

# Postwar Statebuilding in Burundi: Ruling Party Elites and Illiberal Peace

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## Abstract

The widespread enthusiasm for internationally-supported liberal statebuilding since the 1990s has diminished, due in part to the mixed record of post-war liberal statebuilding. Over time, many post-war countries have adopted more authoritarian statebuilding trajectories, despite the fact that negotiated peace agreements tend to reflect liberal principles. This is often attributed to 'liberal' international actors encountering resistant 'illiberal' domestic elites. The post-war statebuilding trajectory in Burundi appears to fit this dominant narrative, with the ruling party, the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), deviating from some of the liberal principles that underpinned the Burundian peace agreement. Drawing on a detailed analysis of the internal politics of Burundi's ruling party, we show that this account is flawed. We question overly simplified accounts of 'illiberal ruling party elites' and we argue that tensions, competition and fragmentation within the ruling party were decisive in Burundi's statebuilding path. Rather than seeing Burundi as an inevitable failure of liberal statebuilding, we highlight how there was some commitment to liberal principles even within the ruling party. Internal struggles within the ruling CNDD-FDD led to current outcomes in Burundi, which should not be interpreted as predestined or definitive. We show that understanding the complexities, diversities, and contingencies within ruling parties opens new spaces for thinking about the creation and recreation of political orders after war.

## Introduction\*

Post-war statebuilding can follow many different trajectories.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, violent conflict is fought at least in part over the control of the state and the distribution of resources, so it is not surprising that the question of which rules,

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<sup>1</sup> The OECD has defined statebuilding as "an endogenous process to enhance capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations." OECD, *State Building in Situations of Fragility: Initial Findings*, Paris: OECD-DAC, 2008. At a more general level, statebuilding can be seen as the consolidation of 'the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained.' See Timothy Mitchell, 'The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics', *The American Political Science Review*, 85: 1, 1991, p. 78.

structures and institutions should govern post-conflict political life is hotly contested. While there is broad variation in terms of actual statebuilding practices in post-war environments, since the end of the Cold War, the emphasis in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions has been on support for liberal statebuilding, as part of broader UN peacebuilding frameworks. Liberal statebuilding usually includes the consolidation of order based on representative government, accountability, constitutional limits on governmental power, and respect for civil and political rights.<sup>2</sup>

Among scholars, there has been extensive debate over the ideas and practices associated with liberal peacebuilding and statebuilding. The more positive views of the 1990s were replaced by serious questions about both the ideas and assumptions underlying international statebuilding, as well as its practical record. The experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular, led to questions about the feasibility of internationally-supported liberal statebuilding. Among international commentators, earlier enthusiasm about the possibilities of international liberal statebuilding as a form of peacebuilding in Africa has subsided. The focus has shifted away from the state towards other forms of peacebuilding, including 'local' or hybrid peacebuilding<sup>3</sup> and community resilience.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, others have pointed to the increased prevalence of 'non-liberal' statebuilding that tend to privilege autocratic ruling elites.<sup>5</sup> The commitment to, and future of, liberal democracy is being questioned by many people across the world, including in established democracies, so it is an opportune time to ask whether the era of internationally-supported liberal statebuilding in post-conflict countries is over.

Burundi is often seen as a bellwether for international intervention. This African Great Lakes region country has suffered from waves of violence at various times throughout its post-independence period, often expressed along ethnic lines. Democratic elections were held in 1993, but the newly elected President was killed three months after taking office, leading to a civil war and a large number of international and regional conflict resolution initiatives. The

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<sup>2</sup> See Roland Paris, 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding', *Review of International Studies*, 36: 2, 2010, p. 340 and 360.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Mac Ginty, 'Hybrid Peace: The Interaction between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace', *Security Dialogue* 41: 4, 2010, pp. 391-412; Séverine Autesserre, *The Frontlines of Peace: An Insider's Guide to Changing the World*, (Oxford University Press, 2021); Tobias Ide, Carl Bunch, Alexander Carius, Ken Conca, Geoffrey D. Dabelko, Richard Matthew and Erika Weinthal, 'The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, 97, 1, 2021, pp. 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Gustavo de Carvalho, Cedric de Coning and Lesley Connolly, 'Creating an Enabling Peacebuilding Environment: How Can External Actors Contribute to Resilience', *ACCORD Policy and Practice Brief*, 2014; Ana E. Juncos, 'Resilience in Peacebuilding: Contesting Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and Complexity', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 39: 4, 2018, pp. 559-574; Cedric de Coning, 'Adaptive peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, 94:2, 2018, pp. 301-317.

<sup>5</sup> David Lewis, John Heathershaw, and Nick Megoran, 'Illiberal peace? Authoritarian modes of conflict management', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53(4), 2018, pp. 486-506

Arusha peace agreement was signed in 2000, paving the way to a transitional government and eventually to multiparty elections in 2005. The Arusha agreement was the basis of a new Burundian constitution.

While the peace process in Burundi certainly faced difficulties, it was commonly interpreted as a successful example of internationally and regionally-supported peacebuilding and statebuilding, particularly since the region had been so volatile since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Large scale violence in Burundi had ended, ethnic divisions appeared to be less salient, and the new constitution contained important power-sharing provisions.<sup>6</sup> If the causes of conflict in Burundi had been exclusive governance, corruption, and state capture by a narrow elite, the Arusha process offered a new democratic promise, inclusive institutional arrangements and greater accountability of political elites. The Burundian peace process was therefore widely celebrated by outside observers as an ambitious, comprehensive effort to transform the state and relations between different identity groups. The 2005 democratic elections brought the CNDD-FDD to power, thus seemingly ushering a real change in Burundi's political landscape since the CNDD-FDD had been the largest rebel movement during the civil war. Meanwhile, a vibrant civil society including a free media, an active opposition, an open discussion of ethnicity, and inclusive political institutions took root.

Nevertheless, since 2005 statebuilding in Burundi has veered away from some of the principles underpinning the peace agreement. Following the CNDD-FDD's electoral victory in 2005, the party has gradually consolidated its power. Statebuilding in Burundi was not abandoned, but it took a different form than that envisaged during the Arusha process. Rather than inclusion, transparency, and liberal principles, the CNDD-FDD ruled with an increasingly authoritarian bent. This came to a head in 2015, when the late President Nkurunziza ran, and won, a controversial third term in office. His candidacy was met with mass protests, an attempted coup, electoral controversy and a further clamping down on the opposition. The 2015 crisis has been interpreted as a key moment in the drift away from liberal principles towards more authoritarian governance. By the time of the 2020 elections, political space continued to narrow and the electoral process was marred by allegations of irregularities and fraud. Elections in 2020 were won by Évariste Ndayishimiye, President Nkurunziza's successor in the CNDD-FDD.

