

# Burundi Constitutional Referendum Result

24 May 2018

## Referendum outcome

Burundi has voted 73% in favour of the constitutional changes proposed in the referendum on 17 May 2018, to allow the Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza to run for another two terms in office. The Burundi Electoral Commission reported that voter turnout was high at 96%, however, opposition groups and the international community have deemed the result as illegitimate due to voter intimidation. Refer to previous Assaye Risk reports [“20180503 – Burundi Constitutional Referendum”](#) and [“20180511-Burundi Constitutional Referendum – Situation Update”](#) for further background on the referendum.

## Constitutional changes

The referendum result has brought in the following constitutional amendments:

- Presidential terms extended from five to seven years
- Presidents can serve more than two consecutive terms
- Removal of ethnic quotas in public institutions (e.g. politics, military)
- New post of Prime Minister created (yet to be announced who this will be)
- Number of Vice Presidents cut from two to one

The referendum result could provide President Nkurunziza with the opportunity to remain in power until 2034 if he is re-elected in presidential elections in 2020 and 2027. Under the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement signed in 2000, a power sharing agreement between Hutu and Tutsi tribes was mandated in public institutions. The new constitutional changes will allow President Nkurunziza to reduce Tutsi influence in the government which could further consolidate his power. Before the referendum, the government had already began relocating Tutsi officers to lower positions in the military and it is expected that there will be a reshuffle of politicians in the government within the next few months.

## Legitimacy of the referendum

Opposition politicians such as Evariste Ndayimpinda, a leading politician in the Amizero y’Abarundi opposition coalition, have denounced the result as illegitimate because of the violence used to intimidate voters. Reporting by the US State Department has found that the government did allow for opposition campaigning but used violence and intimidation tactics to coerce the population into voting for constitutional changes. Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported that fifteen people were murdered during the two weeks of campaigning. The ban on certain foreign media outlets for the next six months has made it difficult to corroborate the claims of government violence.

## Regional response

The African Union (AU) remains divided over how to deal with the possibility of President Nkurunziza remaining in power until 2034. Some AU leaders such as Tanzanian President John Magufuli have co-operated with President Nkurunziza to

forge an agreement which would allow for the return of Burundi refugees residing in Tanzania. Subsequently, the AU has not outlined any plans for a military force to intervene if the security situation begins to deteriorate in Burundi. The United Nations (UN) has also remained hesitant about deploying a peacekeeping force due to threats of violence outlined by the government. The lack of a regional security response to undermine the government will assist President Nkurunziza in maintaining power until the next presidential election in 2020.

### **Predictive assessment:**

- It is almost certain that there will be reporting of voter intimidation as the 2020 presidential election approaches. President Nkurunziza is expected to remain in power after 2020 due to a lack of transparency in elections and the effectiveness of intimidation tactics used by the government
- President Nkurunziza's plans to reduce Tutsi influence in the military is likely to prevent any future insurrections against the government. It is predicted that there will be a reshuffle of politicians and military figures to give individuals who are loyal to the government more influence
- Amendments to the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement are highly to cause civil unrest from the Tutsi minority in Burundi. This could lead to a rise in clashes with the government and a subsequent escalation in the refugee crisis.
- It is possible that only an external military intervention would be able to overthrow the government. The AU and the UN are unlikely to respond with a peacekeeping force due to the threat of violence and division over how to deal with the Burundi situation. Other indirect methods such as sanctions are also unlikely to be implemented as some neighbouring states such as Tanzania are supportive of the Burundi government.

### **Assaye Risk**

Assaye Risk's research and analysis team advises clients on significant changes in operating environments and provides solutions for managing risks. For further information about our risk management services in Burundi contact the research and analysis team on +44 (0) 20 7042 5110 or email [info@assayerisk.com](mailto:info@assayerisk.com).