bratton, M. (1998). Second Elections in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, 9(3), 51-66.
- Burihabwa, Z.N. (2017). *Continuity and contingency: the CNDD-FDD and its transformation from rebel movement to governing political party in Burundi*. PhD Diss, University of Antwerp.
- Burihabwa, Z.N. and Curtis, D. (2019). The Limits of Resistance Ideologies? The CNDD-FDD and the Legacies of Governance in Burundi. *Government and Opposition*, 54(3), 559-583.
- CECAB (2020). *Communiqué de la Conférence des Evêques Catholiques du Burundi sur le scrutin du 20 mai 2020*. Bujumbura.
- Cheeseman, N. (2015). *Democracy in Africa. Successes, Failures and the Struggle for Political Reform*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheeseman, N. and Klaas B. (2018). *How to Rig an Election?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Colombo, A., D'Aoust, O. and Sterck, O. (2019). From rebellion to electoral violence: evidence from Burundi. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 67(2), 333-368.
- Cour constitutionnelle (2015). Arrêt RCCB 316 du 23 octobre 2015. *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi*, 55(12), 2176-2184.
- Cour constitutionnelle (2020). Arrêt RCCB 389 du 4 juin 2020. *Bulletin Officiel du Burundi*, 60(6), 21-26.
- Cros, M.-F. (2021, May 4). Burundi: les preuves de la fraude lors de la présidentielle de 2020. *La Libre Belgique*, retrieved from <https://afrique.lalibre.be/60553/burundi-les-preuves-de-la-fraude-lors-de-la-presidentielle-de-2020/>
- Curtis, D. and Sindre, G. (2019). Transforming State Visions: Ideology and Ideas in Armed Groups Turned Political Parties. *Government and Opposition*, 54(3), 387-414.
- Daley, P. and Popplewell, R. (2016). The appeal of third termism and militarism in Burundi. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43(150), 648-657.
- Fjelde, H. and Höglund, K. (2016). Electoral Institutions and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, 47(2), 297-320.
- Flores, T.E. and Nooruddin, I. (2012). The Effects of Elections on Postconflict Peace and Reconstruction. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(2), 558-570.
- Fombad, C.M. (2014). Appointment of constitutional adjudicators in Africa: some perspectives on how different systems yield similar outcomes. *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 46(2), 249-275.
- Greenstein, C. and Harvey, C. (2017). Trials, lustration and clean elections: the uneven effects of transitional justice mechanisms on electoral manipulation. *Democratization*, 24(6), 1195-1214.
- International Crisis Group (2020a). *A First Step Towards Reform: Ending Burundi's Forced Contribution System*. Nairobi/Brussels. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/b153-first-step-toward-reform-ending-burundis-forced-contribution-system>
- International Crisis Group (2020b). *An Essential Primer on Burundi's Elections*. Nairobi/Brussels. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/essential-primer-burundis-elections>
- King, E. and Samii, C. (2020). *Diversity, Violence and Recognition. How recognizing ethnic identity promotes peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lake, D. (2016). *The Statebuilder's Dilemma. On the limits of foreign intervention*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Leclercq, S. (2018). Between the Letter and the Spirit: International Statebuilding Subversion



