



Desk study on aid and democracy

Burundi

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This study is part of a series of country-focused desk studies on aid and democracy prepared under the project [The state and statebuilding in the Global South](#). They are prepared under the guidance of Rachel M. Gisselquist as background to a broader research effort on aid, governance, and democracy promotion. The studies follow a common template and each draws on the research literature and selected cross-national sources to discuss regime type and timeline, findings from the literature on democracy/democratization, findings from the literature on aid and democracy/democratization, aid flows and sources, and specific aid examples. This study addresses the case of Burundi, from independence in 1962 and with focus on the post-Cold War period.

Key words: foreign aid, democratization, Burundi, statebuilding, development

Note: The datasets and codebook used and drawn upon are listed after the reference list at the end of the study.

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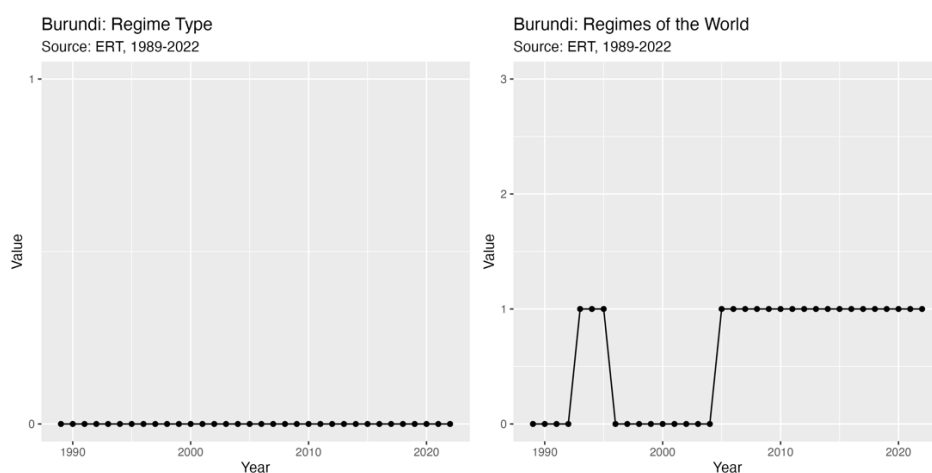
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1 Regime type and timeline

Since the end of the Cold War, Burundi has been and continues to be an authoritarian regime. Varieties of Democracy's (V-Dem) Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) data classify Burundi's regime type as an autocracy (0) continuously since 1989. The Regimes of the World (RoW) confirm Burundi's autocratic classification but reveal that the country has fluctuated in its form of autocracy since the 1990s. Burundi was considered a closed autocracy (0) from 1989 to 1992 and again from 1996 to 2004; it was categorized as an electoral autocracy (1) from 1993 to 1995 and from 2004 to 2022. ERT has never classified the country as an electoral (2) or full (3) democracy.

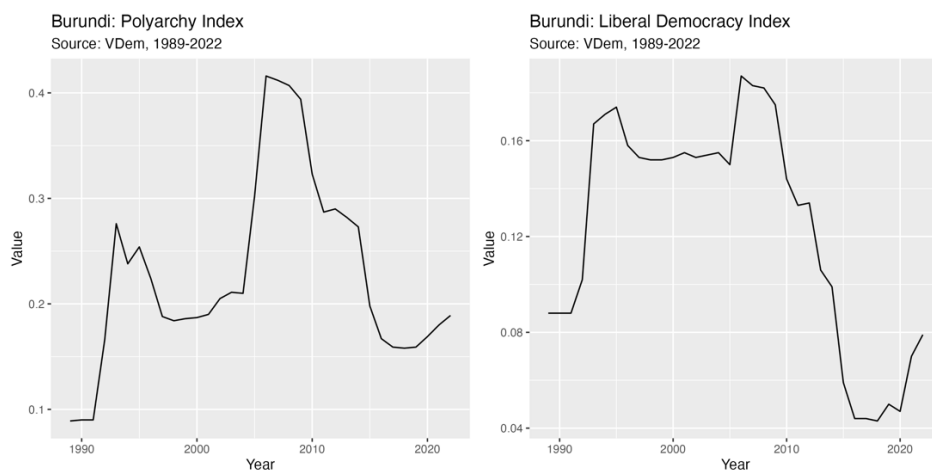
Figure 1: Burundi's regime types



Source: author's construction based on Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) data.

Burundi's electoral and liberal democracy index scores are reflective of its authoritarian regime classification. In general, Burundi's regime has been consistently autocratic, although it has experienced periods of regime development. Although the country's polyarchy score was 0.09 in 1990, it reached 0.416 in 2006. However, after 2006, this measure has been in general decline, and in 2022, its polyarchy index was 0.189. Burundi's liberal democracy scores have experienced an even sharper decline. Burundi's liberal democracy scores peaked in 2006 at 0.187 but dropped to as low as 0.043 in 2018. In 2022, Burundi's liberal democracy score was 0.079.

Figure 2: Burundi's electoral and liberal democracy index scores



Source: author's construction based on V-Dem data.

A major source of Burundi's authoritarianism is its dominant majoritarian political party system. On paper, Burundi is a presidential constitutional republic with a multiparty system, and multiparty elections are regularly held. However, in practice, opposition parties are routinely excluded from politics and all major decision making is channelled through the majoritarian political party, the CNDD-FDD, a former rebel group active during the Burundian Civil War.

The provisions for Burundi's political system were established following the end of the country's civil war. During peace negotiations, mediators simultaneously drafted the outlines of a consociational political system that mandated ethnic and gender parity within political institutions and branches of government. These power-sharing agreements were put into place once the war was ended in 2005 and were intended to distribute political power more evenly, prevent ethnic factionalism from reigniting, and avert a fall back into ethnic conflict. These arrangements have been successful peace-building initiatives; however, they have not ushered in liberal democracy but have instead facilitated Burundi's path toward authoritarianism.

