

Burundi - Media Landscape

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Overview

A landlocked country in Africa's Great Lakes region, Burundi was an independent kingdom for 200 years before it was colonised during the 20th century, first from the Germans then from the Belgians. In 1962 it gained independence and in

1966 it became a presidential republic. However, the political instability that involves the entire region has caused several crises, of which the most recent was on May 2015, when a coup was attempted to depose President Pierre Nkurunziza, who tried to run for a third term which was not allowed by the constitution. The country went through heated debates and opposition groups and civil society organisations called for demonstrations. Nkurunziza's candidature was deemed illegal by some prominent members of his own party *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy - CNDD-FDD) and the situation ended in a thwarted military coup. During the turmoil many outlets, including four important privately-owned media (*Radio Publique Africaine, Radio Bonasha, Radio-Télé Renaissance* and *Radio Isanganiro*) were destroyed and set ablaze. As of 2019, most of them are not fully operational and their journalists fled the country.

According to a 2014 survey by the company International Media and Marketing Research (IMMAR), right before the 2015 crisis, radio was the main means of communication and the most accessible news provider for at least 85 percent of the population. More and more community radio stations were established across the country and online radio stations were followed by many listeners. The survey showed that more than eight out of ten Burundians had a radio and thus had access to information provided by radio stations, while less than one in three Burundians had a TV set. The typical newspaper reader was a man aged 25 to 39, living in the city and having a fairly high standard of living, while less than one in ten Burundians, aged nine and over, used the Internet and, as for newspaper readers, the typical profile of the surfer was a man of 25 to 39 years, living in town and enjoying comfortable living standards. A new IMMAR survey to update this data is expected, with potential donors willing to fund an assessment of mainstream media. The government's top priorities seem to revolve around the 2020 elections and no surveys or studies are available as of July 2019.

Even if the media landscape has seen many changes after 2015, radio remains the main actor. People still gather around a radio set to listen to the news, especially in the evening. However, social media and online press (even if often questionable) have become important sources of information. It is still the tiny, privileged minority of those able to buy smartphones with Internet connection that can access these sources, but apps like WhatsApp are becoming always more popular as a way to receive news items. On the other hand, television channels are not numerous and are followed by affluent people only. Even in the developed Bujumbura Mairie Province, many households do not have a TV set. For example, at major events such as international football matches, viewers move to public venues whose managers have purchased giant screens. Also print media remains very weak. Readers are only entitled to news outlets that are almost entirely supported by the government. The few private weekly magazines available try to deal with topics not covered by daily newspapers, which have a very limited circulation. In a context of financial precariousness and oral tradition, Burundian civil servants and citizens, at large, rarely buy newspapers, which count on the subscriptions of some international organisations and public and private institutions. Rural dwellers are the most disadvantaged in the consumption of all types of media. Not only they lack the means to follow the news, but also their concerns are rarely addressed by the media. The situation is still very similar to the one noted by Eva Palmans in her study of 2009 *Les media audiovisuels au Burundi*. "in a largely rural country, whose population is scattered on the hills and facing the primary needs of survival, it is not obvious that the media reach their audience."

Some media are directly or indirectly linked to politicians and their content is a reflection of the views of those who set them up. Public media such as the *Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (Burundi National Radio and Television - RTNB), *Le Renouveau* and the *Agence Burundaise de Presse* (Burundian Press Agency - ABP) give almost exclusively information related to the activities of the authorities. In its written report of 5 October, 2018, the *Conseil National de la Communication* (National Communication Council - CNC) pointed out that: "the non-respect of the principle of balance and pluralism of information is noticed on the RTNB. Almost all the information disseminated is related to the activities of the government and its various departments or territorial entities."