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<sup>6</sup> René Lemarchand, 'Consociationalism and Power Sharing in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *African Affairs*, 106: 422, 2007, pp. 1–20; Stef Vandeginste, 'Power-sharing, Conflict and Transition in Burundi: Twenty Years of Trial and Error', *Africa Spectrum*, 44:3, 2009, pp. 63–86; Allison McCulloch and Stef Vandeginste, 'Veto power and power-sharing: Insights from Burundi (2000–2018)', *Democratization*, 26: 7, 2019, pp. 1176–1193.

What can we learn about statebuilding from the experience of Burundi? What accounts for this apparent shift, from the promise of liberal state reform underpinning the Arusha peace process and the 2005 constitution, to a more coercive type of statebuilding pursued by the CNDD-FDD, encapsulated by the 2015 crisis? What does this mean for the future of internationally-supported statebuilding?

We make two inter-related claims. First, we argue that it is a mistake to contrast international liberal statebuilding efforts with Burundian illiberal statebuilding practices. This was not a case of a well-intentioned 'liberal international community' encountering an opportunistic, non-ideological, illiberal former rebel party. Such a view misrepresents both international and Burundian agency. Instead, we show that there is a diversity of views within and outside Burundi regarding the appropriate nature of the state and its governance practices. Second, we focus on domestic politics and argue that to understand the trajectory of post-war statebuilding in Burundi, we must understand the internal dynamics and contestations within the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. We highlight the multiple currents within the CNDD-FDD and argue that the 2015 crisis was the result of these political and ideological contestations, rather than a blanket rejection of liberal principles by new Burundian elites.

The article proceeds by first looking at widespread explanations for the failures of internationally-supported statebuilding. These explanations often rely upon an explicit or implicit distinction between the liberal intentions and visions of the intervenors, and the illiberal tendencies of rulers in recipient states. Building on the work of scholars who have rejected these dichotomies, we emphasise the range of views about statebuilding among international and domestic-level actors. We then turn to the case analysis of Burundi and argue that its statebuilding trajectory is mainly the result of political contestation within the ruling CNDD-FDD party. We highlight how internal divisions and fragmentation within the CNDD-FDD led to the 2015 crisis in Burundi, which was an important moment in Burundi's statebuilding path, and we critically assess international responses to this crisis. We conclude with what this means in Burundi and elsewhere. What space exists for international action that builds upon a more nuanced understanding of the domestic politics of statebuilding?

### **International statebuilding and its apparent demise**

The Arusha peace agreement in Burundi was signed in 2000, at the heyday of enthusiasm for international peacebuilding, in which the promotion of liberal

statebuilding was a ubiquitous feature.<sup>7</sup> The Arusha Agreement exemplified these liberal principles. By the time of the contested Burundian elections of 2015, some of these liberal elements were being steadily eroded. This corresponded with a moment in history in which many commentators were proclaiming the end of liberalism<sup>8</sup> as well as the failures of (liberal) international statebuilding.<sup>9</sup>

It is therefore tempting to interpret the statebuilding trajectory in Burundi as the result of inevitable, fundamental flaws that were seen to beset efforts elsewhere in the world as well. These flaws are usually ascribed to a mismatch between the liberal institutions being promoted and the actual politics on the ground in countries emerging from conflict. According to dominant views, the problem is that approaches to statebuilding are based upon ideal-type Western state models which are not appropriate in many post-conflict settings, particularly in Africa. This may be due to different cultures,<sup>10</sup> or different historical developments,<sup>11</sup> or a failure to engage with what people in post-conflict countries actually want or need.<sup>12</sup> Many authors have shown that liberal state institutions are never grafted onto a blank slate; rather, they interact with a range of pre-existing formal and informal institutions.<sup>13</sup> Authors have pointed out that liberal institutions and practices promoted by international organisations and donors coexist alongside neo-patrimonial structures of political authority, leading to statebuilding outcomes that do not correspond to donor expectations. Instead, the outcomes often closely resemble authoritarian governance, under a facade of liberal institutions. Applied to the Burundi case, this interpretation would view the Arusha peace agreement as the embodiment of liberal international statebuilding. When the liberal institutions and practices set up by the Arusha Agreement were superimposed

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<sup>7</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The Imperative of State-Building', *Journal of Democracy* 15:2, 2004, pp. 17-31.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. G. John Ikenberry, Inderjeet Parmar, Doug Stokes, 'Introduction: Ordering the world? Liberal internationalism in theory and practice', *International Affairs*, 94:1, 2018, pp. 1-5.

<sup>9</sup> Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (ed) *Statebuilding and State-Formation: The Political Sociology of Intervention* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Devon Curtis, 'The limits to statebuilding for peace in Africa', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013, pp. 79-97; Oliver Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding: Intervention, the State and the Dynamics of Peace Formation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Meera Sabaratnam, *Decolonising Intervention: International Statebuilding in Mozambique* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (London: James Currey, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Toby Dodge, 'Intervention and Dreams of Exogenous Statebuilding: The Application of Liberal Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq', *Review of International Studies* 39:5, 2013, pp. 1189-1212.

<sup>12</sup> Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, 'Conflicted outcomes and values: (Neo)liberal peace in Central Asia and Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping*, 16, 5, 2009, pp. 635-651.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Richmond, *Failed Statebuilding*; Patricia Daley, 'Ethnicity and political violence in Africa: The challenge to the Burundi state', *Political Geography*, 25: 6, 2006, pp. 657-679.

onto the existing political landscape in Burundi, the result was hybrid authoritarianism, where governance practices retained some formal elements of liberal democracy while drifting towards authoritarian control.

Nonetheless, this reading of the failure of internationally-supported statebuilding in Burundi and elsewhere is flawed. It relies upon a false dichotomy of liberal Western outside intervenors, and illiberal 'locals', and reifies the notion of hierarchical difference.<sup>14</sup> It assumes that difference can be overcome by 'development', reminiscent of the arguments put forward by the modernisation theorists of the 1960s,<sup>15</sup> or that liberal institutions are not appropriate for certain countries for other reasons. The logic of these arguments has led to the greater acceptance of statebuilding blueprints that rely upon authoritarian principles such as control of information, militarised spatial politics, and the repression of opposition.<sup>16</sup>

This interpretation of the failures of international statebuilding is problematic both in terms of its assumptions that Western intervenors promoting statebuilding are liberal, and its assumptions that 'local' elites prefer an illiberal state. On the first, several scholars have pointed out that outside actors promoting statebuilding are not homogeneous, and there is no universal consensus in favour of liberal institutions and practices. Even though multilateral institutions and Western donors profess an attachment to liberal statebuilding, there is no consensus about exactly what this means, and these stated ideals are often in tension with other objectives.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a number of scholars question whether international actors supporting statebuilding are themselves guided by liberal principles. Instead, they liken international statebuilding to imperialism and control based on geopolitical interests, with liberalism serving as ideological legitimisation for hierarchical and coercive interventionist practices.<sup>18</sup> Other authors argue that international statebuilding

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<sup>14</sup> Sabaratnam shows how even critical peacebuilding scholars tend to reproduce the ontological distinction between the 'liberal' and 'the local'. Meera Sabaratnam, 'Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace', *Security Dialogue*, 44:3, 2013, pp. 259-278.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran, 'Illiberal peace? Authoritarian modes of conflict management'; Claire Q. Smith, Lars Waldorf, Rajesh Venugopal & Gerard McCarthy, 'Illiberal peace-building in Asia: a comparative overview', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 20:1, 2020, pp. 1-14; Giulia Piccolino, 'Winning wars and building (illiberal) peace?' The rise (and possible fall) of a victor's peace in Rwanda and Sri Lanka', *Third World Quarterly*, 36(7), pp. 1770-1785.