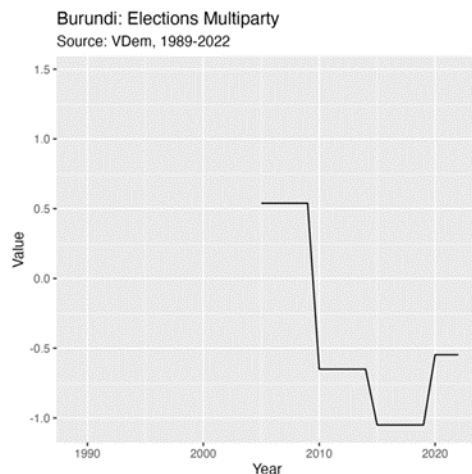
In 2006, following Pierre Nkurunziza's ascension to the presidency in August of 2005, Burundi reached its most promising steps toward democracy. The consociational power agreements were effectively implemented and the political system was stabilized after a decade of civil war. Several international actors offered support to the new government, including the United Nations (UN) via its UN Integrated Office in Burundi. However, shortly after coming to power, the Nkurunziza government and affiliated CNDD-FDD party began utilizing a series of repressive and violent tactics to consolidate political power and manifest its preference for authoritarian politics.

Elections in Burundi are especially expressive of the authoritarian tendencies of the regime and its growing majoritarian party system. The 2010 elections were boycotted by most opposition parties, all but assuring re-election for President Nkurunziza. The 2015 elections were even more problematic as the President sought a third term in office, despite constitutional term limits, and exercised heavy repression against anyone opposed. V-Dem data corroborates the increasingly monolithic nature of Burundi's party system. Its Multiparty Elections variable¹ demonstrates that Burundi began as a weak, but functioning, multiparty state with the onset of its first post-war national election. In 2005, when national elections were re-introduced, Burundi ranked 3.69 on this variable: an imperfect but nearly fully multiparty electoral system.² By 2010, Burundi's score on this multiparty election variable had fallen, approximating a system where 'competition is highly constrained – legally or informally', a classification it has retained ever since. Its current score on this measure is 2.87, up from a low point of 2.33 in 2015. The majoritarian CNDD-FDD party has grown increasingly dominant and has capitalized political competition, at the expense of Burundi's multiparty system.

¹ This variable captures the extent of multiparty national elections, ranked on a 5-point scale, then scaled for model estimates, with 0 representing a single-party election with no real competition and 4 as a full multiparty election.

² It also received a relatively high ranking of 3.94 for its 1993 elections, the first democratic elections held in Burundi. However, this election ended in a coup, the assassination of President Ndadaye, and eventually the country's civil war. Another national election did not occur again until 2005.

Figure 3: Burundi's multiparty elections indicator



Source: author's construction based on V-Dem data.

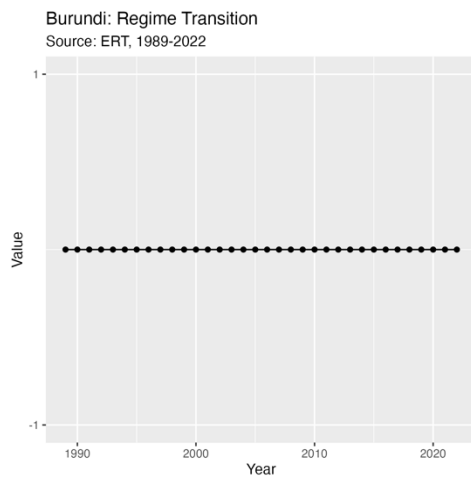
A major moment for the current regime in Burundi was the election of 2015. Widespread political and social opposition sprung up in response to the President's extrajudicial bid for a third presidential term. In response, the incumbent government initiated greater repression and political violence against political opponents. The events of 2015 represented a serious threat to Burundi's political stability and regime. Ultimately, the President's actions were met with domestic opposition within the country and condemnation from the international community. However, President Nkurunziza was able to overcome these challenges and maintained his grip on power, successfully re-elected for a third term that July. The Burundian government did not collapse as a result of the political tensions of 2015; however, they did put significant strain on state stability and political institutions. As a result, both polyarchy and liberal democracy scores dropped that year.

Currently, Burundi is in a state of autocratic stasis. A new president, Evariste Ndayishimiye, was elected in 2020, but he entered office as a handpicked successor and member of the CNDD-FDD party. The Ndayishimiye administration has not proven to be as ruthless as the Nkurunziza government—although his tenure as president is still quite short and perhaps it is too soon to tell. Under his leadership, some of the economic embargos that had been put in place against Burundi have been lifted. However, largely thanks to the country's majoritarian political party and established power-sharing agreements that help to maintain the status quo, electoral authoritarianism is more or less entrenched in Burundi. Its polyarchy and liberal democracy scores have experienced an upward trajectory since President Ndayishimiye's electoral victory, but given how far away from liberal democracy the current regime is, these small advancements are not enough to nudge Burundi into an active democracy.

2 Findings from the literature on democracy/democratization

The literature on democratization in Burundi offers a pessimistic outlook. A great deal of the literature fixates on the intersection of post-conflict peacebuilding and democratization, obscuring the extent of democratization outside of the peace-building process. Regardless, the literature paints a disappointing picture of democratization in the country, both in terms of how weakly it has manifested in the county and in terms of the role that external actors have played in hindering democratic development, or at least in conceding to non-democratic governance practices.