With the destruction in 2015 of the emblematic *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA), at the time enjoying countrywide coverage, and of *Radio-Télé Renaissance*, mostly watched in Bujumbura, RTNB has again become a powerful tool in the hands of the government, which is anxious to publicise its endeavors and stabilise the country. The activity of these destroyed media had pushed public media to slightly open up, by occasionally presenting the microphone to political opponents and having leaders of political parties and vocal leaders of civil society organisations interviewed by news chief editors. Also private media launched by the ruling party, such as *Radio Rema FM* and *Rema Television*, are serving the government's agenda against political opponents and leaders of civil society organisations who are forced to exile. The voices of the leaders of civil society close to the government are the most heard. All the others find that the government has narrowed the public space and only opens it to actors who play its game or simply comply with the current internal political mainstream. The report of the *Union Burundaise des Journalistes* (Burundian Union of Journalists - UBJ) of January 2019 highlights the harmful nature of this complicity: "Playing the game" means, according to the philosopher Alain Deneault, "accepting unofficial practices that serve short-sighted interests, submitting to rules by turning a blind eye to the unsaid, the unthought-of that the game is to accept not to name such a name in such a report, to ignore this, not to mention that, to allow the arbitrariness to gain the upper hand. In the end, playing the game is, by cheating, to generate corrupt institutions." The few independent media of Burundi operate in a context of fear but they still try to give voice to actors with no access to public media. But overall, their level of public service has dropped significantly with the destruction of 2015. In the light of the closing of large stations like BBC and *Voice of America* (VOA), media owners know that the government will not hesitate to repress any observed discrepancies. However outlets such as *SOS Médias Burundi*, *Humura Burundi* and *Inzamba* freely air news and are followed on WhatsApp and Facebook or Twitter. The excessive intervention of the regulatory body under the authority of state officials is another factor negatively affecting the professionalism of media. Many journalists feel to be working in an environment contrary to the rules of ethics and deontology and the public has less and less trust in them.

Media

Print

The print press of Burundi dates back to 1924, when the *Bulletin officiel du Ruanda-Urundi* (Official Bulletin of Rwanda-Urundi - BORU) was first published. In 1939, the Catholic Church launched the ancestor of the current *Ndongozi*, *Rusizira Marembe* (Peace Sower). The government daily *Le Renouveau*, replacing *Flash-Infor*, was launched in 1977. Print media have always been used for propaganda purposes. With the opening of Burundi to political pluralism and the approach of the 1993 elections, nine newspapers were approved: *Le Carrefour des Idées*, *Le Citoyen*, *l'Aube de la Démocratie*, *l'Indépendant*, *Kanura Burakeye*, *Nciragace*, *Panafrika*, *Le Plaidoyer du Peuple* and *La Semaine*. Of these nine newspapers, only three began as initiatives of media professionals and without any political intent: *Le Citoyen*, *Panafrika* and *La Semaine*.

As an example of how print media has often been a reflection of political antagonisms, it can be noted that 15 titles were approved between 1993 and 1994, a very dark period that began with the assassination in 1993 of Ndadaye Melchior, the first elected President of the country. As already mentioned above, many of these titles spread the ideologies of political leaders and sometimes belligerently: "The media's shift to hate speech is partly due to the fact that many newspapers are created on the initiative of people without any journalistic training or experience and mainly motivated by the will to fight with the opposing side, unlike the first titles launched at the instigation of professional journalists or political party leaders." (*Audit des médias par les médias*. Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs - ABR, 2013). A press guide was issued in 1996

listing the operational newspapers at the end of the previous year. Of the 30 newspapers mentioned in the guide, only *Ndongozi* still exists in 2019. All the others have shut down, proving that they were only good as "press of a moment." After 2005 the private press went through a new relaunching phase in order to mark a distance with newspapers involved in political battles.

Regardless of the unfavorable environment brought by the 2015 crisis, print media are evolving. In total, there were 24 periodicals in September 2018 (compared to 39 in March 2015), 26 online newspapers (compared to 14 in March 2015) and 4 specialised magazines focusing on specific themes (compared to none in 2015).

No quantitative or qualitative data is available for newspaper readers. The rare audience surveys concern only the audiovisual sector and it is difficult to know whether the content of the print press has any influence on the attitudes of Burundians.

The socio-political and economic context of Burundi hinders the normal functioning not only of the print press but of all media. Information gathering and dissemination require more of resources that are currently scarce. Already in 2013, the abovementioned ABR report showed that up to 76 percent of the journalists interviewed cited the lack of media means as one of the major threats overburdening the profession. With the drying up of funds resulting from the departure of international NGOs, the situation of private media is even more volatile than that of public media, which live in part from government subsidies. This applies in particular to television and print media due to high printing costs, the low level of penetration and the limited audience related to illiteracy. Media cannot count on their own resources because the advertising market is weak and advertisers are few. Direct aids and external financial support are rare.

