

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
AFRICA PROGRAM

Rwanda

ASSESSING RISKS TO STABILITY

Author

Jennifer G. Cooke

Project Directors

Jennifer G. Cooke

Richard Downie

June 2011



A REPORT OF THE CSIS
AFRICA PROGRAM

Rwanda

ASSESSING RISKS TO STABILITY

Author

Jennifer G. Cooke

Project Directors

Jennifer G. Cooke

Richard Downie

June 2011

About CSIS

At a time of new global opportunities and challenges, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) provides strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to decisionmakers in government, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society. A bipartisan, nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., CSIS conducts research and analysis and develops policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke at the height of the Cold War, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways for America to sustain its prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world.

Since 1962, CSIS has grown to become one of the world's preeminent international policy institutions, with more than 220 full-time staff and a large network of affiliated scholars focused on defense and security, regional stability, and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global development and economic integration.

Former U.S. senator Sam Nunn became chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in 1999, and John J. Hamre has led CSIS as its president and chief executive officer since 2000.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

Photo credit: Detailed vector map of Africa with border states, © iStockphoto.com/AVvector/
Andrea Venanzi.

© 2011 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-89206-636-0

Center for Strategic and International Studies
1800 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006
Tel: (202) 887-0200
Fax: (202) 775-3199
Web: www.csis.org



CONTENTS

An Introduction to the Series	v
Key Stress Points	1
Overview	1
Background	3
The Economy	4
The Consolidation of Ethnic Identities	5
The “Hutu Revolution” and the Habyarimana Regime	6
The Civil War and the 1994 Genocide	7
The Postconflict Transition and Entrenchment of RPF Preeminence	9
Vulnerabilities	11
Social Divisions	11
The Brittle Nature of the RPF Government	14
The Limits of Development without Competitive Politics	15
Regional Factors: The DRC	17
Potential Scenarios	17
Conclusion	19



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

This report is part of a series examining the risks of instability in 10 African countries over the next decade. The 10 papers are designed to be complementary but can also be read individually as self-standing country studies. An overview paper draws on common themes and explains the methodology underpinning the research. The project was commissioned by the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The recent upheavals and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa reinforce the value of taking a hard look at underlying social, economic, and political conditions that have the potential to trigger major change and instability. Few observers predicted the events that have unfolded with such speed in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya since the turn of 2011. But a close analysis of the underlying fault lines in those countries may have offered some clues, uncovering a range of possibilities that would have given U.S. policymakers a head start in framing responses and devising contingency plans. Similarly, an examination of political crises and conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, such as postelection violence in Kenya in 2007–2008 and the presidential standoff in Côte d’Ivoire in 2010–2011, uncovers patterns of behavior, common grievances, and social dynamics that can help inform assumptions about other countries on the continent. The purpose of these papers is to delve below the surface of day-to-day events and try to identify the underlying structural vulnerabilities and dynamics that help to drive and explain them.

The papers in this study are not meant to offer hard and fast predictions about the future. While they sketch out some potential scenarios for the next 10 years, these efforts should be treated as thought experiments that look at how different dynamics might converge to create the conditions for instability. The intention is not to single out countries believed to be at risk of impending disaster and make judgments about how they will collapse. Few, if any, of the countries in this series are at imminent risk of breakdown. All of them have coping mechanisms that militate against conflict, and discussions of potential “worst-case scenarios” have to be viewed with this qualification in mind.



Map No. SP17 Rev. 10 UNITED NATIONS
 June 2009

Department of Peace Support
 Cartographic Section



RWANDA

Jennifer G. Cooke¹

Key Stress Points

- The Rwandan government's inability to manage political competition within a democratic framework may ultimately radicalize opponents who have no legitimate means to challenge the regime. Mutual suspicion and fear along ethnic lines—the product of more than a century of state manipulation—abide. But new coalitions that are united in opposition to the current ruling party may also emerge.
- The government's strategy of “development without politics,” on which it has staked its domestic and international legitimacy, has important limitations, leaving the cornerstone of the country's fragile social compact vulnerable to economic shocks, possible setbacks, and growing economic inequality.
- Rwanda's continued interests and involvement in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo could have destabilizing effects, both in that country and within Rwanda.