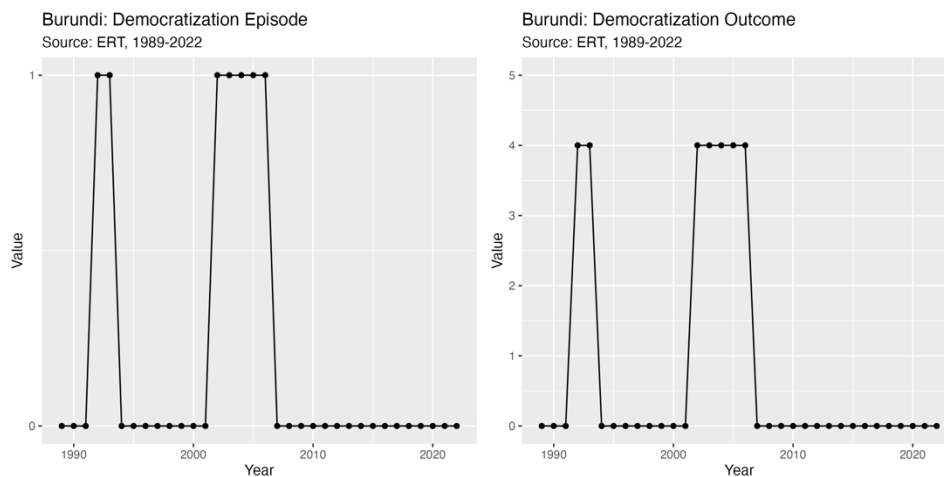
Figure 4: Burundi's regime transition variable



Source: author's construction based on ERT data.

Burundi is consistently coded as an autocratic regime, meaning there has not been a regime transition there in the last 30 years. It is an autocratic regime, which is reflected both by the V-Dem measures and through observational analysis. There have been a few moments of potential democratizing events in Burundi, but none of these have been successful in bringing about democracy. The ERT dataset identifies two periods of democratizing episodes (1) in Burundi: from 1992 to 1993 and from 2001 to 2006. Both periods resulted in reverted liberalization (4), indicating a failure of these episodes to bring about substantial democratic development.

Figure 5: Burundi's democratization episodes and outcomes



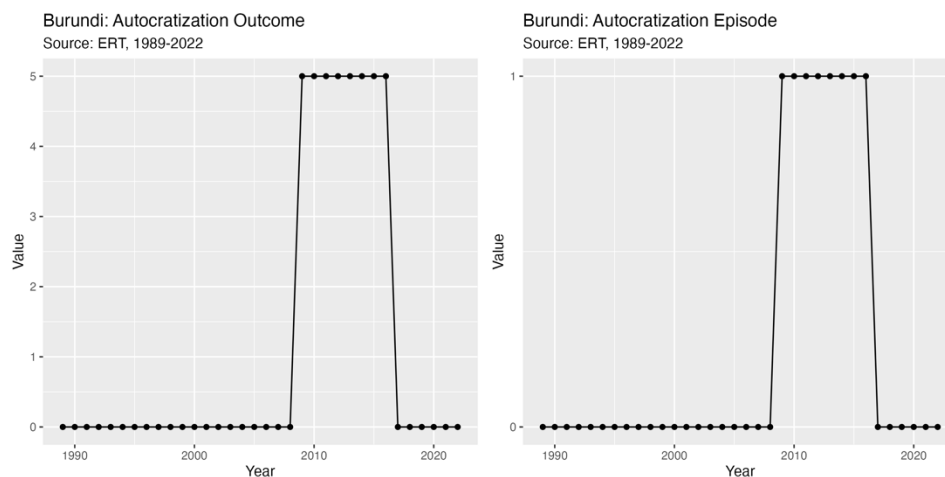
Source: author's construction based on ERT data.

The first democratizing period—1992–93—is characterized by the end of the Buyoya-led dictatorship. Pierre Buyoya, after seizing power in a coup in 1986, presided over Burundi with a heavy-handed dictatorship. Ethnic tensions had begun to emerge within the country in the late 1980s/early 1990s, intensifying pressures for domestic political reform from within the administration to avoid worsening political instability. In response, President Buyoya allowed a new constitution to be drafted in 1992 that called for multiparty elections, which were successfully carried out the following year. Despite taking this step toward democracy, which brought Melchior Ndadaye, a new democratically elected president, to power in 1993, the election was followed by a coup and President Ndadaye was assassinated shortly after. This episode of potential democracy building ultimately resulted in a reversion back to autocracy and instigated the Burundian Civil War.

The second democratic episode from 2001 to 2006 coincides with the establishment and adoption of the Abuja Accords that simultaneously brought about the end of the civil war and reorganized the Burundian government into a consociational multiparty presidential political system. The Accords held much promise for Burundi to develop its democracy, given that several of the provisions of this document called for democratic institutional power-sharing measures. However, upon their actual implementation in 2005, which initiated the election that brought President Nkurunziza to power, these arrangements were ‘renegotiated and reinterpreted’ by Burundian politicians in favour of centralized political control in the ruling party’s interests (Curtis 2013). Instead of strengthening democracy, the provisions of the Abuja Accords allowed the newly formed government to circumvent democratic practices.

Even within its staunchly autocratic regime, Burundi has experienced moments of deepening authoritarianism. The ERT dataset also identifies one period of autocratization (1) from 2009 to 2011, which resulted in regressed autocracy (5), confirming the entrenched nature of authoritarianism in the country. This period of autocratization is sandwiched by Nkurunziza’s second and third presidential elections. His second election was fraught with diminished electoral competition and political violence. In the intervening period, the Nkurunziza government continued to exhibit human rights violations and repression of oppositional political voices. This stretch of autocratic expression did not lead to successful resistance or reform, instead, it deepened the regime’s hold on power, as exhibited by Nkurunziza’s bold and successful bid at a third presidential term in 2015.

Figure 6: Burundi’s autocratization episode and outcome



Source: author’s construction based on ERT data.

2.1 Origins of authoritarianism

The origins of Burundi’s steady fall into authoritarianism are attributed to three major factors in the literature: 1) the institutional parameters that allow CNND-FDD party elites to manipulate political outcomes for their own benefit, 2) the composition and practices of the majoritarian CNND-FDD party, and 3) the failure of international and external actors to fully support democratic development.

