Both state forces and the Imbonerakure, the ruling party’s youth league, threatened, beat, and arrested students in an enduring climate of political violence and intimidation. Attacks on students and teachers peaked in 2018 in the months leading up to a constitutional referendum.

Context

The Burundian government, dominated by the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party, and led by President Pierre Nkurunziza, continued to limit civil and political freedoms in Burundi during the 2017-2019 reporting period. Nkurunziza’s bid for a third term in 2015 spun the country into a political crisis.

Violence increased in the months leading up to the May 2018 constitutional referendum, which resulted in 80 percent of voters approving a two-term extension of presidential power. Human Rights Watch reported that both state security forces and the Imbonerakure, the youth branch of the CNDD-FDD, carried out targeted attacks on members of opposition parties, such as the National Congress for Freedom (CNL, formerly the National Liberation Forces – FNL), as well as journalists and activists, in the lead-up to both the 2018 referendum and the 2020 general elections.

The UN Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry on Burundi reported that state entities, including the Imbonerakure, which the Commission determined to operate under state control in specific circumstances, systemically attacked the civilian population, for reasons of real or perceived opposition to the government and the ruling party, throughout the reporting period. According to the Commission, the Burundian state committed serious human rights violations with complete impunity, including executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest, sexual violence, and violations of civil liberties.

The political crisis in Burundi impacted education during the reporting period. In September 2018, the UN Human Rights Council reported that the CNDD-FDD pressured teachers and students, or removed them from their schools for refusing to join the party, pay mandatory contributions for elections, or attend political meetings. In August 2019, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi also reported that student and teacher members of the CNDD-FDD prevented some students from attending school, sometimes with threats. Although the Ministry of Education banned the barring of students from schools for reasons related to elections contributions in February 2019, Human Rights Watch documented the continuation of this practice throughout 2019.

Since 2017, the Burundian government’s restrictions on international organizations have led to the departure or reduced aid of international NGOs, UN agencies, and bilateral partners. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights closed at the government’s request in February 2019. The crisis has impacted funding for education. For example, in 2018, ICG reported that following Nkurunziza’s re-election, the government’s education budget decreased 30 percent, leading to more crowded classrooms, higher fees, and the suspension of many school feeding programs at all levels of education.

During this reporting period, freedom of the press became increasingly constrained, which may have affected the availability of media reports on attacks on education during this period.

Attacks on school students, teachers, or other personnel

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA collected reports of at least 42 incidents of attacks on students, teachers, or other personnel, which harmed over 65 people. By comparison, in the 2013-2017 period covered in Education under Attack 2018, at least 70 students were detained, arrested, and imprisoned, and many others intimidated or threatened.

Both teachers and students were targeted by state security forces and the Imbonerakure during this reporting period. Attacks were reported at a similar rate as in the Education under Attack 2018 reporting period, 2013-2017, when at least 70 students were detained, arrested, and imprisoned, and many others were intimidated or threatened. As in the previous reporting period, beatings and detention prior to voting occurred, as well as the detention of children who de-
faced images of the president in textbooks. In 2017, GCPEA compiled 11 incidents of attacks on school students and personnel, which harmed around 15 people. All of these 2017 attacks were identified after the publication of *Education under Attack 2018*.

In 2018, GCPEA compiled at least 15 reports of attacks on school students and staff that led to the injury or death of at least 18, and the arrest or detention of at least ten. Many attacks occurred in the months preceding the May 2018 constitutional referendum, when teachers who supported, or were suspected of supporting, opposition parties, were frequently beaten and detained by Imbonerakure members. Examples of reports included:

- SOS-Torture/Burundi reported that on January 10, 2018, Imbonerakure members allegedly arrested a teacher and supporter of the opposition FNL party, while at work in Busoni, Kirundo province. The teacher was detained and beaten, according to local media, for advising people to vote against the constitutional referendum.

- On April 2, 2018, local police reportedly assaulted the dean of Bweru Communal High School in a pub in Bweru town, Ruyigi province, for not mobilizing the local population for the CNDD-FDD.

- Between April 22 and April 28, 2018, Imbonerakure students at Musema High School in Kayanza province reportedly beat their classmates while forcibly collecting money for election contributions.

- On the evening of May 5, 2018, the Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detainees (APRODH) reported that a local Imbonerakure representative arrested a teacher at Lycée Musemam in Butoganzwa, Kayanza province. The teacher, a member of the then-FNL opposition party, was reportedly arrested at school and secretly kept in detention for at least one week, allegedly for campaigning against the referendum.

- On December 28, 2018, the exiled civil society organization Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT Burundi) reported that a secondary school teacher and member of an opposition group was reportedly detained or forcibly disappeared by state intelligence agents, in Mabayi, Cibitoke province, allegedly for his association with an opposition party. At the time of the incident report, the teacher’s location remained unknown.

In addition, GCPEA identified one incident of police and members of the Imbonerakure repressing a student protest. On November 26, 2018, students of the Fundamental School in Mpanda Commune, Bubanza province, reportedly protested against the arrest of a teacher by police and the Imbonerakure, resulting in a clash between the two groups, according to a local source.

