

## **Table of Contents**

- ***[Why jogging or going to church can get you arrested](#)***
  - ***[Burundi law to limit church numbers](#)***
- 

## **Why jogging or going to church can get you arrested**

The Washington Post (23.07.2014) - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2014/07/23/article/43043/> - Since 2013, the small Central African nation of Burundi has seen a gradual but serious contraction of political rights and social freedoms. The government has even targeted leisure activities. In March, dozens of members of an opposition political party, MSD (Mouvement pour Solidarite et Democratie), were arrested for "illegal assembly" while jogging. The punishment for taking part in this "assembly," one that included many non-MSD-affiliated bystanders, was as severe as life in prison. The incident led to a larger ban on jogging in groups.

The young make up more than 50 percent of Burundi's population of 10.3 million. Many of these youths are recovering from decades of conflict, have little prospect of employment, and participate in football and running clubs as an informal means of conflict resolution.

On the weekends, Bujumbura's main thoroughfares are a parade of similarly dressed joggers of all ages, both male and female, often with their own songs, chants, and drill sergeants to keep time. In a country where sports activities are not only for leisure and health, but also act as a primary form of socializing, the impact of this ban is huge.

Also troubling in light of the jogging groups ban is a law currently in Parliament setting the size of churches to a minimum of 500 members (1000 for foreign churches) and requiring a permanent structure. Burundi is especially religious, with most of the country practicing Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, but with a growing number of evangelical denominations. Like jogging clubs, religion for most Burundians - especially those who live 'upcountry' - serves as a social, political, and economic activity.

The jogging groups ban and proposed church law are attempts by the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD (Conseil Nationale pour la Defense de la Democratie- Force Nationale pour la Defense de la Democratie), to stifle assembly and sideline future potential electoral opposition. It is somewhat surprising that the government would pursue these efforts given Burundi's president, Pierre Nkurunziza, is a former sports teacher known for his passion for sports and his wife, Burundi's first lady, is herself an evangelical pastor. It's also not clear that these moves by the government to stifle assembly will benefit the ruling party.

By limiting the size and type of churches Burundians may form, the CNDD-FDD may be hurting its biggest support base: the rural citizens who live in tiny hamlets dotting the interior of the country. In the 2010 elections, the rural countryside, save for Bujumbura-Rurale (an opposition stronghold), gave massive levels of support to the CNDD-FDD and is expected to do so again. Many of these villages, however, have fewer than 500 inhabitants, so finding an officially sanctioned church may be miles - and an expensive bus ride - away. Some discussion paints this law as a reaction to in-country editorials about the illicit behaviors of a handful of church leaders, but other efforts to shrink political space in Burundi, including the jogging groups ban and the imprisonment of civil society members give analysts pause.

While a strategy of pre-election crackdowns and violence is not new in emerging democracies, Burundi earns distinction in that electoral maneuvering begins very early, often years before the election. The CNDD-FDD, a former rebel group, came to power through negotiated settlement following the stalemate to major conflict of the civil war in 2005. The first post-conflict election, in 2005, saw less violence because of the structure of the election: an indirect election decided by Parliament against a backdrop of armed conflict with the Palipehutu-FNL (Parti pour la libération du peuple hutu- Forces nationales de liberation), now the FNL. The 2010 direct election, however, ended in a boycott by most opposition parties, including the FNL and MSD. The 2015 election will also be a direct election, raising questions of term limits (Burundi's constitution currently allows for two) for Nkurunziza.

Opportunistic violence and intimidation began as early as 2009, although my research suggests that it may have begun when the ruling party began to consolidate power soon after the 2005 election as the goodwill sown by the end of major hostilities wore off. Currently stoking the anxiety of the ruling party is the rearmament of elements of the FNL in preparation for future violence.

Pre-election violence can increase chances of victory a number of ways. For example, intimidation and state-sponsored violence has been shown to mobilize ruling party supporters to turnout in Burundi. Additionally, the reduction of political space for opposition often forces boycotts, which in turn allow the ruling party to be victorious. Burundi's ruling party would benefit from both mechanisms. Although it is widely speculated that the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, will win the 2015 elections because of unorganized opposition, the larger theoretical question of whether these present moves will affect support for the incumbent and whether or not this will change electoral outcomes is worth investigating closely.

Only time will tell if the 2015 elections will bring widespread violence to Burundi. Although the threat of civil war is real, one bright side to these early pre-electoral maneuvers is the time they provide for those in Burundian civil society and the opposition to pursue peaceful reform. In the meantime, Burundians may have to find outlets other than sports and religion in order to come together.

---

## **Burundi law to limit church numbers**

BBC News (10.07.2014) - Burundi's lower house of parliament has passed a bill intended to curb the country's "proliferation of churches".

A government survey last year found there were 557 denominations practising in the small Central African state.

New regulations would require churches to have at least 500 members and a proper building.

Evangelical churches mushroomed during and after the long ethnic-based civil war, which officially ended in 2005 after some 300,000 people had died.

The BBC's Prime Ndikumagenge in the capital, Bujumbura, says the bill received the unanimous support of MPs in the National Assembly and is unlikely to face much opposition in the Senate.

If no changes are made to the draft legislation, it must be signed by the president within 30 days or sent back to parliament for a second reading.

Once signed into law, churches would have a year to comply with the new regulations.

For a foreign church to be allowed to register, it would have to show that it had 1,000 followers.

### ***Abuse scandals***

Our correspondent says it is common to see makeshift tents where worshippers gather by the side of the road on Sundays.

Anyone can set themselves up as a preacher and there have been a few scandals over the years involving some of the smaller churches, he says.

Some preachers have been accused of manipulating or abusing their followers.

One reported case involved a preacher who said that barren women wanting to conceive should sleep with him.

Most of Burundi's nine million inhabitants are Christian, and some also follow traditional beliefs.

During the parliamentary debate on Wednesday, MP Jean Minani asked for those following these animist beliefs to be given the right to worship as they wanted.

Animist worshippers pray and perform rituals in the open to communicate with their ancestors or their god Imana.

But Interior Minister Edouard Nduwimana dismissed such practices as "backward".

President Pierre Nkurunziza - a former rebel who was first elected president in 2005 - is a born-again Christian and his wife is a preacher in an evangelical church.

---