Institutional arrangements

Burundi’s authoritarianism is a product of its civil war. The war lasted from 1993 to 2005 and was fought along ethnic lines. The initial origins of the civil war itself were precipitated by a reformed constitution that allowed for multiparty elections, bringing an extra degree of caution toward implementing a new constitution for the regime once the war had ended in 2005. The Abuja Accords were therefore carefully crafted with heavy involvement from international and regional actors—including the Presidents of Tanzania and South Africa—in order to try and temper the ethnic factions that ignited the civil war in

the first place. Burundi's subsequent political system, governing apparatus, and decision-making processes have all been formulated with this previous conflict in mind. Evidence suggests that even local political participation may be shaped by a fear of civil instability and desire to avoid social fragmentation (Vandeginste 2011). The consociationalism that was built into the new regime was designed as a stopgap measure to avoid ethnic conflict. However, it ironically proved to be a major factor in Burundi's sustained autocracy.

The legal provisions established in the peace-building process providing equitable distribution of power—amongst ethnic groups and between governing branches—have, in practice, served as convenient democratic facades for Burundian politicians and have facilitated pathways for greater autocratization to occur. The Burundian government has successfully implemented ethnic power sharing, even within the CNND-FDD itself. It has also successfully established several democratic institutions including national, regional, and local elections and a Constitutional Court. The country has, in general, abided by the structural, legal, and political provisions of the ceasefire agreement. It closely approximates an ideal consociational model, and in fact the only reason Burundi is not considered a one-party state at this point is the vestige of pluralism preserved in these power-sharing consociational agreements (Lemarchand 2007; Vandeginste 2011). To that end, the country's leadership is frequently able to use the seemingly democratic power distributions that it upholds in its own defence, even while it commits repeated violations of human, political, and social rights.

Burundi's balanced political allocations, instead of ushering in democracy, have served as viable means for political violence and political corruption. Although no longer in the throes of civil war, violence is still very much present in Burundi, but it is now channelled through these institutional arrangements. Thanks to the new structure of its political system, tendencies toward ethnic violence have been replaced by political and electoral violence (Colombo et al. 2019). Ethnic alliances have been rechannelled into party allegiances and affiliations, so now when violence occurs, it occurs within the confines of political parameters (Reyntjens 2016; Van Acker et al. 2018). The party has been able to exploit key legal provisions, including the veto power meant to protect minority rights, in order to consolidate power for itself and override many of democratic outcomes these power-sharing arrangements were intended to produce (McCulloch and Vandeginste 2019).

The president's third electoral campaign in 2015 offers a clear example of the counterintuitive use of democratic political institutions for undemocratic ends. This episode highlights the underlying legal, political, and institutional means often used to reverse democratic development in Burundi (Vandeginste 2016). The president defended his third term by exploiting a legal loophole in the Constitution arguing his first election in 2005 was not a fully mandated election, thus making him eligible for another presidential campaign. He was also able to point to the ethnic parity within his party and government to suggest his democratic credentials. Because resistance to his proposed extension of power was not an ethnic-based grievance, he was also able to parlay his third term as an expression of political competition. Consociationalism was able to mask the intense party purges and repressions that occurred against the President's dissenters. The courts were also used to adjudicate his claim to a third term in office and when they inevitably sided with him, it served as another form of legal legitimacy for President Nkrumiza. Ultimately, Burundi's power-sharing agreements have been short-sighted; they have prevented ethnic civil war from reigniting but were unable to foresee or counter other forms of political violence from occurring and have paved the way for dominant, rather than pluralistic, politics to emerge.

Party practices

Secondly, although in 2006 Burundi appeared to be on the precipice of developing electoral and liberal democracy, thanks largely to the CNDD-FDD party, these goals have been thwarted. It emerged as a political party in 2004 from an active rebel group in the civil war, and the remnants of its militant past were almost immediately made evident. Upon rising to power, the party began to consolidate itself both across the political landscape and around internal party factions, an agenda that has taken primacy over other more pressing socio-economic and political development goals (Burihabwa and Curtis 2019). The party's focus on consolidating power during its first few years in office detracted from development and democracy goals and allowed for non-democratic governance practices to take hold.

The nature of the country's main political party as a former militia group has also flavoured its political behaviour. Political fractionalization is typically met with harsh crackdowns, and the prevalence of leftover trained military men within both the party and governing apparatus has contributed to both political violence and non-democratic governance measures (Colombo et al. 2019). The party often appears more comfortable using tactics of aggression and violence than diplomacy and discussion, which has not boded well for its democratic development.

The political infighting that has taken place primarily within party ranks has also significantly dampened Burundi's domestic development, both economic and political. The party's focus on domestic power control has come at the expense of its relationship with other countries, especially with donor countries. The party maintains weak relationships with external donors and has not done much to cultivate these interactions, which has limited its sources of outside assistance and has prevented larger aid flows from entering the country (Curtis 2015). The party itself is also savvy to international donor rhetoric and often works to exploit those constraints for its own purposes when receiving aid distributions (Leclercq 2018). Burundi's lack of strong and amiable relationships with external actors, especially external donors, has further dampened its state-building initiatives.

External actors

Thirdly, the origins of autocracy in Burundi are also attributed to the lacklustre and sometimes detrimental responses of external actors. International and regional actors have been instrumental in Burundi's regime outcomes since its civil war. The Abuja Accords were facilitated by several external actors, and regional and international forces were instrumental in monitoring Burundi's transition to civilian rule. The African Union (AU) sent observers to monitor the ceasefire in 2003, an operation eventually handed over to the UN, which maintained a steady presence in Burundi throughout its post-war transition. However, despite the heavy presence of external actors, many tasked with monitoring the political situation on the ground, in its early post-war years, these actors were either unwilling or unable to raise the alarm on the serious anti-democratic behaviours that were already beginning to manifest within the government (Bouka 2017).