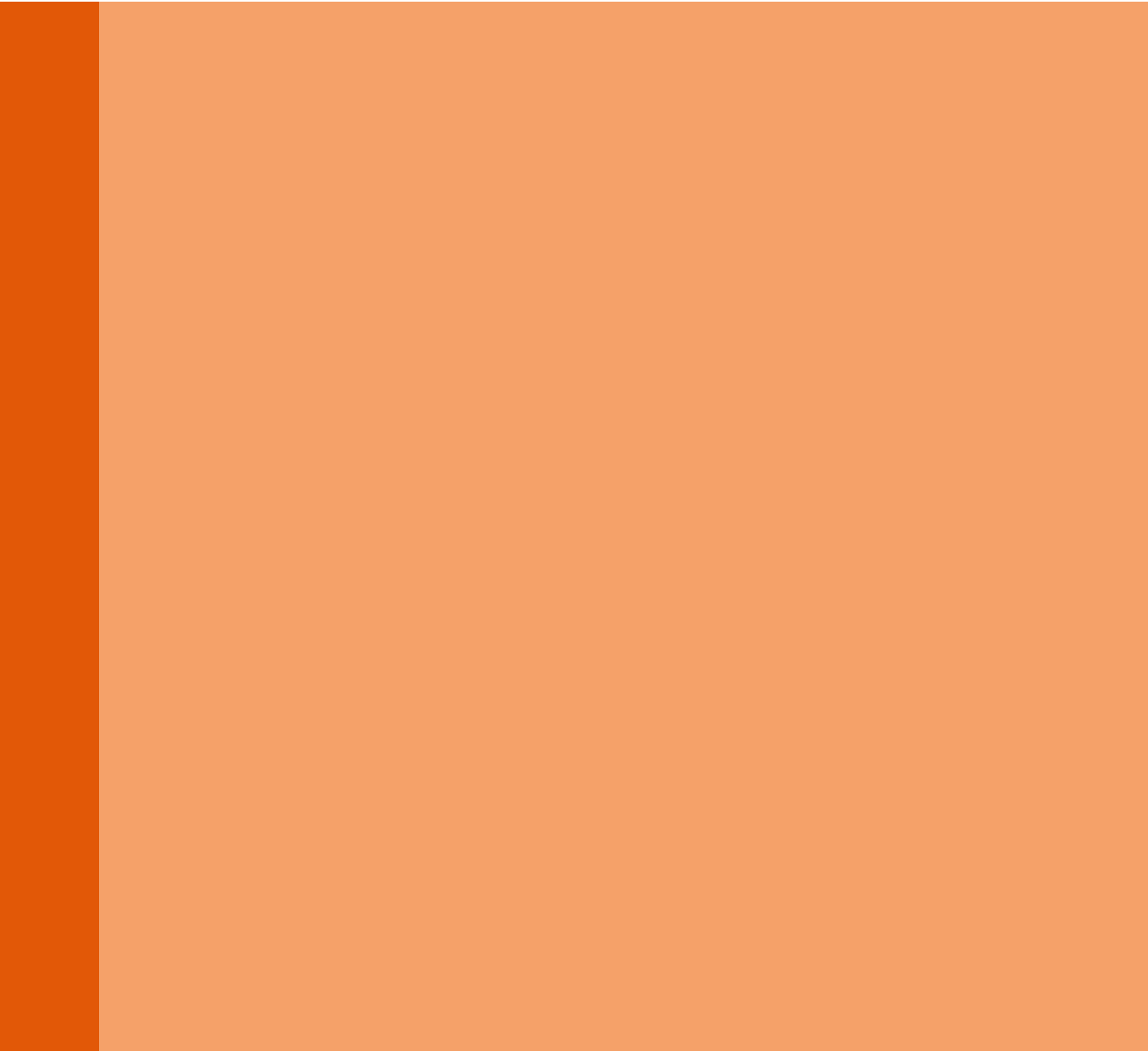
- Tactics in Burundi. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 12(2), 159-184.
- Lijphart, A. (2004). Constitutional Design for Divided Societies. *Journal of Democracy*, 15(2), 96-109.
- Lindberg, S., (Ed) (2009). *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Lyons, T. (2004). Post-conflict elections and the process of demilitarizing politics: the role of electoral administration. *Democratization*, 11(3), 36-62.
- Mozaffar, S. (2002). Patterns of Electoral Governance in Africa's Emerging Democracies. *International Political Science Review*, 23(1), 85-101.
- Nantulya, P. (2020). *Post-Nkurunziza Burundi: The Rise of the Generals*, Washington: Africa Center for Strategic Studies.
- Nations Unies (2020) – Conseil des Droits de l'homme. *Conclusions détaillées de la Commission d'enquête sur le Burundi*. UN Doc. A/HRC/45/CRP.1.
- Nicaise, G. (2019). Local power dynamics and petty corruption in Burundi. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13(4), 698-717.
- Nimubona, J. (2005). *La perception de l'identité ethnique dans le processus électoral au Burundi*. Bujumbura: LDGL.
- Nindorera, W. and Bjarnesen, J. (2018). The geography of violence in Burundi's 2015 elections. In M. Söderberg Kovacs and J. Bjarnesen *Violence in African Elections. Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*, pp. 87-113. London: Zed Books.
- Nkurunziza, A (2019). *Le dessous des cartes*. Bujumbura: Iwacu Press.
- Norris, P. and Grömping, M. (2019). *Electoral Integrity Worldwide*. University of Sydney: Electoral Integrity Project.
- Ntaganda, E. (2014). *Organes de gestion des élections en Afrique de l'Est. La CENI du Burundi*. Nairobi: Open Society Foundations.
- Palmans, E. (2011). Les élections de 2010 au Burundi: quel avenir pour la démocratie et la paix? *Journal of African Elections*, 10(1), 48-79.
- Paris, Roland (2010). Saving Liberal Peacebuilding. *Review of International Studies*, 36(2), 337-365.
- Raffoul, A. (2020). The Politics of Association: Power-Sharing and the Depoliticization of Ethnicity in Post-War Burundi. *Ethnopolitics*, 19(1), 1-18.
- République du Burundi (2018). *Partis, organisations et acteurs politiques de l'opposition. Proposition pour une sortie de crise*. Arusha: Dialogue inter-Burundais.
- Rufyikiri, G. (2017). The Post-wartime Trajectory of CNDD-FDD Party in Burundi: A Façade Transformation of Rebel Movement to Political Party. *Civil Wars*, 19(2), 220-248.