<sup>17</sup> Devon Curtis, 'The international peacebuilding paradox: Power-sharing and post conflict governance in Burundi', *African Affairs*, 112: 446, 2013, pp. 72-91; Karina Mross, 'First peace, then democracy? Evaluating strategies of international support at critical junctures after civil war', *International Peacekeeping*, 26: 2, 2019, pp. 190-215; Oliver Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> David Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Statebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2010); Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War* (London: Polity,

relies on problematic knowledge claims that assume that social relations can be mapped, known, and acted upon by outsiders, with predictable, knowable, or malleable results.<sup>19</sup>

The assumption that local elites are illiberal is equally problematic. Much of the literature on statebuilding does not pay sufficient attention to domestic politics. When domestic politics are taken into account, many frameworks rely on rationalist logics, whereby domestic elites are assumed to make calculable individual cost-benefit calculations, which set the 'price' for their loyalty.<sup>20</sup> Using a rationalist perspective, it is logical that ruling domestic elites may prefer authoritarian statebuilding to consolidate and maximise their power and continued dominance. In cases of ruling parties that had their origins as rebel movements, arguments are sometimes made about the illiberal tendencies of former rebel elites due to their military legacies or their war-time institutional structures.<sup>21</sup>

Bringing domestic politics to the centre of any understanding of statebuilding is essential, but not merely through the lens of individual rationalist opportunistic calculations or through war-time legacies. In the Burundian case, authors have characterised the statebuilding space as one of subversion and appropriation,<sup>22</sup> frictional encounters,<sup>23</sup> and political struggle.<sup>24</sup> We build on these insights and show how ruling domestic elites operate within power relations under conditions of specific historical conjectures. Nevertheless, ideas of representative government and civil and political rights are not the monopoly of Western liberals, nor are Westerners the sole authors of such ideas.<sup>25</sup> There are many leaders across the world with authoritarian tendencies,

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2007). See also Inderjeet Parmar, 'The US-led liberal order: imperialism by another name?', *International Affairs*, 94: 1, 2018, pp. 151–172.

<sup>19</sup> Nehal Bhuta, 'Against state-building', *Constellations*, 15: 4, 2008, pp. 520–1.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Alex de Waal, 'Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace', *International Affairs*, 85: 1, 2009, pp. 99–113. Much of the literature on power-sharing institutional design is also based upon assumptions about 'rational' individual self-interest.

<sup>21</sup> Terrence Lyons, 'From victorious rebels to strong authoritarian parties: Prospects for post-war democratization', *Democratization*, 23, 6, 2016, pp. 1026–1041; Reyko Huang, *The wartime origins of democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Sidney Leclercq, 'Between the letter and the spirit: International statebuilding subversion tactics in Burundi', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 12: 2, 2018, pp. 159–184.

<sup>23</sup> Stefanie Wodrig and Julia Grauvogel, 'Talking past each other: Regional and domestic resistance in the Burundian intervention scene', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 51: 3, 2016, pp. 272–290.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Daley, 'The Burundi peace negotiations: An African experience of peacemaking', *Review of African Political Economy*, 34: 112, 2007, pp. 333–352.

<sup>25</sup> Likewise, within larger efforts to re-focus on non-Western actors in world politics, Abrahamsen shows that the 'postwar liberal world order' 'was not made in the West', but produced in interaction with Pan-African ideas, values and actors.' Rita Abrahamsen, 'Internationalists, sovereigntists, nativists: Contending visions of world order in Pan-Africanism',

and many others who articulate visions of state and society that reflect liberal principles. Such commitments are not necessarily fixed, but also not necessarily malleable by outsiders in knowable ways. Thus, statebuilding trajectories reflect a complex constellation of ideas, power relations, and interactions.

This article brings an account of domestic politics to the centre of understanding statebuilding trajectories. As an illustration of this complexity, the article highlights the diversity of views among Burundian elites within the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD. The CNDD-FDD has dominated the political landscape in Burundi since 2005 and the internal politics of the ruling party is the key driver of Burundi's post-war statebuilding trajectory.<sup>26</sup> While CNDD-FDD elites are typically viewed as authoritarian or illiberal, we show that senior figures within the CNDD-FDD did not express unified views in favour of illiberal state practices. There were key political differences within the CNDD-FDD. Thus, the drift to a more authoritarian version of statebuilding was contingent upon CNDD-FDD power relations, but this was not inevitable or irreversible and did not signal the existence of an immutable illiberal Burundian 'local', resisting 'foreign' liberal ideas.

### **Statebuilding in Burundi and the CNDD-FDD**

The creation of the CNDD-FDD was itself rooted in the country's post-colonial statebuilding pathway which unfolded in three major phases. The first was Burundi's initial post-colonial statebuilding framework, a constitutional monarchy, which did not resolve conflict between the two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi. While dating back to pre-colonial political and social inequalities, conflict was amplified by colonial policies, especially Belgian policies.<sup>27</sup> The second statebuilding phase followed a series of high-level political assassinations and mass killings in the immediate aftermath of independence, eventually culminating in the emergence of a Tutsi-dominated military dictatorship. Heralded by a military coup in 1966, this second statebuilding phase was further consolidated through the 1972 genocide of up to 300,000 Hutu, and the purging of Hutu from government.<sup>28</sup> Hutu would remain systematically excluded from the educational system, the civil service

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*Review of International Studies*, 46: 1, 2020, p. 73. On democracy, nondomination and ideas for a more egalitarian world order, see also Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after empire: The rise and fall of self-determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Other actors, including regional actors and Burundian opposition parties also played important roles, but a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Gahama, *Le Burundi sous administration belge*, (Paris: Karthala, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Aidan Russell, 'Obedience and Selective Genocide in Burundi', *Africa*, 85(3), 2015, pp. 437-456.



and the army, and their everyday experience of oppression under a Tutsi hegemony reinforced a collective awareness of victimhood.<sup>29</sup>

The third phase of Burundi's post-colonial statebuilding was characterized by a series of largely ineffective power-sharing arrangements and a failed democratisation process (1988-1993). These changes were triggered by internal and external pressures following renewed inter-ethnic massacres in 1988. Having been largely excluded since 1965, Hutu were progressively re-integrated into state structures. This gained further momentum after the end of the Cold War, as Burundi's third Tutsi military ruler, Pierre Buyoya, initiated a democratization process amid international pressure.<sup>30</sup> Multiparty elections held in June 1993 were won by a new political party, FRODEBU, whose leader, Melchior Ndadaye, subsequently became the country's first democratically-elected and Hutu president. However, this change was short-lived as President Ndadaye was assassinated only several months later on 21 October 1993 during a failed coup mounted by the Tutsi-dominated army. This ultimately triggered Burundi's civil war and the creation of the rebel movement, the CNDD-FDD.