A large factor at play is, of course, Burundi's post-conflict context, which has underscored the need for political stability as a primary political objective. The fragile nature of the country and its particular country context have often undermined external efforts to enact positive development outcomes (Desrosiers and Muringa 2012). Nonetheless, foreign involvement in Burundi has been invaluable in ushering in civil peace. External actors were instrumental as conflict mediators and as economic and political supporters in fortifying the Burundian state and making it less fragile and subject to political instability (Nkurunziza 2022). Burundi took a 'gradualist' approach that has combined peace building with state building, which has proven remarkably good at successfully steering Burundi away from civil conflict and toward a stable peace (Fiedler et al. 2020; Mross 2019). In practice, the emphasis upon peacebuilding and state stability that has presided since the end of the civil war has overshadowed the country's democratic development.

Ever since, external actors, especially donors, continue to be skewed by a fear of political instability. Many donor decisions are made with a heightened awareness of maintaining political stability, so they have not always been vocal in condemning anti-democratic practices, have not always held Burundi accountable to its democratic promises, and their actions have fallen short of fully supporting the country's political development (Mross 2015). For instance, Belgium—a key bilateral donor and former colonial power—provisioned an extra €50 million to Burundi for state-building purposes from 2010 to 2013, but in its quest to maintain political stability provided vaguely democratic conditionalities that the country was easily able to work around in obtaining these funds (Leclercq 2018).

External actors have publicly condemned Burundi's autocratic practices, particularly in the aftermath of the events of 2015, but these condemnations are often weak and overdue. External actors and international organizations have been well aware of Burundi's authoritarian tendencies but have been reluctant to exert pressure upon Burundi to enact change in this area. Despite repeated warnings of its anti-democratic practices, the Burundian government was able to secure an increase in donor assistance in 2012, and although it did not uphold the democratizing conditionalities of this foreign

assistance, it still received aid (Bouka and Nyabola 2016). Burundi's government had rarely been held accountable for its repressive tactics by international actors in the first decade of civilian rule, so that when condemnations started to pour in during 2015, these criticisms were weakly founded and therefore less effective in encouraging regime change.

External actors have also been disjointed in their approaches to Burundi, and external actor responses are often not very well coordinated. At the regional level, members of the AU did not present a united front against the events of 2015, with some member states expressing less concern over the president's constitutional violation than others (Bouka 2017). Internationally, Russia and China have repeatedly thwarted attempts to resolve human rights abuses at the UN Security Council level. Even individual external actors have been contradictory in their own actions and responses. Several bilateral donors—the US and Belgium for instance—have publicly condemned the Nkurunziza government, but continue to support it, again with a rationale of preserving political stability. Disjointed or less robust responses from external actors have not only served as a feeble front when seeking to enact positive regime change in Burundi, they have also indirectly contributed to further declines in democracy building. Such uncoordinated or contradictory donor responses have given further license to the incumbent government to continue in its non-democratic practices and have simultaneously sent mixed messages to local civil society and opposition actors within the country seeking political reform (Vandeginste 2016). Without positive signals from external forces, domestic political activists have felt less support to their cause, while the incumbent government has become emboldened.

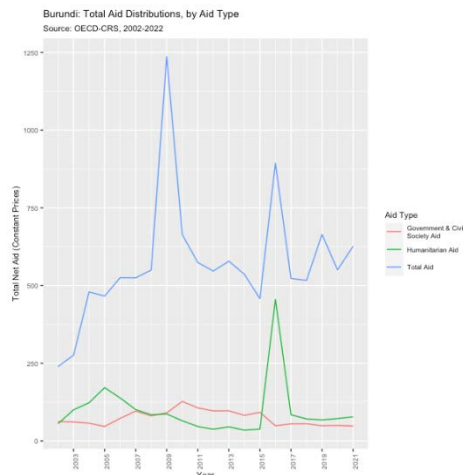
In terms of democratization, the literature identifies the origins of Burundi's authoritarianism and the factors that have led to the reversal of democracy building in the country. However, the majority of research focuses on elite politics and national-level factors and is less clear about the influence of domestic or subnational actors on regime outcomes. It often focuses on party politics, given the majoritarian nature of Burundian politics, and less attention is paid to civil society actors, subnational politics, and political participation at the local level. Democratization in the country is often discussed within the context of peacebuilding initiatives, and less work has been done addressing democratization outside of civil war reconstruction efforts. The literature on Burundi in general is not robust and there is certainly much more room for research on this country altogether.

3 Findings from the literature on aid and democracy/democratization

The extent to which aid has played a role in Burundi's democratization is largely a consequence of a) the lack of aid or b) the inability of aid to exert adequate influence over regime outcomes. Foreign assistance in Burundi is considered a contributing factor to its growing authoritarianism. This influence is not necessarily exerted directly, as the aid flows Burundi receives from authoritarian donors has not been found to directly induce authoritarianism (Bermeo 2011). Rather, the role of foreign aid in Burundi's regime outcomes is more a mechanism that occurs in absentia, as both the lack of aid or the inability of aid to be distributed with carrot-and-stick democratizing conditionalities has helped fuel and advance pre-existing preferences for its authoritarian governance.

As with its political system, aid has been distributed to Burundi with the civil war and its reconstruction in mind (Brachet and Wolpe 2005). As a result, Burundi has received substantial flows of humanitarian assistance. In fact, there has been more humanitarian aid distributed to the country than aid for government or civil society purposes. The volume of humanitarian aid flows to Burundi was heightened during the Abuja Accord peace process (2001–06). Humanitarian assistance tapered off after the post-war government was established in 2005, but spiked in 2016, following the tumultuous events of 2015. Since then, humanitarian aid has continued to be issued to the country and continues to outpace democracy aid distributions. The emphasis upon aid allocated for humanitarian relief has meant that Burundi receives less aid for socio-political development.

