

# Burundi Constitutional Referendum – Situation Update

11 May 2018

## Overview

This report follows on from Assaye Risk's report "[20180503 – Burundi Constitutional Referendum](#)" and provides an update on activity leading up to the constitutional referendum in Burundi on 17 May 2018. Over the past week, the government has officially started campaigning for a 'yes' vote in the referendum and has begun to suppress the opposition through increased use of force and the banning of foreign media outlets.

## Media clampdown

On 04 May 2018, Burundi suspended broadcasting rights for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Voice of America (VOA) for six months; the BBC had invited an opposition speaker onto its program and stand accused of broadcasting inaccurate statements against the government. The VOA was banned for allegedly broadcasting on a frequency banned by the media regulation body. Other broadcasters, such as Radio France and Isanginero, have been threatened with suspension if reporting contains anti-government content. These actions highlight a government intent to prevent the spread of contradictory views before and after the referendum this month.

## Reports of violence

The disruption to foreign media outlets has made it difficult to corroborate reports in the past week of beatings, kidnappings and murders by state forces and the ruling party's youth wing called the Imbonerakure. However, given public statements by the ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party members supporting violence against opposition movements, it is highly likely that there have been additional cases of state violence which have gone unreported in the media.

A key group of opposition who has voiced outrage against the government's use of violence has been the Catholic Church, who retain significant influence within the country. At a bishop's conference on 08 May 2018, the Catholic Church stated that voters will be too afraid to cast votes supporting the opposition. The Catholic Church has denounced the recent attacks on the public and use of violence. The government's tight control of the media has prevented the Catholic church from being able to widely broadcast its message and effectively challenge the government.

### Predictive assessment:

- It is highly likely that Burundi will vote for the constitutional changes proposed in the referendum. The violence and intimidation tactics employed by state forces, assisted by control of the media, will pressurise the public into voting in favour of the government's position.
- It is probable that there will be a rise in violence after the referendum if the constitutional changes are applied. State forces are highly likely to retaliate with heavy force against opposition supporters to secure the government's position.
- Continuing lack of unified response by the African Union (AU) suggests that it is unlikely to respond to any escalation of violence in Burundi. This indicates that President Nkurunziza will be able to maintain control over Burundi as the dominant state forces remain loyal to the current CNDD-FDD government.
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mission in Burundi is already stretched in dealing with the refugee crisis; any escalation in violence would see further movement of refugees into neighbouring states. This would impact neighbouring states, such as Tanzania and Rwanda, who may have to allocate funding for additional aid and an increased military presence on the border with Burundi.

### Assaye Risk

Assaye Risk's research and analysis capability monitors security issues and assesses future threats for companies currently operating or looking to invest in Burundi. For further information about our bespoke services in Burundi contact the research and analysis team on +44 (0) 20 7042 5110 or email [info@assayerisk.com](mailto:info@assayerisk.com).