The CNDD-FDD was formally created on 24 September 1994 in eastern DRC (then Zaire) in response to President Ndadaye's assassination. The main elements of its political wing, the CNDD, comprised of an ex-FRODEBU group of politicians headed by Ndadaye's former interior minister and the CNDD-FDD's first leader, Leonard Nyangoma. A second important group included young Hutu officers that had deserted Burundi's military academy, the *Institut Supérieur des Cadres Militaires* (ISCAM), and went on to lead the military FDD wing commanded by Jean-Bosco Ndayikengurukiye. A third group consisted of ex- members of the PALIPEHUTU, a different Hutu rebel movement that had been created in exile in Tanzania in 1980. This latter group switched allegiance to the nascent CNDD-FDD, and included future Presidents Pierre Nkurunziza and Évariste Ndayishimiye, among other key figures who later played critical roles in post-war politics in Burundi.<sup>31</sup>

Over time, internal fragmentation within the CNDD-FDD increased, often according to: i) regional divisions; ii) divisions between 'politicians' in the

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<sup>29</sup> Augustin Nsanze, *Le Burundi contemporain. L'État-nation en question (1956-2002)*, (Paris, Éditions L'Harmattan, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> The most prominent example of this international pressure was expressed at the 1990 Franco-African summit of La Baule by the then French President Francois Mitterrand who made it clear that further support of (francophone) African countries would be assessed based on their achievements towards democratisation. Marc Manirakiza, *Burundi: Quand le passé ne passe pas (Buyoya I – Ndadaye) 1987-1993*, (Bruxelles, Longue Vue, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ntagahoraho Z. Burihabwa, 'Continuity and Contingency: The CNDD-FDD and its Transformation from Rebel Movement to Governing Political Party in Burundi', PhD dissertation, University of Antwerp, 2017, p. 394 ; Willy Nindorera, *The CNDD-FDD in Burundi: The path from armed to political struggle* (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2012), pp 14-17.

CNDD political leadership and ‘fighters’ in the FDD military command; and iii) divisions between ‘insiders’ – fighting the armed struggle within Burundi – and ‘outsiders’ based abroad. These fractures were exacerbated by a gradual marginalization of the movements’ founding political ideology and intellectuals, as well as a very high level of internal violence and killings.<sup>32</sup>

These three patterns of internal conflict within the movement were important catalysts for two leadership changes during the rebellion. In 1998, the CNDD-FDD founder and first leader Nyangoma was deposed by his military chief-of-staff Ndayikengurukiye, who himself was removed in 2001 after initiating monumental reforms that fully integrated the political CNDD wing and military FDD branch into a hybrid leadership structure. Ndayikengurukiye’s removal was orchestrated by the ex-PALIPEHUTU faction.<sup>33</sup> These new leaders retained the integrated politico-military leadership structures introduced by Ndayikengurukiye and later signed the comprehensive ceasefire agreement with the Burundian transitional government in 2003. This led to the CNDD-FDD’s transformation from a rebel movement into a political party in 2004 and its eventual electoral victory in 2005.

However, even after the war had ended, the CNDD-FDD as a political party remained divided and there were disagreements over statebuilding strategies. There were disagreements over the extent to which the CNDD-FDD should deviate from the principles in the Arusha agreement. Additional points of contention revolved around how much to cooperate with opposition, press freedom, and engagement with civil society and with international partners.<sup>34</sup> In terms of factions, there were tensions between those who had been active inside Burundi during the armed struggle and others who had supported the CNDD-FDD while in exile.<sup>35</sup> Several of the latter seemingly favoured more liberal statebuilding approaches. Divisions were compounded by tensions between the ‘old’ militants of the ex-rebel movement and ‘new’ members who joined the political party after the war, sometimes out of political expediency.

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<sup>32</sup> Ntagahoraho Z. Burihabwa and Devon E. A. Curtis, ‘The Limits of Resistance Ideologies? The CNDD-FDD and the Legacies of Governance in Burundi’, *Government and Opposition*, 54(3), 2019, pp. 559-583.

<sup>33</sup> This faction was led by Pierre Nkurunziza, Hussein Rujaburwa, Adolphe Nshimirimana, Evariste Ndayishimiye, Alain Guillaume Bunyoni, and Silas Ntugurirwa.

<sup>34</sup> In a party congress in 2006, the CNDD-FDD Chairman Hussein Rujaburwa issued a directive instructing party members to stop talking to civil society actors and the media. Willy Nindorera ‘Burundi: The Deficient Transformation of the CNDD-FDD’, in: Jeroen de Zeeuw (ed.) *From Soldiers to Politicians. Transforming Rebel Movements after Civil War*, (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, former Senate President and Second Vice-President Gervais Rujakira had been the wartime CNDD-FDD representative in Belgium.

Furthermore, the ‘politicians’ vs ‘soldiers’ antagonism now pitted civilian CNDD-FDD politicians against the former FDD rebel commanders who had become members of the national security sector supposedly without political affiliations. The civilians criticized the military leaders’ reluctance to adapt to peacetime politics and loosen their tight grip on the new party.<sup>36</sup> Eventually, those factions relying on more coercive power politics gained the upper hand over those that articulated a more liberal, inclusive vision, due in part to their ability to back their ideas with force.<sup>37</sup> In essence, this meant that the group more open to developing and implementing a rights-based, accountable state-building vision for Burundi was set against an “old guard”, that primarily emphasized their entitlement to power as liberators and focused on pragmatic approaches to consolidating this power. However, it is also important to note that the fault line between the two groups was not fixed, but was sometimes rather blurred due to shifting positions based on political, economic, and other considerations.<sup>38</sup>

There were already some signs of a drift towards more authoritarian governance in the early years of the CNDD-FDD’s rule. One manifestation of this was the reliance on the use of force, which can also be traced to divisions within the CNDD-FDD. When the new president Pierre Nkurunziza took office in 2005, he was quick to capitalize on an imbalance between CNDD-FDD heavyweights in the civilian party and security sector, by forging an alliance with powerful ex-FDD generals in the army and police.<sup>39</sup> Nkurunziza’s collaboration with ‘the generals’ would come to constitute the informal inner circle of power. Referred to as the ‘CNDD-FDD system’, this inner circle would become Nkurunziza’s main vehicle to control the CNDD-FDD political party through state structures. As shown below, this had important ramifications for Burundi’s post-war statebuilding trajectory.