Radio

Radio exists in Burundi since 1960, when the public *Radio nationale* began broadcasting on the territory of Rwanda-Urundi. *Radio nationale*, like all other public media, has been a tool at the service of the government and not of the Burundian public. The ruling party also launched some radios like *Radio Rema FM* - which manages to be functional even if it was partly vandalised by the failed coup plotters in 2015. The CNC council instructed the Director of this radio station to point out to him the excessive nature of the remarks made in certain programmes. Listeners do not hesitate to say that some guests use hate speech from their positions of power.

Other private radio stations were created between 1994 and 1996. This is the case of the radio of the Chamber of Commerce, *CCIB FM+*, approved in 1994, and *Radio Umwizero*, whose purpose is humanitarian. The former had funding from French cooperation and the latter was supported by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO). Burundians are thus able to obtain varied information even if the degree of listener satisfaction is difficult to determine, because of the scarcity of audience measurement in the country.

As of September 2018, according to the CNC, which issues authorisations for media outlets, there were four international radio stations, twenty local radio stations (against nineteen in 2015) and nine community radios (against five in March 2015). It must be noted that many community radios belong to individuals or groups with strong links with political parties.

In 2019, the regulatory body decided to withdraw the BBC's operating license for having broadcast a supposedly lying documentary according to the Government of Burundi. The documentary in question shows, in particular, a house where people are said to be illegally detained and even killed for being opponents of the government. The CNC also decided to suspend *Voice Of America* (VOA) broadcasts throughout Burundi. In order to regain permission to broadcast, VOA must sign an agreement with the CNC and stop employing the former director of *Bonesha FM*, who was accused of harming state security in 2015. These two international stations are still widely appreciated by Burundian listeners.

Except for some news outlets, even the most accessible and listened-to radios have a hard time clearly differentiating one another through editorial lines, with consequences in the loyalty of their audience. Radios should aim at the construction of a more coherent, more targeted offer, allowing them to be better identified and more clearly chosen.

Television

Television is consumed only by Burundians who have high standards of living. The rural world is literally cut off from TV consumption, as only households dwelling in electrified urban centers have television sets. As of September 2018, there were six TVs (against five in March 2015), two foreign channels (against one in March 2015), and two distributors. There were also eight web TVs (against none in March 2015).

Founded in 1984, with the initial help of French cooperation, the *Télévision nationale* is the pioneer of the televisions operating in the country. Closely supervised by the authorities, it broadly disseminates news coverage of the authorities' activities. As for the case of *Radio nationale*, the *Télévision nationale* often broadcasts declarations from political actors and leaders of a civil society that has shifted "to the State side" and has therefore lost "its representativeness," as denounced by the *Union Burundaise des Journalistes* (Burundian Union of Journalists - UBJ) in a report of February 2019 on the use of hate messages in Burundian media. Opposition figures do not have access to this TV station, whose headquarters are set up in Bujumbura and guarded by the soldiers of the *Brigade Spéciale de Protection des institutions* (Special Brigade for the Protection of Institutions - BSPI). Since 2015, the TV is airing hate messages with various accusations targeting Rwanda, Belgium, France and the European Union. The debates are led by journalists chosen for their allegiance to power and do not allow any contradiction and, to put in the words of the UBJ report, all "guests speak the same language."

As the political theorist Hannah Arendt said: "There is authentic democracy only when power comes from free discussion, from the free confrontation of diverse viewpoints, none must be ignored, all must be exposed, considered, debated, judged." The UBJ report of the second quarter of 2018 on the violation of the rights of journalists echoes her words in denouncing this situation which is detrimental to democracy.

The *Télévision nationale* still manages to sell space and bail out the coffers of a company that only receives government wages from workers. All the numerous field missions carried out by state authorities are covered with funds obtained from advertisers. It is understandable, therefore, that there has been no (further) major initiative by journalists who have become true civil servants *per se*. Topics of interest for even only the urban populations are rarely treated. Therefore viewers cannot help but point out the faded nature of the broadcast content. For example, they would prefer to receive more informative international news as they used to do when *Voice of America* and BBC were aired.

In 2008, privately-owned *Tele Renaissance* was launched with the ambition to decentralise the public debate by giving voice to political actors who could not easily access the *Télévision nationale*. The French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, who was present at the launch of *Tele Renaissance*, said that its message should be at the service of fraternity. The TV was destroyed during the 2015 crisis, but managed to reopen later in Rwanda in 2016.