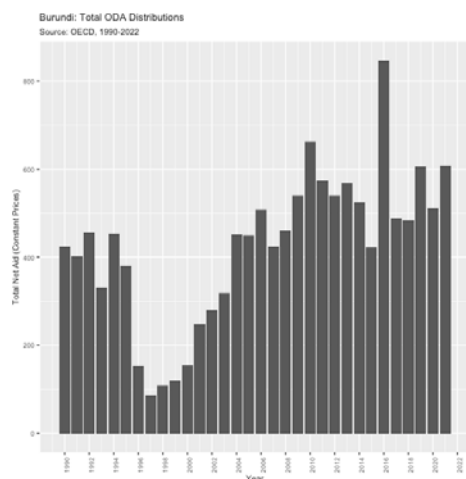
Figure 7: Total, humanitarian, and democracy aid distributions in Burundi (2002–22)



Source: author’s construction based on OECD Creditor Reporting System (OECD-CRS) data.

Burundi is considered an aid-dependent country, and it has been a recipient of substantial aid flows. In fact, the country’s economy is highly reliant upon international assistance. From 1970 to 2018, foreign aid has on average accounted for 19% of the country’s gross national income, which is much higher than average on the African continent (Nkurunziza 2022). However, Burundi receives far less net aid over time than many other African states. Official development aid (ODA) to the country has fluctuated, but donor allocations have never been particularly large. The largest ODA distributions to Burundi occurred in 2016 with just under \$850M total distributions, whereas in 1997, in the midst of its civil war, it only received \$87M in aid. As compared to countries like Mali or Malawi,³ Burundi’s yearly aid flows are underwhelming, and they have not experienced any sustained increase since 2016. Its status as a highly aid-dependent country, but one that does not receive large volumes of aid, has contributed to tempering political and economic development outcomes within the country.

Figure 8: Burundi’s total official development assistance distributions



Source: author’s construction based on OECD data.

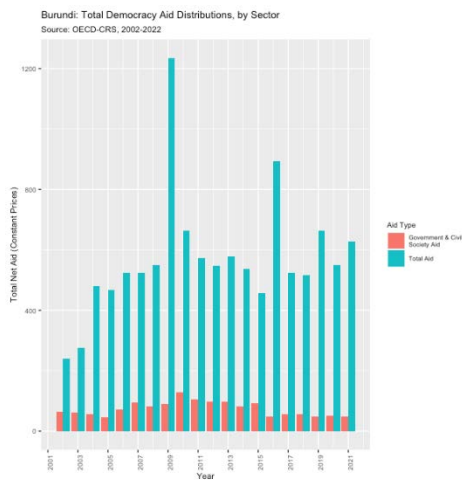
Where foreign aid has been most influential in Burundi is in bringing about peace. International actors were instrumental in implementing a successful ceasefire agreement, and foreign aid was a key factor in establishing and ensuring peace in the country (Nindorera 2012). Peace talks were simultaneously

³ Mali received just under \$2B in 2019, its largest aid distributions to date, and its smallest aid flows still accounted for \$478M in 2000. Similarly, Malawi received its largest aid flows of \$1.7B in 2017; its smallest aid flows in 1997 were still just under \$500M.

grouped in with state-building initiatives, a gradualist approach that has successfully resulted in the cessation of ethnic hostilities and civil conflict (Mross 2019; Fiedler et al. 2020). However, the donor community’s subsequent prioritizing of political stability in its aid practices toward Burundi has functioned counter to democratizing objectives.

The use of aid to influence democracy building has been fractured and uncoordinated in Burundi (Bouka 2017). Much of the aid that has gone toward state building has worked toward Burundi’s political stability, rather than toward its political development. The aid that has been distributed toward state building has also been applied toward undemocratic ends, instead of working to achieve liberal democracy (Leclercq 2018). The donor community continues to stress the need for greater democracy building in the country, but it has not matched those stated goals with subsequent democracy aid flow distributions. Aid allocated for governance purposes continues to be a small fraction in comparison to total aid distributions each year.

Figure 9: Burundi’s total aid and government and civil society aid distributions



Source: author’s construction based on OECD-CRS data.

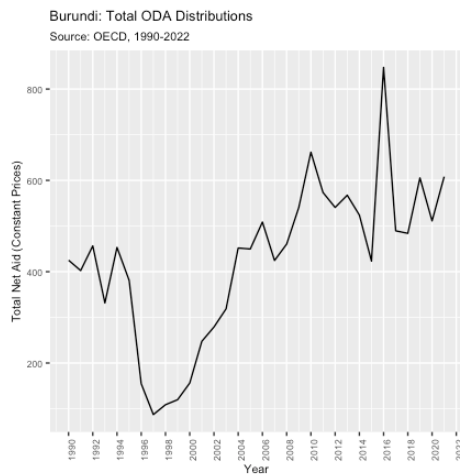
The role of donors in the effectiveness of aid is particularly important in the case of Burundi. A pattern of donor reactions has emerged, whereby donor responses have lagged and been slow to respond to events occurring within the country. Leclercq (2018) demonstrates how donors initially were optimistic about Burundi’s potential for democracy, and so were tolerant of its initial undemocratic practices; by the time they realized those undemocratic practices were systemic approaches to governance, they reverted to issuing criticisms and trying to initiate aid conditionalities and sanctions. However, these responses were overdue and were not as impactful as democratic motivators or foreign policy instruments. In addition to aid sanctions being a late response to what has been long understood as a decline into autocracy, these sanctioning tactics have also been notoriously uncoordinated and contradictory (Molenaers et al. 2017). Combined with the small volumes of aid and proportionately small amount of democracy aid distributed to Burundi, weak and unsynchronized donor responses have contributed to diminishing democratic outcomes in the country.