## The 2015 crisis as a key period in Burundian statebuilding

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<sup>36</sup> Formal participation by security sector actors in political parties is prohibited by Burundian law, but the increased influence of the ex-FDD generals in the de facto politico-military command structures of the party – most notably as members of the *conseil des sages* – was internally legitimised by Article 10 of the party statutes. It states that all activists of the CNDD-FDD movement until its conversion to a political party on 8 August 2004 are considered founding members of the party, which therefore included the ex-FDD actors who had joined the security sector after the war. Burihabwa, ‘Continuity and Contingency’, p. 522.

<sup>37</sup> Burihabwa and Curtis, ‘The Limits of Resistance Ideologies?’

<sup>38</sup> Individuals with more liberal orientations sometimes changed their views depending on circumstances, just as some fighters with more authoritarian tendencies eventually adopted a more liberal outlook. Author interview with former senior political CNDD-FDD leader and official, Bujumbura, January 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Most of the top leadership of the CNDD-FDD rebel movement integrated into the security sector rather than join the new political party as civilian politicians. Nkurunziza and Radjabu were notable exceptions.

The divisions within the CNDD-FDD continued to intensify through the 2010 elections, which were won by the party amid further claims that the country was distancing itself from the liberal statebuilding ideals underpinning the Arusha agreement.<sup>40</sup> An example of this was the increased visibility of the CNDD-FDD's youth wing "Imbonerakure" with its tactics of intimidation vis-à-vis individuals and communities perceived as enemies, most notably FNL militants and supporters, sometimes in close coordination with the local administration and the police.<sup>41</sup>

The movement towards more coercive and authoritarian statebuilding practices was intensified by additional drivers in the lead up to the crisis of 2015. The crisis revolved around whether or not President Nkurunziza could run for a third term in office.<sup>42</sup> For many advocates of liberal statebuilding, a third term went against the principles of the Arusha agreement and the 2005 Constitution and would signal a final collapse of the governance ideals underpinning the peace process. Within the "CNDD-FDD system", several key ex-FDD generals were supportive of Nkurunziza's desire to run for a third term, albeit for different reasons. Determined to safeguard the CNDD-FDD's political power as well as their related personal assets, these generals believed that a continued Nkurunziza presidency would be a source of stability and protection. They therefore wanted to see a continued shift towards more control over the levers of power and less room for dissenting oppositional voices and views, including less criticism from within the CNDD-FDD. This was exacerbated by a world view that rejected the Arusha peace agreement, and certain aspects of the 2005 Constitution.<sup>43</sup> For other CNDD-FDD elites, their opposition to the Arusha Agreement was more of a reflection of the fact that the CNDD-FDD had not participated in the Arusha negotiations that led to the 2000 Agreement that served as the basis for the 2005 Constitution.<sup>44</sup> The CNDD-FDD only participated in cease-fire negotiations *after* the signing of the

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<sup>40</sup> Stef Vandeginste, 'Power-sharing as a fragile safety valve in times of electoral turmoil: The costs and benefits of Burundi's 2010 elections', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49(2), 2011, pp. 315-335.

<sup>41</sup> The Forces nationales de libération (FNL) was another predominantly Hutu rebel movement that had fought in the civil war. It later became a political party and has become the biggest opposition party in Burundi. Burundi Human Rights Initiative, *A façade of peace in a land of fear. Behind Burundi's human rights crisis*, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Stef Vandeginste, 'Legal loopholes and the politics of executive term limits: Insights from Burundi', *Africa Spectrum* 51, 2, 2016, pp. 39-63.

<sup>43</sup> For a similar view, see Pierre Claver Ndayicariye, *Burundi 2015: Chronique d'un complot annoncé* (Cape Town: Compress.dsl, 2020), pp. 18-20. This was not expressed as a rejection of democracy but as a re-articulation of democracy that would require mass education. Ndayicariye, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Although some CNDD-FDD leaders may have been opposed to the liberalism underpinning the Arusha accords, others were not and, in any case, this opposition was largely framed as an issue of exclusion and lack of participation. Gervais Rufyikiri, 'The post-wartime trajectory of CNDD-FDD party in Burundi: A facade transformation of rebel movement to political party', *Civil Wars*, 19:2, 2017, pp. 220-248.

Arusha peace agreement and the establishment of transitional institutions. Paradoxically, this meant that key figures within the CNDD-FDD lacked a meaningful commitment to Burundi's post-conflict statebuilding architecture, which it was mandated to govern and protect following its election to power in 2005.<sup>45</sup>

Even though the 2015 dispute was about President Nkurunziza's eligibility to run for a third term in office, it reflected an internal 'CNDD-FDD system' conflict. Those within the party who objected to the third term were opposed to Nkurunziza loyalists, both within the CNDD-FDD party and among ex-FDD security actors. Signs of this faultline could already be seen in October 2013, when a proposal to revise the constitution was introduced in the council of ministers. This was widely perceived as an attempt to facilitate the constitutionality of Nkurunziza's third term bid. A corresponding motion was eventually rejected by just one vote in the National Assembly on 21 March 2014.<sup>46</sup> The National Assembly president, CNDD-FDD's Pie Ntavyohanyuma, refused to manipulate the vote despite pressure by Nkurunziza loyalists.<sup>47</sup> This triggered action by those opposed to Nkurunziza's third term to try to find an alternative presidential candidate within the CNDD-FDD. In response, loyalist ex-FDD sector actors started finetuning plans to ensure Nkurunziza's third term, including through intelligence operations aimed at uncovering critics in the CNDD-FDD ranks.<sup>48</sup>

Given the nature of the "CNDD-FDD system", it was clear that Nkurunziza would perceive internal opposition coming from ex-FDD generals as his biggest threat. Already in 2011, it appeared that there were key figures in the CNDD-FDD system who were committed to upholding the Arusha Agreement, a position that was interpreted by some other CNDD-FDD insiders as superficial.<sup>49</sup> President Nkurunziza's strategy of sidelining his most influential critics was clearly in evidence by 2013.<sup>50</sup> Former army chief-of-staff Major-General Godefroid Niyombare expressed a commitment to the Arusha

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Gervais Rufyikiri, 'Failure of Rebel Movement-to-Political Party Transformation of the CNDD-FDD in Burundi', *IOB Working Paper*, University of Antwerp Institute of Development Policy, 2016, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Yolande Bouka and Stephanie Wolters, 'The Battle for Burundi. Is There a Viable Solution?', Pretoria, Institute for Security Studies, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Stef Vandeginste 'Burundi's Electoral Crisis: Back to Power-Sharing Politics as Usual?', *African Affairs*, 114: 457, 2015, pp. 624–636.