Overview

Seventeen years after the 1994 civil war and genocide, Rwanda is apparently stable, posting consistently strong economic growth rates and managing the country's considerable development assistance revenues effectively and transparently. Crime rates are low, the capital Kigali is remarkable for its orderliness, and the government's expressed vision of national reconciliation through development and service delivery has won accolades from the international community. President Paul Kagame, who has been credited with bringing an end to the genocide and restoring order, is an erudite and persuasive man, who has cultivated strong global allies, including within successive U.S. administrations. But the country's apparent stability masks deep-rooted tensions, unresolved resentments, and an authoritarian government that is unwilling to countenance criticism or open political debate. International partners have largely refrained from pressing the government on

...the country's apparent stability masks deep-rooted tensions, unresolved resentments, and an authoritarian government that is unwilling to countenance criticism or open political debate.

1. Jennifer G. Cooke is director of the CSIS Africa Program. This study was based on desktop research and extensive interviews in Washington and in Rwanda. The author traveled to Rwanda in February 2011.

opening political space, in part for fear of reopening the political and social fissures that have fueled violence in the past, and in part because of a legacy of guilt for failing to prevent or adequately respond to the genocide. Economic growth and service delivery, it is argued, are more important for stability and reconciliation in Rwanda at present than an overweening focus on political competition or an insistence on “Western-style” human rights.

Given Rwanda’s long history of increasingly rigid social divisions, its recurrent paroxysms of violence since independence, and the profound national trauma of the 1994 civil war and genocide, there is an understandable tendency to emphasize the country’s economic successes rather than its political shortcomings. Yet there is a real risk that, if left unaddressed, those shortcomings could exacerbate tensions and ultimately drive broader instability. Given the country’s past, instability could escalate very quickly and could potentially be very violent.

In the coming decade, the greatest vulnerability that Rwanda will confront is the unyielding nature of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its inability—or unwillingness—to allow and manage genuine political competition and debate. Although the RPF’s political strategy has been ostensibly undertaken to foster stability and reconciliation, it may ultimately radicalize op-

Although Rwanda’s economic performance has been impressive, demands for political change will likely outstrip the stabilizing or conciliating effect of economic growth, which itself will be inhibited by the country’s size and resource base and is vulnerable to exogenous shocks.

ponents, who will find other means to challenge the regime if open political discourse is not an option. Opposition could coalesce in a number of ways. After having been cultivated by successive leaders for more than a century, the Hutu/Tutsi divide abides, and mutual fear and suspicion, if not openly expressed, are still present. Many view the RPF as an essentially Tutsi government, made up of a fairly narrow segment of Tutsi at that, with its principal power brokers drawn largely from anglophone RPF loyalists who had lived in exile in Uganda before 1994. Since the RPF’s

accession to power, successive waves of defections by senior political leaders indicate a narrowing of political support for President Kagame and the RPF within the political elite. Defections have spanned ethnic and party divides and have included moderate Hutus, Tutsi survivors, and, most recently former close comrades of Kagame himself.

President Kagame and the ruling RPF are evidently aware of these vulnerabilities and the fragility of the party’s control. Criticism of the country’s leadership is met with a level of outrage and vehemence that belie the RPF’s seeming confidence in its near-universal popularity among Rwandans. But the government’s heavy-handed reactions to criticism may in fact exacerbate its vulnerability and ultimately create a self-fulfilling prophecy that makes political liberalization all the more difficult. National institutions of countervailing power—the legislature, the judiciary, the media, and a politically active civil society—are very much constrained under RPF control and are thus unable to fulfill their potentially stabilizing role as formal channels for national debate and peaceful political competition.

An additional vulnerability is the limitations inherent in the “development without politics” model, on which the RPF government has staked its domestic and international legitimacy. Although Rwanda’s economic performance has been impressive, demands for political change

will likely outstrip the stabilizing or conciliating effect of economic growth, which itself will be inhibited by the country's size and resource base and is vulnerable to exogenous shocks. Continued political repression may discourage donor funding, and the government's top-down policies of economic management and social engineering may alienate rural populations.