Denominational televisions cannot be the counterbalance of *Tele Renaissance*. They do not have many ways to operate. Yet, in the 2007 report *Overcoming 40 Years of Failure: A New Roadmap for Sub-Saharan Africa*, written by the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs of Canada, the international community was urged to support Africa in "its efforts to establish real institutions" such as autonomous judiciaries, free and independent media, autonomous central banks, independent election commissions, effective public functions and "neutral and professional police services." The same international community should help parliaments to improve their "legislative functions and oversight functions."

Digital Media

Traditional media of Burundi are trying to have an online presence. The *Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (Burundi National Radio and Television - RTNB) is easily accessible and its news presenters always remind audiences of the URL address of their live news feed. RTNB has also launched an Infonet service which publishes selected information from radio and television, including videos. According to its sources, more than 100,000 people have visited the website. These visits are considered sufficient to build relationships of interest with telecommunication companies. The results of these relationships are not yet known to the public.

Also some newspapers have a digital version, like *Burundi-Eco*, which deals with economic issues, and *Iwacu*. Others, such as *Publication de Presse Burundaise* (Burundian Press Release), the government-owned *Agence Burundaise de Presse* (Burundian Press Agency - ABP), and *Net Press* (private) have both digital and print versions. According to information provided by journalists working for online press, especially in state-owned outlets, the goal is to gain followers in the international community and the Burundian diaspora. It is a political and diplomatic struggle to counterbalance the discourse of political leaders and exiled civil society actors against the government. Following the 2015 electoral crisis, the majority of exiled journalists who live abroad, can record footage that they broadcast on *Inzamba* and *Humura Burundi* radios, whose information is widely available through WhatsApp.

The SOS Médias Burundi initiative (SOS MBDI) initiative is the work of journalists and of civil society actors in Bujumbura and the Diaspora. Its main aim is to aid journalist who have lost their jobs or had to leave the country because of the closure of their media.

The government, through its regulatory body (CNC) which is supposed to enjoy autonomous decision-making, is not positively responsive to the creation of news sites. For example in October 2017, it took steps to block certain media sites such as that of the *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA), nowadays *Humura*, *Radio Isanganiro*, *Bonesha FM Radio*, *Iwacu Press Group*, *Ikiriho*, *Agence Bujumbura News* and *Radio Inzamba*. Innocent Muhozi, the exiled President of the *Observatoire de la Presse Burundaise* (Burundian Press Observatory - OPB) says: "these measures are a logical continuation of the destruction of the independent media; they are desperate to be the only ones to give the story." (*Les médias Burundais toujours dans le collimateur de Bujumbura*, Bujumbura News, 18 January, 2018).

Other outlets search for visibility among audiences who do not consume print versions, visibility which can enable them to find partnerships. Digital interaction helps measure the number of visitors, making it possible to convince advertisers of the relevance of the business relationships to be formed. But no study has been done so far to assess the profitability of online media.

Social Networks

Despite the low Internet penetration, social networks have become familiar among young people of Burundi and also the public administration has learned how to use them to communicate to internal and external audiences and to react constantly

to information that it deems erroneous. Civil servants are the main users. Almost all ministries have an information site and Facebook and Twitter accounts. Police and military personnel use them to receive information from different sectors of society.

Media outlets use social networks as sources of information but also as a means of reaching other audiences. Social networks enjoy strong media collection capacity. Journalists have also become more accountable to the audience they serve because the dialogue with the recipients of the information disseminated is spontaneous and sometimes not at all friendly, especially when they make information-processing mistakes. It is important to stress that social networks break the journalists' monopoly over the production of content but give them the important role of verifying the accuracy of the information they present.

With the destruction of some independent media in the 2015 crisis, social networks have become an effective means of exchanging information even if manipulation happens. The *Yaga* blog of 14 November, 2016 noted that: "After the destruction of several media and the intimidation that some journalists are currently experiencing, social networks are in great demand, for example, the Burundian Twitter community has seen its numbers grow, despite multiple reported abuses, including criticism of rumors."

Burundians exiled abroad communicate with each other and with Burundians who have remained in the country using social networks. The government, fearing subversion favoured by these exchanges, is irritated by the relatively long time that Burundians spend on social networks even during working hours. In 2018, the President of the Burundian Senate, Revérien Ndikuriyo, proposed that digital platforms should be taxed in order to discourage overconsumption. Also in 2018, the CNC council warned the media against the dissemination of information on social networks without having reported it to this regulatory body.