<sup>49</sup> Author interview with senior military official, Bujumbura, June 2011.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Major-General Silas Ntigurirwa was sent to become the first Burundian force commander of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) at the end of 2013. Major-General Godefroid Niyombare, who had been replaced as chief of staff of the National Defence Forces (FDN) by ex-FDD Major-general Prime Niyongabo in November 2012, was accredited as Ambassador to Kenya in early 2014, a position he only took up reluctantly. Bouka and Wolters, 'The Battle for Burundi'.

framework when he explained his reservations regarding Nkurunziza's third-term bid, and he was joined by other influential ex-FDD generals. The emergence of this anti-third term group of generals coincided with growing frustration among other ex-FDD generals vis-à-vis the influence, power and economic benefits enjoyed by some within Nkurunziza's inner circle, notably the head of the SNR intelligence service the late Adolphe Nshimirimana, and Chef de Cabinet and future Prime Minister Alain-Guillaume Bunyoni.<sup>51</sup>

In response to these dynamics, Nkurunziza agreed to measures to that would somewhat appease these critics (*généraux frondeurs*), while in reality retaining the influence of Nshimirimana and Bunyoni. Consequently, the presidency issued a decree on 28 November 2014 replacing Nshimirimana with Godefroid Niyombare as head of intelligence. Nshimirimana was moved to the presidency as a counsellor and Bunyoni was re-appointed as permanent secretary of the National Security Council.

Shortly after Niyombare's appointment, a confidential report drafted on 13 February 2015 by the SNR (national intelligence service) was leaked, advising President Nkurunziza not to run for a third term due to serious security risks for the country. Niyombare was immediately dismissed from his position on 18 February 2015.<sup>52</sup> Another shockwave occurred on 1 March 2015 when former Secretary-General and historic CNDD-FDD strongman Hussein Radjabu escaped from Mpimba prison, which suggested the involvement of CNDD-FDD affiliated security personnel. On 14 March 2015, a meeting of the *conseil des sages* (council of the wise) revealed that Nkurunziza did not have the necessary votes for his nomination as presidential candidate. Emboldened by these developments, 17 high-ranking CNDD-FDD politicians spearheaded by Nkurunziza's own spokesperson, Leonidas Hatungimana, signed a petition on 23 March 2015 demanding that the president abandon his third term ambitions.<sup>53</sup>

With his political future on the brink, Nkurunziza mounted a counter-attack by mobilising key loyalists in the security sector, most notably Nshimirimana and Bunyoni, who in turn mobilised the CNDD-FDD youth wing, the *Imbonerakure*, alongside the police against perceived internal and external challengers. Critically, Nkurunziza also managed to win over some critics (*généraux frondeurs*) who seemed less interested in the fate of the Arusha statebuilding

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<sup>51</sup> These frustrated generals included the chef de cabinet militaire at the presidency and current president, Major-General Évariste Ndayishimiye.

<sup>52</sup> Vandeginste, 'Legal Loopholes', p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Bouka and Wolters, 'The Battle for Burundi', p. 15.

framework than in their individual promotion.<sup>54</sup> Accusations that Rwanda was involved in fomenting opposition to Nkurunziza also helped mobilise supporters of the President. The threat of violence served to intimidate potential opponents.<sup>55</sup> In a matter of weeks by mid-April 2015, third-term critics inside the CNDD-FDD system had lost momentum as their leaders such as Léonidas Hatungimana and Jérémie Ngendakumana went into exile and others re-joined the Nkurunziza camp after asking to be pardoned.<sup>56</sup>

In a controversial decision, on 5 May 2015 the Constitutional Court ruled that Nkurunziza was eligible to run for a third term. The vice-president of the Court said that the decision was made under duress and sought refuge in neighbouring Rwanda.<sup>57</sup> With the legal pathway now cleared for Nkurunziza to run for a third term, ex-FDD elements in the security sector made a last attempt to stop him. On 13 May 2015, there was an attempted military coup launched by Major-General Godefroid Niyombare, supported by a mixed group of Hutu and Tutsi officers. However, the coup collapsed just two days later.<sup>58</sup>

Nkurunziza was eventually re-elected as President on 21 July 2015.<sup>59</sup> By then, the last overt critics among CNDD-FDD figures in the political sphere, Vice-President Gervais Rufyikiri and former President of the National Assembly Pie Ntavyohanyuma, had also gone into exile. To many, this signalled the final collapse of the liberal statebuilding vision underpinning the Arusha peace agreement.<sup>60</sup> This sealed the victory – at least temporarily – of those CNDD-FDD elites who had come to rely on force and the suppression of opposition and dissent, in favour of more authoritarian statebuilding. Other CNDD-FDD elites who continued to express more liberal ideals, often in support of the Arusha framework, were either silenced, imprisoned or displaced into exile.

The immediate aftermath of the 2015 elections was marked by a further deterioration of the security situation. On 2 August 2015 Lieutenant-General Adolphe Nshimirimana was assassinated. Several weeks later, the military chief-of-staff Prime Niyongabo narrowly escaped an assassination attempt.

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<sup>54</sup> An example is Etienne 'Steve' Ntakarutimana who succeeded Niyombare at the head of the SNR (national intelligence service) on 24 February 2015.

<sup>55</sup> The new party spokesperson Gélase Ndirakobuca publicly stated that the critics and signatories of the anti-third term petition would have been executed 'back in the maquis' (bush). Willy Nindorera 'Chronique d'une crise annoncée', in F Reyntjens, S Vandeginste and M Verpoorten, eds, *L'Afrique des grands lacs: Annuaire 2014-2015*, (Antwerp: University Press Antwerp, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Burihabwa, 'Continuity and Contingency'.

<sup>57</sup> Bouka and Wolters, 'The Battle for Burundi', p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> Nindorera, 'Chronique d'une crise annoncée', p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Vandeginste, 'Legal Loopholes', p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, VOA Afrique, 25 June 2015, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/avec-le-depart-de-gervais-rufyikiri-le-regime-burundais-est-il-en-crise/2836789.html>

Meanwhile, statements by exiled politicians suggested that an armed group led by Major-General Godefroid Niyombare was being established. Other ex-CNDD-FDD actors, including former Vice-President Gervais Rufyikiri, were at the heart of new opposition dynamics which led to the creation of the *Conseil National pour le Respect de l'Accord d'Arusha et de l'Etat de Droit au Burundi* (CNARED) in Addis Ababa in August 2015.

These did not constitute serious threats for the CNDD-FDD Government, but Nkurunziza and his loyalists learned several important lessons from the 2015 crisis. These included the need to further reinforce control over the CNDD-FDD party and to continue to collaborate with influential ex-FDD generals in the security sector. In March 2016, the CNDD-FDD leadership announced a country-wide 'verification campaign' of party organs. In August 2016, the CNDD-FDD held a party congress during which structural adjustments were introduced to centralize power.<sup>61</sup> The most momentous change was the appointment of Major-General Evariste Ndayishimiye as new Secretary-General of the party. Having been one of the critics (*généraux frondeurs*), he had since been rehabilitated as military chief of staff at the presidency. By placing a general at the helm of the political party, Nkurunziza had *de facto* formalized the politico-military 'CNDD-FDD system'.<sup>62</sup> Authoritarian practices continued, for instance in 2017 the Government imposed a contribution scheme on its citizens to fund the 2020 elections outside the formal tax system. In 2019 it shut down a human rights advocacy group operating in Burundi and arrested several independent journalists.