Finally, something of a wild card will be Rwanda's relationship with the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the RPF has significant interests and influence. In the long run, tapping into the DRC's enormous market potential could be a massive boon for Rwanda's economic future. But in the near term, finding accommodation on issues of security, sovereignty, and self-interest may threaten the current rapprochement between Kigali and Kinshasa, with potentially destabilizing effects.

It is frightening to contemplate a return to violent conflict in Rwanda. Rwandan citizens—and indeed the world—remain traumatized by the horror of the 1994 genocide. But Rwanda's well-wishers should not ignore troubling signs of increasing inflexibility and potential fragility. Although the country is currently calm and orderly, its stability could be put at risk by political repression, a narrowing of the ruling party's base, and a failure to address deep-seated grievances openly and equitably.

Although the country is currently calm and orderly, its stability could be put at risk by political repression, a narrowing of the ruling party's base, and a failure to address deep-seated grievances openly and equitably.

Rwanda At a Glance

GDP per capita	\$1,100 (2010 estimate)
Unemployment	Not available
Life expectancy	58.02 years (2011 estimate)
Population	11,370,425 (July 2011 estimate)
Population growth rate	2.792% (2011 estimate)
Median age	18.7 years (2011 estimate)
Urban population	19% of total population (2010 estimate)
Urbanization rate	4.4% annually (2010–2015 estimate)
HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate	2.9% (2009 estimate)
Literacy rate	70.4% (2003 estimate)

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2011* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2011).

Background

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country, approximately the size of the state of Maryland. It is among the poorest nations in sub-Saharan Africa and is the most densely populated. Its population of

11.4 million comprises two main ethnic groups—Tutsi (about 14 percent), and Hutu (about 85 percent)—and a small minority, the Twa (1 percent). An estimated 81 percent of the population lives in rural areas.

The Economy

Rwanda lacks significant natural resources, and more than 85 percent of its labor force is engaged in subsistence farming. Coffee and tea are its primary exports. Land is extremely scarce. With population growth, farm sizes are shrinking; about 30 percent of households eke out a living on less than half an acre. The country relies heavily on donor assistance, which makes up some 50 percent of the government's budget. The economy is highly vulnerable to external shocks, including rises in the costs of essential commodities, especially fuel.

Despite major structural challenges, the economy has grown at impressive rates in recent years (albeit from a very low base), with an average annual growth rate of 6 percent between 1995 and 2004 and 7.3 percent since 2004. The Rwandan government has proved capable, strategic, and adept at attracting increasing levels of international investment. It has launched an ambitious growth strategy, aiming to modernize and diversify the economy, generate off-farm employment, and make Rwanda a middle-income country by 2020. Key to this strategy is investment in the service sector, and the government aspires to become a regional hub for information and communications technology. Equally important is the drive for regional integration; Rwanda joined the Common Market for East and Southern Africa in 2004 and the East African Community in 2007.

There is considerable concern...that the country's economic growth is failing to benefit its poorest citizens and that population growth will outstrip economic gains.

In agriculture, the government aims to maximize productivity and efficiency through two key strategies. The first is its encouragement of monocropping and crop regionalization—that is, pushing farmers in a particular region to cultivate a particular crop that has been deemed best suited to that particular area. The second, the policy of *imidugudu*, is

essentially a villagization plan that relocates rural farmers to designated communal areas, with the aim of maximizing the efficient use of scarce arable land and facilitating service provision for rural citizens.

Rwanda has made important strides in several social sectors—including the provision of education and health. There is considerable concern, however, that the country's economic growth is failing to benefit its poorest citizens and that population growth will outstrip economic gains. According to the most recent UN National Development Report for Rwanda, the country's high growth rates hide large and growing inequalities, and benefits have largely bypassed the rural poor.² The report warns that with rising inequality, Rwanda could soon exhaust its ability to reduce poverty rates through economic growth alone.

2. UN Development Program, *Turning Vision 2020 into Reality: From Recovery to Sustainable Human Development*, UN National Development Report for Rwanda (Kigali: UN Development Program, 2007), http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/national/africa/rwanda/RWANDA_2007_en.pdf.