It might seem that the government of Burundi is following the example of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which on 31 December, 2018 decided the obstruction of access to the Internet and social networks. Likewise Uganda has also implemented a digital platform tax in July 2018 and Tanzania charges US\$900 to bloggers for a three-year license. As noted by *Afrik.com* in October 2018, "the power of social media lies in the fact that they are less dependent on state structures and can be out of control, which makes it difficult for governments to steer social and political discourse. Social media makes it awkward for leaders to say that users can build alliances and challenge state action."

Opinion Makers

All government institutions, including the Presidency of the Republic, have operational websites. People in power successfully learned to tweet and they also post information on Facebook. On the contrary independent opinion makers operating autonomously from the government are facing notable hindrances. For example, according to the issue of International Media Support (IMS) entitled *Silence Radio: Les médias burundais pendant la crise électorale de 2015* the site of the independent newspaper *Iwacu*, which registered more than 100,000 visitors a day during the crisis, is still receiving remarks from the CNC. Radios, TV studios and websites are still trying to make Burundians hear other ideas and as noted in the same IMS issue "some journalists resort to the Internet to provide news and information to their communities. Many Facebook and Twitter accounts have been created. *Tele Renaissance* has created a YouTube channel."

All propaganda kills freedom, as Christian Kakam says: "the political propaganda in its instrumental action has a liberticidal vocation; its promoters use it to systematically obtain the support of public opinion for some politics or an ideology. To achieve this, freedoms that allow citizens to have a dissenting opinion tend to be reduced to insidiously guide their conduct, while explicitly guiding their choices." (Kakam, Christian *Propagande politique et désobéissance civile. De la désobéissance mentale comme rempart contre le harcèlement idéologique et politique.*

Le Philosophe, vol 26, no 1, 2006, pp 167-179).

SOS Médias Burundi writes about topics which usually don't have coverage: imprisonment of opponents, discovery of corpses, forced recruitment by the ruling party, the freezing of the assets of some officials accused by France to have undermined democracy in 2015, the cracking of heavy weapons on the border between Burundi and Rwanda and other information unreported by radios and newspapers.

As mentioned in the Radio chapter, the broadcasts of Voice of America (VOA), suspended for an indefinite period by the government, helped Burundians to form their own opinions through a daily six-hour interactive programming. Balanced programmes realised by the *Studio Ijambo* were also broadcast by this strongly followed radio, featuring information that the correspondents collected throughout the country and that VOA disseminated.

The BBC, whose operating license was permanently withdrawn, was another tool that helped Burundians organise mental dissent (defined by Kakam as "a means of self-protection against political harassment through discernment and effective deliberation in the choices one makes."), because of the various interactive programs it aired in the national language Kirundi.

The CNC recently threatened to take punitive measures against *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) after the latter interviewed one very vocal lady harshly criticising the government.

Sources

Newspapers

- [Renouveau](#) (Twitter only)

Radio

- [Radio Culture](#)
- [RFM - Radio Fréquence Menya](#) (Facebook only)
- [CCIB FM+](#) (Facebook only)
- [Radio Isanganiro](#)
- [Radio nationale](#)
- [Radio France Internationale](#) (RFI)
- [Radio Rema FM](#) (Facebook only)
- [Radio Umwizero](#) (Wikipedia page only)
- [Voice of America](#) (VOA)

Television

- [Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi](#) (RTNB)
- [Tele Renaissance](#) (Youtube channel only)

Digital media

- [Bonesha FM Radio](#) (no official website, info only)
- [Burundi-Eco](#)
- [Ikiriho](#)
- [Iwacu](#)
- [Publication de Presse Burundaise](#) (PPB)

- [Radio Inzamba](#)
- [Radio Inzamba](#)
- [Radio Isanganiro](#)
- [Radio Publique Africaine](#) (RPA)
- [SOS Médias Burundi](#)
- [Yaga](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

The union with the biggest number of members is the *Union Burundaise des Journalistes* (Burundian Union of Journalists - UBJ), which is a member of the Eastern African Journalists Association (EAJA) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). UBJ has lost vitality due to the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs suspended it in October 2016, as it was one of the local organisations which allegedly colluded with state security.

Meetings between journalists who fled Burundi and others who remained in the country have taken place in Kigali, Rwanda and Kampala, Uganda. The aim was to overcome the climate of mistrust towards the journalists who remained in the country, suspected of being in cahoots with the *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy - CNDD–FDD). A fee is theoretically required to be part of the union, but journalists no longer do so. Moreover, due to their political obedience to power, journalists are timidly trying to organise elections so that the UBJ falls under the chairmanship of pro-government representatives.