Despite the consolidation of increasingly authoritarian party and statebuilding strategies, tensions within the CNDD-FDD escalated in anticipation of the 2020 elections. Concerns about Nkurunziza's plan to run for office yet again were openly voiced amongst influential ex-FDD security actors. Following a party congress in March 2018 during which Nkurunziza was named 'eternal supreme guide' of the CNDD-FDD, a group of generals apparently urged the President not to stand for a fourth presidential term.<sup>63</sup> However, many were taken by surprise when the President declared he would not stand for re-election in 2020. This triggered a struggle for succession within the CNDD-FDD. Following tactical manoeuvring along a blurred fault line between pro- and anti-Nkurunziza camps throughout 2019, it was expected that the President of

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, the positions of party president and two vice presidents were abolished while the posts of Secretary-General and deputy Secretary-General were re-introduced. Furthermore, the *conseil des sages* was reduced to a symbolic nucleus of five members, to be headed by the president himself.

<sup>62</sup> At the same time, elevating Ndayishimiye to this crucial position was a gamble on the part of Nkurunziza, with subsequent consequences.

<sup>63</sup> A referendum on a constitutional amendment that extended presidential terms from 5 to 7 years was passed in May 2018.



the National Assembly, Pascal Nyabenda, would be nominated as CNDD-FDD presidential candidate ‘by the grace of Nkurunziza’.<sup>64</sup> However, a group of ex-FDD generals ultimately prevailed by mounting a determined effort on the eve of the historic party congress, which resulted in the election of Évariste Ndayishimiye as CNDD-FDD presidential candidate in January 2020.<sup>65</sup>

### **Post-war international statebuilding support**

Domestic power struggles and the internal politics of the CNDD-FDD therefore influenced Burundi’s post-war statebuilding trajectory. What about the role of international actors? As described above, international and regional actors had played a prominent role in facilitating and supporting the Arusha peace process, and many international agencies and donors remained engaged in Burundi after the 2005 elections.<sup>66</sup> Despite the expression of some concerns about the CNDD-FDD’s governance practices, regional integration in the East African Community (EAC) proceeded and international support to Burundi’s security sector continued. Burundi was a new troop contributing country in African and international peacekeeping operations, most notably AMISOM in Somalia.<sup>67</sup>

However, this did not prevent a steady deterioration of relations between the CNDD-FDD government and the United Nations as well as bilateral relations with a number of donor countries. Several international actors criticised the CNDD-FDD’s increasingly authoritarian governance, as well as the corruption, impunity, lack of accountability and clientelism that was shaping post-war Burundian statebuilding. The Burundian government accused the United Nations and donors of challenging its sovereignty and underestimating the strong legitimacy and support the CNDD-FDD enjoyed, especially amongst the rural population.<sup>68</sup> The CNDD-FDD leadership complained about the unequal

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<sup>64</sup> In seeking to consolidate control of the party by Nkurunziza loyalists, some of most influential of the ‘second-generation *généralistes*’, Silas Ntigurirwa and Etienne ‘Steve’ Ntakarutimana, were removed from their respective positions of permanent secretary of the national security council as well as head the SNR. Ntakarutimana was reassigned as adviser in the presidency while Ntigurirwa was named military attaché to China, a position he would never take up.

<sup>65</sup> Marie-France Cros, ‘Burundi : un futur Président « moins mauvais » que ses pairs mais faible’, *La Libre Afrique*, 28 April 2020; Filip Reyntjens, ‘A New Leader in the Wings for Burundi’, *Fair Observer*, 20 April 2020.

<sup>66</sup> The role of the region as an important factor in Burundi’s statebuilding trajectory is beyond the scope of this article, but regional geopolitical dynamics were important both in terms of influencing the strategies and decisions of key Burundian elites and also in influencing other international actors.

<sup>67</sup> Nina Wilén, David Ambrosetti and Gérard Birantamije, ‘Sending peacekeepers abroad, sharing power at home: Burundi in Somalia’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9, 2, 2015, pp. 307-325.

<sup>68</sup> Andrea Filipi and Katrin Wittig, ‘Assuming our place in the concert of nations: Burundi as imagined in Pierre Nkurunziza’s political speeches’, Forthcoming.

treatment of Rwanda in terms of development assistance and political support, despite authoritarian governance in Rwanda. Furthermore, international donors did not acknowledge the longer history of authoritarianism in Burundi, including pre-war patterns of governance.<sup>69</sup> As relations worsened and fewer international diplomats and aid representatives were welcomed in Burundi, the spiral continued as international actors lacked the proximity with which to understand and to meaningfully engage the Burundian regime, including its internal dynamics.

In the lead up to the 2015 electoral crisis, this inability to engage with the CNDD-FDD and its internal politics would prove detrimental. Many international actors focused their attention on the civil society and opposition-led protests in Burundi rather than seeking to respond sensitively to the complex alliances, motivations and power relations within the CNDD-FDD which would eventually prove to be the more relevant factors. International involvement was based on an overly simplistic framing of the CNDD-FDD as problematic and illiberal, paying insufficient attention to the growing group of *frondeurs* starting from late 2014. This framing does not capture the complexities and changing tendencies within both the opposition and the CNDD-FDD. Critically, international actors did not appreciate that certain elements within the CNDD-FDD, even among ex-FDD strongmen in the security sector, had views that were compatible with liberal forms of statebuilding.

Furthermore, this had been preceded by missed opportunities, for instance in 2011, to facilitate a solution to the debate over Nkurunziza's third mandate. International donors and diplomats vacillated between framing term limits as a matter of democracy and constitutionalism on the one hand, and adopting pragmatic positions based on political considerations on the other. This resulted in incoherent signals by international partners and enabled the Burundian government to play different external actors against one another.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, international actors themselves did not seem to be united in favour of fully supporting liberal statebuilding, and even those that were committed to supporting a more open political space were not able to find ways to support these ideas within the CNDD-FDD.

## Conclusions

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of pre-conflict authoritarian structures, see Katrin Wittig, 'Politics in the shadow of the gun: Revisiting the literature on 'rebel-to-party transformations through the case of Burundi', *Civil Wars*, 18(2), 2016; Ntagahoraho Z. Burihabwa and Devon E. A. Curtis, 'The Limits of Resistance Ideologies?'

<sup>70</sup> Stef Vandeginste, 'Legal Loopholes', p. 47.