The Consolidation of Ethnic Identities

The divisions that fueled the brutal massacres of Rwanda's early postindependence years and the genocide of April 1994 were neither the product of ancient "tribal" hatreds nor simply the outcome of colonial manipulations. The consolidation of ethnic identity and class divisions in Rwanda intensified in the mid-1800s with the reign of Kigeli Rwabugiri, then king of the Rwandan monarchy. The kingdom originated in the sixteenth century in a Tutsi clan of eastern Rwanda and expanded very gradually westward over several centuries. Rwabugiri, who reigned from 1860 to 1895, accelerated this expansion and centralized the monarchy's authority over what had formerly been autonomous local lineages that encompassed both Hutu and Tutsi. Although there was some fluidity across both class and ethnic lines during this period, Rwabugiri established a number of patron–client practices that deepened economic differences and consolidated land, cattle, and political power in the hands of Tutsi elites. Many of these measures applied to poor Tutsi and Hutus alike, but the forced labor system (*uburetwa*), from which all Tutsi were exempt, intensified cleavages along ethnic lines.³ Although there was little violence under the monarchy along class or ethnic lines (rivalries within the elite class were often bloody, however), the system was basically a mechanism of exploitation and control and began to cement economic stratification and social identities along ethnic lines.

The divisions that fueled the brutal massacres of Rwanda's early postindependence years and the genocide of April 1994 were neither the product of ancient "tribal" hatreds nor simply the outcome of colonial manipulations.

Colonial rule deepened and rigidified these distinctions. When Europeans first came to Rwanda in the late nineteenth century, they found a highly structured, centralized state, led by a Tutsi monarch whose authority extended throughout much of present-day Rwanda. Notably, a number of lineages in northern Rwanda were conquered only with the help of colonial forces, accounting to some extent for a persistent North/South fissure that has played out in postindependence intra-Hutu power struggles. Colonial administrators—first German, and after World War I, Belgian—were "smitten" with the Tutsi, deeming them a superior race more fit for leadership.⁴ The Belgian colonial rulers used Tutsi power structures to govern, removing Hutu from virtually all positions of authority and excluding them from access to higher education. In the 1930s, the Belgian authorities issued ethnic identity cards that classified every Rwandan as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa, formalizing racial difference and putting an end to any remaining fluidity among the ethnic groups. Race, not class, became the principal political and social classification, and ethnic solidarity and consciousness intensified. The ruling elite embraced these changes, while Hutu of all classes, having been excluded from power, "began to experience the solidarity of the oppressed."⁵

3. Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival, and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

4. Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

5. Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 35.

The “Hutu Revolution” and the Habyarimana Regime

Belgium continued to support the Tutsi elite until just before independence when, under increasing pressure from elements within the Church hierarchy, the United Nations, and broader prodemocracy forces, it began to swing toward greater Hutu participation in public life. Moderate, progressive elements among both the Hutu and Tutsi, which offered some hope for prodemocracy, cross-ethnic alliances, were quickly sidelined as parties formed along ethnic lines. Key among these parties were the elite Tutsi-led, Union National Rwandais (UNAR) and the Hutu-led Parti du Mouvement et de L’Emancipation Hutu (Parmehutu). UNAR pressed for immediate independence, and in response, Belgium quickly swung its full support to the new Hutu coalition, replacing the remaining Tutsi civil servants with Hutu ones. The dramatic reversal of political fortunes that ensued came to be known as the “Hutu Revolution.” Rwanda gained its independence in July 1962, with Parmehutu firmly in control.

Resentment against Hutu preeminence and the new Hutu elites’ determination to consolidate control set off a prolonged period of episodic massacres—in 1959, 1963, and 1967—violent gusts that became known as *muyaga*, “the wind.”⁶ By 1967, these successive rounds of violence had left

The pervasiveness of state structures, the degree of social control, and the insistence on obedience to the regime ultimately play a part in explaining the ruthless efficiency of the 1994 genocide, which left 800,000 dead in just 100 days.

about 20,000 Tutsi dead and 300,000 exiled in neighboring Uganda, Burundi, and the DRC, from where militarized elements launched periodic cross-border attacks. The new postindependence government of President Grégoire Kayibanda outlawed Tutsi opposition parties and used the exiles’ attacks to foment anti-Tutsi sentiment and promote Hutu solidarity as intra-Hutu divisions challenged the president’s authority.⁷ The government was increasingly indiscriminate in its responses to the exiles’ attacks, and Tutsi who remained in

Rwanda paid the heaviest toll. Meanwhile, the international community was largely silent on the regime’s predations.