The journalists working at the national radio and television broadcaster, can join two unions. The oldest one is the *Syndicat des Travailleurs de la Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (Union of Workers of the National Radio and Television of Burundi – SYRT) established in 1996). After a two-month strike demanding the improvement of wage conditions, a split has given birth to the *Syndicat Libre des Travailleurs de la Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (Free Union of Workers of the National and Television of Burundi - SY-RTNB), a second union close to power. A rapprochement between the two unions is unlikely.

As far as the private sector is concerned, workers are not organised into unions and their rights are often violated.

Journalist Associations

The active associations of journalists in Burundi include the *Association des Femmes Journalistes du Burundi* (Association of Women Journalists - AFJO), which has gender equality in its objectives. Sports journalists gather in the *Association des Journalistes des Sports du Burundi* (Association of Sports Journalists - AJS). Some journalists came together around the goal of development, founding the *Réseau des Journalistes pour le Développement Humain Durable* (Association of Journalists for Sustainable Human Development - RJDHD). Others are fighting against AIDS through the *Association des Journalistes Burundais pour la Lutte contre le SIDA* (Association of Burundian Journalists for the fight against AIDS - RBJS). Directors of radios also form the association known as *Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs* (Burundi Association of Radios - ABR).

The *Maison de la Presse du Burundi* is a hub of development, documenting and professional training as well as a permanent support structure of the professional organisations, which relatively enjoys considerable exposure. Launched in 1997 with the support of UNESCO, it organises trainings for journalists and receives technical support from the German-funded Eirene Project.

The above-mentioned *Observatoire de la Presse Burundaise* (Burundian Press Observatory - OPB), whose President Innocent Muhozi fled to Rwanda in the 2015 crisis, is experiencing operational difficulties, although it is in charge of the self-regulation of the media.

News Agencies

As of September 2018, in Burundi there are two local press agencies (compared to five in March 2015) and 15 communication agencies (compared to none in March 2015). The best-known news agencies are a public and a private one:

- The *Agence Burundaise de Presse* (Burundian News Agency - ABP) is a governmental agency with correspondents throughout the 18 provinces who cover the activities of local authorities. These correspondents are practically communicators of the provincial authorities and neglect the inhabitants as sources of information. The information disseminated therefore has no informative value to inspire other media.
- Net Press is the private agency which plays a very important role in Burundian mainstream politics. Its director Jean Claude Kavumbagu has spent at least three terms in prison, under the regime of Pierre and the current regime.

Other online agencies, like SOS Media, offer information that either supports or opposes power. The CNC council is supposed to manage their operations, but struggles to do so.

Audience measurement organisations

Apart from the rare audience surveys conducted by specialised organisations, it is difficult to measure the audience of Burundian media. The only surveys were conducted in 2008 by the Panos Institute via the IMMAR office, again in 2010 and then in 2014, always by IMMAR.

The audiovisual area is the one lagging mostly behind. Radio journalists are testing their following via interactive shows. In some radio stations that have had UNESCO training, including community radios, all the calls of the listeners can be stored in a computer connected to an Android phone via the Frontline SMS software. It is thus possible, after some time, to get an idea of one's audience. The software is not used in older radios like the national one.

Some radios have set up listening clubs throughout the country. The managers of these radios are able to make impact surveys of their information and their programmes. The clubs also propose to these radios that they treat subjects of interest for the local populations.

Televisions have not implemented any audience measurement tool. They broadcast for a very small audience who has a high standard of living. On television journalists take a vertical stance, acting as information lords.

Thanks to their interactivity, online press outlets still manage to measure the number of people who follow their news. Web televisions also manage to identify the number of people around the world who follow them. For example, the managers of *Humuriza TV* (Channel 2), which broadcasts on Facebook from Gitega in central Burundi, know that about 17,000 people from all over the world like their productions.