- Schedler, A. (2013). *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Speight, J. and Wittig, K. (2018). Pathways from rebellion: rebel-party configurations in Côte d'Ivoire and Burundi. *African Affairs*, 117(466), 21-43.
- Stojanovic, N. and Strijbis, O. (2019). Electoral incentives for cross-ethnic voting: evidence from a natural experiment. *European Political Science Review*, 11(2), 197-212.
- Tull, D. and Simons, C. (2017). The Institutionalization of Power Revisited: Presidential Term Limits in Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, 52(2), 79-102.
- Union Européenne (2005). *Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union Européenne au Burundi. Elections législatives 2005*. Brussels: European Union.
- Van Acker, T. (2018a). From rural rebellion to urban uprising? A socio-spatial perspective on Bujumbura's conflict history. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12(2), 310-328.
- Van Acker, T. (2018b). *From bullets to ballots and back? Arenas, actors and repertoires of power in post-war Burundi*. PhD Diss, Ghent University.
- Vandeginste, S. (2016). Legal Loopholes and the Politics of Executive Term Limits: Insights from Burundi. *Africa Spectrum*, 51(2), 39-63.
- Vandeginste, S. (2017). Power-sharing in Burundi: an enduring miracle? In: McCulloch, A. and McGarry, J. (Ed.) *Power-sharing: empirical and normative challenges*. New York: Routledge, pp. 166-188.
- Vandeginste, S. (2020). *Burundi's institutional landscape after the 2020 elections*. Brussels: Egmont Institute Africa Policy Brief. Retrieved from <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/burundis-institutional-landscape-after-the-2020-elections/>



van Ham, C. and Lindberg, S. (2018). The Power of Elections in Multiparty Africa. In Cheeseman, N. (Ed.) *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 213-237.

Vircoulon, T. (2007). *L'opposition burundaise en exil*. Paris: IFRI. Retrieved from [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/vircoulon\\_opposition\\_burundaise\\_en\\_exil\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/vircoulon_opposition_burundaise_en_exil_2017.pdf)

Wilen, N. (2020). *Burundi on the brink again? Identifying risks before the 2020 elections*. Brussels: Egmont Institute Africa Policy Brief. Retrieved from <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/burundi-on-the-brink-again-identifying-risks-before-the-2020-elections/>



**University of Antwerp**  
**IOB** | Institute of  
Development Policy