In 2019, reporting suggested that state security forces and Imbonerakure members arrested, threatened, or physically harmed students and teachers at a similar rate to previous years. GCPEA collected 15 reports of such incidents from local and international media, and local human rights observatories.

The most publicized case occurred in early March 2019, when state security forces arrested seven school students between the ages of 13 and 17, including one boy, in Kirundo province, for insulting the president by allegedly defacing his image in school textbooks. While one thirteen-year-old boy who was below the age of criminal responsibility was immediately released, the six girls were held at the police station in Kirundo. Three of the girls were released after two days, while three others were transferred to the female prison in Ngozi for prosecution. The children were eventually released after advocacy on the ground and mounting pressure, including an online social media campaign entitled #freeourgirls, though the charges were not dropped. GCPEA reported that at least 70 students were detained and 11 arrested in 2016 for defacing pictures of the president in textbooks.

In addition, GCPEA collected reports of attacks by the Imbonerakure or unidentified armed groups against students, teachers and staff in 2019, examples of which included:

- Human rights organization League Iteka reported that, on January 12, 2019, in Kavumu hill, Kayanza province, a student in year nine at Ruganza School was beaten by two Imbonerakure members while on the way to school. The student was allegedly in a coma for days and had broken ribs following the attack. The attackers were reportedly arrested and detained at the police commissariat in Kayanza.
- Local media reported that, on the night of August 18, 2019 in Rushubije, Ntenga commune, Kirundo province, six alleged Imbonerakure members killed a teacher who was affiliated with an opposition party.417

- League Iteka reported that, on September 30, 2019, at Kinyovu School in Nyamurenza commune, Ngozi province, a member of the Imbonerakure removed three male students from their school in front of school administrators and held them at the district’s administration building. The Imbonerakure member allegedly accused the three students of disrupting the paramilitary group’s activities in the area. The students were released the same day.418

- On October 3, 2019, Imbonerakure reportedly assaulted a secondary school student on his way home from class in Nyamurenza commune, Ngozi province, according to local media sources.419

Military use of schools and universities

Between 2017 and 2019, GCPEA identified two reported incidents of military use of school. In the period covered in Education under Attack 2018, at least 21 schools were reportedly used as police or military posts in 2015 and 2016.420

In 2018, APRODH reported two cases of the Imbonerakure using primary schools. On June 23, 2018, the Imbonerakure reportedly used the playground of Kiranda Primary school, in Bugenyuzi commune, Karuzi province, to conduct trainings.421 On September 25, 2018, 12 Imbonerakure members reportedly stopped two male members of the FNL party and brought them to Buhoro II Primary school where they were detained overnight, after which they were allegedly taken to a police station in Gashikanwa district.422

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school or university

GCPEA received one report of a case of children being forcibly associated with the Imbonerakure at a school between 2017 and 2019; no incidents were reported in the 2013-2017 period covered in Education under Attack 2018.. APRODH reported that, in January 2018, the Imbonerakure forcibly engaged students in grade six from a primary school in Bugabira district, Kirundo province. The Imbonerakure forced these students to participate in paramilitary training at school and in the surrounding community, particularly on Friday and Saturday night, and allegedly severely punished students who did not participate.423

Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university

During the 2017-2019 reporting period, GCPEA received two reports of sexual violence by armed parties targeting students at, or on the way to or from, school. The first case occurred in 2017 but was collected by GCPEA in 2018. On January 24, 2017, in Cibitoke province, a member of the Imbonerakure allegedly raped a 14 year-old schoolgirl as she returned home from school.424 The second case occurred on January 15, 2019, in Muramvya province when League Iteka reported that a police officer raped a 16-year-old girl on the grounds of a secondary school. The perpetrator was apprehended and arrested.425

Rape and sexual violence committed by the Imbonerakure and state security forces have been documented by the Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained People (APRODH), as well as the UN Commission of Inquiry.426

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education occurred sporadically between 2017 and 2019, similar to the rate reported in Education under Attack 2018. Between 2013-2017, GCPEA documented three incidents of attacks on higher education, two of which occurred in 2017.427 One incident from 2017 was not reported in Education under Attack 2018. On or around August 18, 2017, Imbonerakure members reportedly beat a Tutsi student with clubs and forced him to walk on his knees across the Mutanga campus of the University of Burundi in Bujumbura.428

Two incidents of attacks on university students were reported in 2018. On July 9, 2018, opposition students at the Mutanga campus of the University of Burundi, Bujumbura were threatened when flyers appeared which threatened students who did not adhere to the government ideology, saying that the government would authorize violence against such students. Iwacu and APRODH reported that the flyers likely came after protests following the arrests of three students
earlier in the week. Separate reports from local NGOs APRODH and SOS Médias Burundi confirmed that on the night of July 2, 2018, Imbonerakure members and police arrested three students from their rooms on the same campus after arbitrarily searching their rooms. Two students were reportedly released from jail on July 12, 2018.


“Protests against the Cancellation of Scholarships in Burundi: 2 Students Arrested (Protestations contre la suppression des bourses au Burundi: 2 étudiants arrêtés),” RFI Afrique, April 1, 2017.

RPA, as cited in ACLED, Event ID BUR7242.