Sources

Trade unions

- [Union Burundaise des Journalistes](#) (UBJ)

Journalists associations

- [Association Burundaise des Radiodiffuseurs](#) (ABR)
- [Association des Femmes Journalistes du Burundi](#) (AFJO)
- [Association des Journalistes des Sports du Burundi](#) (AJS)
- [Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie - Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie](#) (CNDD–FDD)
- [Eastern African Journalists Association](#) (EAJA)
- [Maison de la Presse du Burundi](#)

News agencies

- [Agence Bujumbura News](#)
- [Agence Burundaise de Presse](#) (ABP)
- [Net Press](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [International Media and Marketing Research](#) (IMMAR)
- [Panos Institute](#)

Policies

Media legislation

The first legal text regulating the freedom of the press in Burundi is the legislative order of March 1922 approved by the

decree in August of the same year. This text was adopted to "counter the propaganda tending to raise the indigenous population against the colonial belgian authority and even against the white population." It lasted long and was repealed by the Press Law of 1976. Burundi was under a one-party rule and media had pledged allegiance to the ideology of the sole ruling party, the *Union pour le Progrès National* (Union for National Progress - UPRONA):

The Press Law of 2003 allowed journalists not to reveal sources of information to the judicial authority. It also introduced the conscience clause that allows journalists to take the initiative of breaking the contract in the event of an editorial reorientation.

The 2013 law was criticised by all Burundian journalists and the international community. Confused articles were introduced, especially "not to disseminate information that could affect the credit of the state or the national economy." In May 2013 Amnesty International organised a protest against the press law, in front of the Embassy in Brussels. In August 2013, UBJ petitioned for the unconstitutionality of the law. On 7 January, 2014, the Constitutional Court invalidated certain provisions, for example the heavy fines, but overall the law remained liberticidal.

In 2015, another Press Law was promulgated, which is more open to freedom. Article 10 prescribes the journalist's right to access sources of information and gives journalists the right to freely investigate, criticise and comment on any matter. In Article 11, the law emphasises the journalists' right to protect their personal integrity and their equipment.

With the last constitutional reform promulgated on 7 June, 2018, articles 19 and 31 are in theory even more explicit in regard of press freedom: "The rights and duties proclaimed and guaranteed by internationally ratified international human rights instruments are an integral part of the Constitution" (art 19) and "Freedom of expression is guaranteed, the state respects freedom of religion, thought, conscience and opinion" (art 31). However, hindrances to press freedom persist, especially as the 2018 press law entitles the CNC to unilaterally distribute and withdraw a press card to journalists as it deems right. This means some journalists may not get the press card. Media organisations have tried to be involved in the issuing of the press cards but failed. Therefore all journalists are under the control of the CNC, which is a governmental body.

Accountability systems

Burundian media are not accountable to their audiences as are European media, mainly because they lack an internal mediator system to receive complaints from injured parties and there are no systematically established and verifiable standards of feedback mechanisms. The right of reply or correction is possible in theory, but hard to empower especially in public media and privately owned media belonging to the ruling party. Even intellectuals who have been unjustly denounced find it very difficult to enforce their rights.

Local audiences are not accustomed to holding media accountable for violations, nor to seize courts on damage related to any disseminated information that is prejudicial to their rights. The "watchdogs of morality" seem to consider themselves infallible and do not accept any "barking" that can reframe their action.

Regulatory authorities

Regulation is ensured by the CNC council, which is made of 15 members, five of whom make up the Bureau. All members are appointed by the President of the Republic. This constitutional body is supposed to report to Parliament but in fact it depends directly on the Presidency of the Republic. It works with government subsidies and it is the civilian chief of staff of the President who authorises or orders the actions to be carried out. The mentioned episodes of the withdrawal of the BBC operating license and the extension of the *Voice of America* (VOA) suspension were made on direct order of the Presidency of the Republic.

This lack of independence makes the CNC less credible than the organs of other African countries. In DRC, the Higher Council for Audiovisual and Communication is composed of 15 members, nine of whom are appointed by representatives of civil society. The other six are appointed by the public political authorities. In Burkina Faso, out of the 12 members of the Superior Council of Communication, four are appointed by associations of media professionals. This has a negative impact on the freedom of the press in Burundi. Moreover, all regimes, without exception, have violated press freedom, shutting down radios and newspapers, jailing journalists, forcing them into exile and even removing them. A known case of disappearance is that of Jean Bigirimana, journalist of the Iwacu Press Group, who mysteriously disappeared on 22 July, 2016 at the height of the crisis in Burundi.

In July 2005, under the presidency of Domitien Ndayizeye, police went to lock *Radio Publique Africaine* (RPA). The closure was short-lived due to solidarity shown by other sister media, which decided to stop airing any news about the government's positive initiatives towards the population. In 2015, neither the CNC nor the police have succeeded in bringing to courts or arrest those guilty of burning down RPA, *Radio-Télé Renaissance*, *Radio Television Rema* and *Bonesha FM*.