4 Aid flows and sources

Burundi remains a relatively low-scale aid recipient, but aid flows to the country are at least on the incline and have been since the mid-1990s. Detailed nuances regarding actual aid flows to Burundi in general are under-researched. To my knowledge, there is no literature that specifically addresses sectors of aid to the country, no literature that compares bilateral to multilateral aid flows, and no literature that analyses how different aid modalities or contributions to different sectors impact governance outcomes. The literature also does not make much mention of democracy aid flows with regard to Burundi, and it has not yet assessed if democracy aid distributions are having any impact

upon regime outcomes. Additional research—both quantitative and qualitative—is needed regarding the details of Burundi’s aid sector.

Figure 10: Burundi’s total official development aid distributions



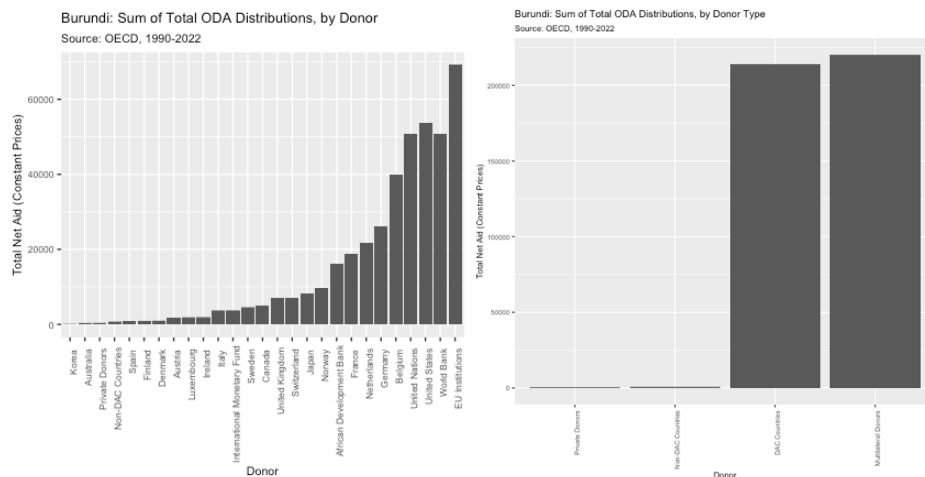
Source: author’s construction based on OECD data.

Net ODA flows increased to Burundi in 2016, despite a series of aid sanctions that were placed upon the country the year before. In 2015, following President Nkurunziza’s successful attempt to secure a third term in office and the violent repressions against protesters and dissenters that followed, the EU and some of its member states immediately suspended aid to the country (Jones and agencies 2015; Nduwimana 2015). The political crisis caused tremendous economic hardship amongst Burundian citizens (Nimubona 2016), which perhaps explains the increase in net aid the following year. But this particular increase in foreign assistance in 2016 perhaps deserves more attention and analysis.

As mentioned above, a significant amount of aid to Burundi is allocated as humanitarian assistance and it is one of Burundi’s primary aid flow streams. OECD data confirm that for 2020–21 the top three sectors of bilateral aid to Burundi were: health (33%), social infrastructure (19%), and humanitarian relief (19%), indicating that humanitarian aid, rather than governance aid, is still a donor priority. OECD data also reveal that the majority of aid comes into Burundi as grants and that net ODA distributions represent 20.3% of Burundi’s gross national income ('Aid at a glance charts', OECD - DAC n.d.).

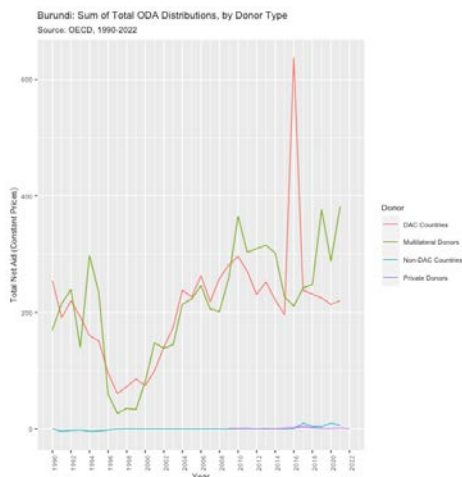
The majority of Burundi’s aid is also distributed to the country from multilateral donors. Multilateral donors including the EU, World Bank, and United Nations have been the largest contributors of aid to Burundi over the last 30 years. Even recently, multilateral disbursements continue to comprise most of Burundi’s foreign assistance. From 2020 to 2021, only 35–40% of Burundi’s aid was distributed from bilateral donors including from the US, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany ('Aid at a glance charts', OECD - DAC n.d.). These four countries have been Burundi’s largest bilateral donors. The country does accept aid from emerging authoritarian states, but these flows have been miniscule in contrast to official bilateral and multilateral channels, and Burundi still primarily receives its foreign aid from official development assistance donor partners.

Figure 11: Burundi's official development aid distributions by donor and donor type



Source: author's construction based on OECD data.

Figure 12: Burundi's official development aid by donor type



Source: author's construction based on OECD data.

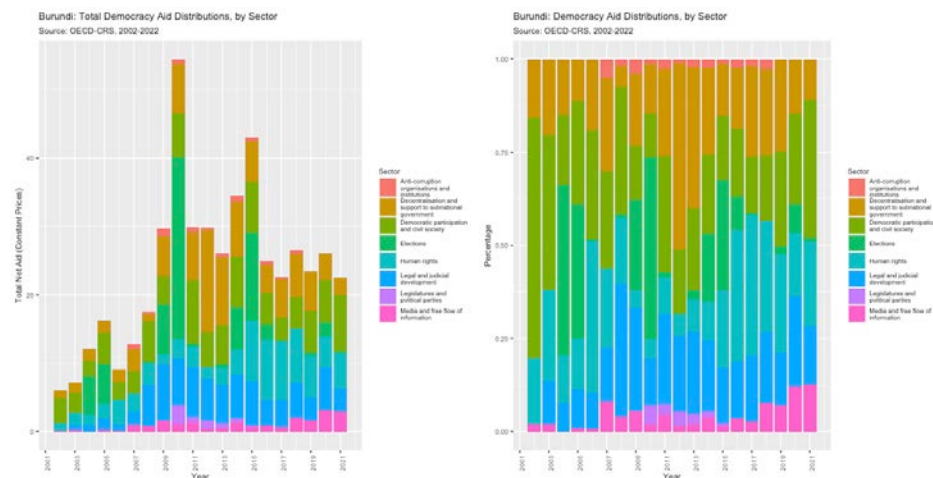
On the one hand, the volume of multilateral aid has probably been helpful in maintaining political stability and peaceful conditions on the ground in Burundi. However, the smaller percentage of bilateral assistance that has been bestowed upon the country offers less opportunity for individual democratic donors to have a particularly large sway in influencing regime outcomes. The existing regime knows it can rely on multilateral funds, should bilateral donors issue aid sanctions as they did in 2015, thus further helping insulate Burundi from overpowering external democratizing pressures.