The internationally-supported Burundian Arusha Agreement was intended to bring an end to the conflict and provide liberal pillars to a new era of Burundian post-war politics. The core principles underlying Arusha's statebuilding vision included ethnically-based power-sharing, inclusive liberal democracy, freedom of the media, assembly and association, and civilian control of security institutions. This marked a profound deviation from decades-long exclusive, authoritarian, military rule in Burundi. The CNDD-FDD's governance practices since 2005 have challenged some of these principles, and the leadership has forged a more authoritarian statebuilding path. This has happened at a time of profound, widespread global questioning of the values of multilateralism and of liberal democracy, and a disillusionment with post-war liberal statebuilding in many parts of the world. For some, the Burundian case adds to a body of evidence about the inappropriateness of liberal approaches to statebuilding in African countries emerging from conflict, and the inevitability of authoritarian control.

This article, however, has argued that these are the wrong conclusions to draw from the Burundian case. If statebuilding is flawed, it is not because of the mismatch between an international commitment to liberal principles, and local elites' rejection of these principles. The article has shown that there were a multitude of views, including liberal ones, within the CNDD-FDD. Following from this, there are three further observations that are relevant to other cases of countries emerging from conflict.

First, international actors are just as fractured and disjointed as domestic-level actors. In Burundi, many international donors were firmly committed to liberal statebuilding and some international peacebuilding projects were attentive to local accountability.<sup>71</sup> But this commitment was by no means universal, and many international actors tolerated low intensity violence and coercive governance practices, particularly if the veneer of liberal democratic governance was upheld.<sup>72</sup> Even during the peace negotiations in Arusha, liberal state-making was contested and the long-term cessation of hostilities was not a priority for everyone.<sup>73</sup> We are not seeing the 'end' to international liberal statebuilding, because it never fully existed in the first place. Thus, this article challenges some of the critical scholarship that sees statebuilding as an unwanted foreign imposition of liberal institutions, assumptions and imagined ends, but it also challenges liberal internationalists who believe that politics is malleable, knowable, and can be engineered in predictable ways. There should

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<sup>71</sup> Susanna Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> Curtis, 'The international peacebuilding paradox'; Julia Grauvogel, 'Burundi after the 2015 elections: A conference report', *Africa Spectrum*, 51: 2, 2016, pp. 3-14.

<sup>73</sup> Daley, 'The Burundi Peace Negotiations'.

be some scepticism of solutionist thinking that intervention X will lead to outcome Y, but this is not a call for international retreat. Instead, international action should be based upon greater humility and a recognition of the mutually constituted and historically positioned character of ideas, beliefs, and institutions. Understanding statebuilding means understanding a complex, intertwined, political terrain and acknowledging potential contradictions and cognitive dissonances while doing so.

Second, this article has re-focused attention on domestic politics at the elite level. While there has been a recent move in the peacebuilding literature away from statebuilding and towards advocating 'bottom-up' community approaches, this article shows the centrality of internal debates between elites *within* the ruling party. This is not to say that other actors, such as international donors and diplomats, the Burundian political opposition, and the wider Burundian public were insignificant. Other actors did influence the calculations and positions of CNDD-FDD elites, but the arc of Burundian politics was driven by divisions within the CNDD-FDD and contests over power and ideas. Thus, a clearer understanding of the ruling party and the motivations and alliances of key elites should be at the centre of understanding statebuilding. This, in itself, does not resolve the 'problem' of statebuilding. Indeed, both liberal and non-liberal forms of statebuilding rely upon forms of dominance over the population, albeit through different mechanisms of control.<sup>74</sup> To understand the history of dispossession in countries such as Burundi it is necessary to understand why people view sources of state and non-state authority with suspicion.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately though, this is a question of state-society relations, so the ideas and practices of domestic elites must be foregrounded and understood.

Third, Burundian politics is marked by a large number of cleavages that sometimes reinforce each other but are sometimes cross-cutting. These divisions eventually became subsumed and interpreted as a contest between those who were pro-Arusha (usually seen as international actors, the Burundian opposition, defectors from the CNDD-FDD) and those who were anti-Arusha (CNDD-FDD leadership). This reproduces other problematic binaries of good and bad, liberal and illiberal, moderate and hardliner. Yet these distinctions obscure more than they reveal. Views among different elites

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<sup>74</sup> This cannot be resolved by an appeal to 'local peacebuilding' since local peacebuilding programmes tend to be acknowledged and supported only when they reinforce and coexist with national statebuilding initiatives.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Uvin, *Life After Violence: A People's Story of Burundi*, (London: Zed Books, 2009), p. 173; Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka and Cécile Giraud, 'An anatomy of liberal peace from the case of land tenure in Burundi: Towards an intermedial perspective' *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, September 2020, doi:[10.1177/1542316620956934](https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620956934)

and among the broader population about Arusha changed depending on circumstances and over time. Indeed, some of the biggest defenders of Arusha in 2015 were Burundian politicians that had been opposed to Arusha in the early days of the peace process. Positions are not immutable, and Burundians' commitment to different ideas and practices of statebuilding also change according to circumstances and historical conditions. Yet the failure on the part of many international actors to understand the shifting internal politics of the CNDD-FDD led to counter-productive policies. Many international donors saw the CNDD-FDD as intransigent and failed to recognise the different alliances and views held by party elites. This made it difficult for international actors and some CNDD-FDD officials to work together in support of shared goals such as the improvement of conditions faced by rural Burundians and popular participation across the country.

Burundi has entered a new chapter of its post-war trajectory with the death of former President Nkurunziza in June 2020 and the inauguration of President Évariste Ndayishimiye. Many people point to the strength and resilience of the 'CNDD-FDD system' and believe that the statebuilding direction of the country will not change, notwithstanding the new leader, and that the trend towards a creeping authoritarianism will continue. However, it is too soon to make such a projection. The appointment of Guillaume Bunyoni – a close collaborator of the late Pierre Nkurunziza – as Prime Minister has widely been interpreted as proof of a tendency towards continuity. However, this choice may also reflect an attempt by the new President to distribute power between different CNDD-FDD factions to mitigate renewed internal crisis within the party. In any case, the change in leadership in the CNDD-FDD and the country in 2020 is a chance to reset relations. Power politics and relations of force will not disappear, but if international actors approach the CNDD-FDD with greater humility and a recognition of different views within the party, the prospects of more inclusive and accountable statebuilding trajectories are higher.

In all post-war countries, the creation and recreation of political orders involve a rich landscape of overlapping interests, ideas and institutions. Amid this landscape, we have shown that the internal politics of the ruling party are central. Deconstructing the messy black box of internal politics is difficult, and for international actors there may be the temptation to reach quick conclusions about 'good' people and 'bad' people or to imagine that liberal ideas can be transmitted from the West to the 'rest' through capacity-building workshops and institutions. A better starting point is a recognition of ideas, principles, visions and aspirations expressed by Burundians are just like ideas elsewhere: they have histories, they are contested, they can be fragile and contradictory and can change with circumstances, but they are also meaningful and consequential.