Sources

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Education

Universities and schools

The country's only school of journalism closed in 1991 after having trained more than 120 aspiring journalists, specialised in radio or print media. Some of these graduates were able to continue their studies in Kinshasa and obtain a Bachelor of Arts. They trained in Burundi and former Zaire. Most of them are still working in various media and international organisations. Those who were naturally gifted became great professionals, respected by colleagues who have embraced journalism schools or universities in the country or abroad. Many heads of news organisations would rather prefer to directly recruit operational staff, as training new people reveals costly. In the already mentioned survey *Audit des médias par les médias*, this concern was highlighted: "The interviews with radio directors are very clear on this point, young recruits know nothing about the practice of the profession, they do not know how to make a paper, they do not know how to make a summary, let alone how to handle equipment. The directors are confronted with the necessity to train them without really having the human resources and financial requirements."

Since the 2000s, private universities are running courses related to social communication or communication for development. Journalism-related courses are optional, but the *Université Lumière de Bujumbura* (Lumière University of Bujumbura - ULBU) has set up an audiovisual section. In 2008, the Hope Africa University was created, which currently has a radio station where students can practice as future journalists.

In 2009, the University of Burundi in partnership with Belgian cooperation, launched a complementary Master in Journalism. The laureates must complete one year to obtain this prestigious degree. The program targets mainly journalists already on the job. Before the 2015 crisis, great lecturers came to teach courses, mainly from Belgian universities. Interviewed managers of different media outlets realised that it is necessary to filter the admittance and allow only experienced

journalists, as the mere participation to the master's course is not sufficient to improve the skills of participants new to the profession.

Professional development

From time to time, Burundian journalists have occasional opportunities to receive training. The main actor involved in the organisation of on-the-job training is the *Maison de la Presse du Burundi* (Burundi Press House), which had set up the *Centre de Formation des Médias du Burundi* (Centre for Burundian Media Formation - CFM), heavily affected by the crisis of 2015. Its head, Alexandre Niyungeko, at the same time President of UBJ fled to Rwanda because of threats. Funding has almost dried up, but the partners of the *Maison de la Presse*, including UNESCO and the French government, still lend a hand in the organisation of training on various topics, such as conflict-sensitive journalism.

Other actors like Search for Common Ground (SFCG) occasionally organise training for journalists. The already mentioned *Association des Femmes Journalistes du Burundi* (Association of Women Journalists - AFJO) is also trying to stir the interest of journalists in gender issues. Until the end of 2018, the William Academy organised a series of trainings on mobile journalism and conflict-sensitive journalism. UNESCO has tried to build the capacity of community radios through ICTs.

It is important to stress that efforts that can bear fruit should be made within the media, which must pool the material and human resources to meet the ever-increasing training demands of journalists. In the absence of this, each media should understand there cannot be positive press in a competitive environment, without competitive staff. They should plan to secure even modest budgets for training as is the case at the RTNB, which has a department in charge of training. Targeted training is organised and there is a modest financial incentive that those internal journalists who train their colleagues receive.

Sources

Universities/School of journalism

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- [Université Lumière de Bujumbura](#) (ULBU)

Professional Development

- [Centre de Formation des Médias du Burundi](#) (CFM)
- [Maison de la Presse du Burundi](#)
- [Search for Common Ground](#) (SFCG)
- [UNESCO](#)
- [William Academy](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

The Burundian media landscape is dominated by radio, even if in 2015 the most popular ones were destroyed. As of 2019,

there are radio stations whose editors cannot determine the agenda of the day, as they are directly or indirectly managed by the government.

The public broadcaster *Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (RTNB) remains a tool to publicise the action of the government and works to advertise past, current and future activities of high-ranking authorities. Private radio stations, which should increase the level of pluralism, are afraid to air other voices in fear of reprisals from public institutions. The regulatory body keeps sending warnings to the radios that try to balance the public debate. Print media are also at the service of the government, which directly issues *Le Renouveau*. The Groupe de Presse Iwacu tries to counterbalance with alternative content, but it regularly receives remonstrance from the CNC council. Television is the media for the Burundian elite and viewers who can afford subscriptions can pick up interesting channels, as the regular programmes of the *Télévision nationale* are not of great appeal. Ordinary citizens mainly gather to watch TV in public places. Digital media, social networks and news sites offer alternative sources of information, but Internet penetration remains low and the reliability of online news depends on the ability of users to spot rumors and fake news.

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