Additionally, democracy aid flows⁴ with the intent purpose to directly impact component measures of democratic development have not been substantial to Burundi. In 2002, aid targeted at democratizing objectives only accounted for less than \$6M, and while it surpassed \$54M in 2010, democracy aid flows are still relatively small in the country. Democracy assistance is distributed relatively comprehensively across sectors and time, with the greatest portions of aid going toward civil society participation,

⁴ In the CRS data, purpose codes are selected that correspond most closely to democracy building to reflect democracy aid. Some aid flows, for instance public finance management or public sector policy, that are coded under Government and Civil Society purpose codes are excluded in this conceptualization of democracy aid.

subnational governance, human rights recognition, and legal development. Nonetheless, democracy aid to Burundi has not been a priority in the scheme of total foreign aid flows to the state.

Figure 13: Burundi's democracy by sector



Source: author's construction based on OECD-CRS data.

Donors have utilized aid as a coercive tool in Burundi. In response to regime behaviours, donors—especially bilateral donors—have withheld aid from and exerted aid sanctions against Burundi, as they did in 2015, in the hopes that by removing this income flow the regime would be forced to accept democratizing provisions. Using aid as a coercive instrument has been successfully implemented in other African contexts, but it has proven less effective in Burundi (Fiedler et al. 2020). Aid sanctions, both regional and international, were partially effective in the 1990s, as they were somewhat responsible for bringing President Buyoya to the negotiating table that eventually facilitated the Abuja Accords and the end of the civil war (Grauvogel 2015). However, this negative reinforcement mechanism also contributed to souring relations between Burundi and external donors in the long run. As a country, Burundi remains unable to appeal to donor states and has not been able to cultivate overtly positive relationships with external donors, which has in the long term negatively impacted its development.

Otherwise, the literature suggests that aid sanctions have also been less effective in transforming political outcomes in Burundi. As donors cut aid flows to the national government in 2015 and stressed the importance of engagement with subnational political actors, they remained outwardly pessimistic regarding the potential for the removal of aid to bring about any democratizing progress (Grauvogel 2016). Foreign assistance was notably suspended in 2015 by several major donors including the EU, Switzerland, US, Belgium, Germany, and France, but was compensated for by an incline in aid to 2016, perhaps accounting for some of the pessimism of the effectiveness of aid sanctions in Burundi.

Under the new Ndayishimiye government there is some indication that higher aid flows may be on their way. Aid sanctions were reversed in 2021 by the US and EU, and the US even announced a \$400 million development project grant to Burundi in 2022 (AFP 2022). There is potential for these aid distributions to finally take hold in the country and enact positive changes. However, this programme may also follow previous aid patterns, whereby Burundi may seek to circumvent democratic conditionalities and donors may again be reluctant to exert accountability in the name of preserving social stability; it is still too soon to tell.

Regardless, increased aid flows are one of the solutions often proposed to support democracy-building initiatives in Burundi. World Bank recommendations assert Burundi's need to strengthen its capacity for donor coordination, but also insist that effective and improved aid allocation methods and distributions can positively support Burundi's economic and political growth (Nielsen and Madani 2010). Developing Burundi's democracy may be contingent upon increased aid flows, specifically with clearer and enforceable parameters and stated development goals.

5 Specific aid examples

Another major gap in the literature on Burundi is that it fails to specify or analyse ongoing or previous aid projects and programmes in the country. Research will typically pay lip service to state-building projects or humanitarian aid flows, but the impact of the modalities or types of aid distributions remains under-researched.

Leclercq (2018) details the extent of many of these projects and how they fit into state-building parameters. On top of regional and international peacekeeping missions, a multilateral, multi-donor World Bank programme has been in place to support demobilization and efforts at reintegrating ex-combatants into society. The World Bank, the UN, and other international actors have committed to projects aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, electoral transparency, government effectiveness, political party capacity, and civil society development. Bilateral donors have contributed toward enhancing governance and rule of law: the UK and Belgium have implemented programmes aimed at bolstering the courts and justice sectors, and the Netherlands, Belgium, and Sweden have contributed heavily to programmes aimed at coordinating and professionalizing police, defence, and security forces.

These specific programmes indicate that democracy aid has been issued to Burundi, as many of these sector-specific initiatives fall under democracy aid. But these programmes have also been subject to many of the aid sanctions that were imposed in 2015. For instance, assistance to police forces was immediately halted in 2015, for fear that those resources would be turned upon regime dissenters and opposition forces. Additionally, there is no comprehensive quantitative data analysing the extent to which these programmes have been successful or not, which programmes are most promising, and which areas still need assistance and further donor support.

Aid targeting democracy and governance has not been a priority for donors in Burundi. However, in order to more effectively distribute foreign assistance and design projects that may work to develop regime outcomes in Burundi, greater research is still needed. Understanding the mechanisms underpinning aid distributions within the structural and political constraints of the country is critical in assessing which sectors are most receptive to external assistance and how best to channel foreign aid for development purposes.

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