In 1973, General Juvenal Habyarimana, then head of the army, ousted Kayibanda’s regime in a coup. Habyarimana represented northern-based Hutu constituencies, which increasingly resented Kayibanda’s evident favoritism toward his home base in southern Rwanda. Habyarimana created the Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie et le Développement (MRND), and changed the Constitution to make Rwanda officially a one-party state. The MRND was “truly a totalitarian party,”⁸ with every Rwandan citizen a member and party structures extending from national level down through prefectures, communes, sectors, and cells (the last consisting of approximately 1,000 people).

6. Joseph Sebarenzi, *God Sleeps in Rwanda* (New York: Atria Books, 2009). Sebarenzi describes the nature of the violence: “It would come suddenly and forcefully and then, just as suddenly as it came, it would stop. Those who were killed were gone, and those who survived would continue to live with their persecutors as if nothing had happened.”

7. Kayibanda and much of Parmehutu’s leadership were largely southern-based. Kayibanda’s successor, General Habyarimana, came from the northwest of the country, and among the impetuses for the 1973 military coup was Parmehutu’s evident favoritism to the southern-based Hutu.

8. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*.

The pervasiveness of state structures, the degree of social control, and the insistence on obedience to the regime ultimately play a part in explaining the ruthless efficiency of the 1994 genocide, which left 800,000 dead in just 100 days. But for the first decade at least, the Habyarimana government was seen by the outside world as delivering a level of relative stability and strong economic performance, ensuring clean streets and a low crime rate, and making good use of donor assistance. Tutsi were still victims of institutional discrimination, but, as Gérard Prunier notes, they were generally left in peace as long as they stayed out of politics.⁹ The MRND regime propounded an ideology of “development without politics,”¹⁰ which, after the *muyaga* of the Kayibanda regime, the international donor community wholeheartedly embraced. Donor assistance accounted for a major proportion of government financing. Despite the exclusion of Tutsi from higher office, increasing signs of authoritarian repression and violence, and a growing income disparity between Hutu and Tutsi and between southern and northern Hutu—with a heavy bias toward Hutu (and specifically Hutu from Habyarimana’s northwestern home region)—Rwanda was seen by the outside world as a “model” development partner.

The Civil War and the 1994 Genocide

There can be no single explanation for the horrific levels of violence perpetrated in the 1994 genocide. But a number of factors coalesced in the late 1980s, intersecting with the deepening fear and mutual suspicion that had been fostered by successive administrations. In 1989, a 50 percent drop in international coffee prices hit Rwandan coffee producers and the country’s foreign exchange earnings hard. This economic crisis was compounded by drought and food shortages, and also by donor demands for austerity and structural adjustment programs. The national budget was cut by 40 percent in 1989, and the government adapted by slashing expenditures on critically needed social services.¹¹ These developments left ordinary Rwandans vulnerable and angry and made the Habyarimana regime increasingly desperate to shore up dwindling political support as it fought off challenges emanating from southern-based Hutus and mounting domestic calls for reform. Growing pressures from external donors to democratize further fueled the government’s sense of insecurity. In 1991, Habyarimana acceded to pressures for multipartyism, and in short order a raft of new parties sprang up. But by that time the whole political process was playing out in the midst of civil war.

In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launched its first cross-border attack into Rwanda, the start of the Rwandan civil war. The RPF was largely made up of second-generation Tutsi refugees based in Uganda and numbered about 4,000. It had gained considerable battle experience fighting alongside Yoweri Museveni, now president of Uganda, in his bush war against the erstwhile Ugandan regime of Milton Obote. Habyarimana saw the RPF incursion as both a risk—in that it could embolden domestic opponents and reformists—and an opportunity—to rally increasingly divided Hutu factions to confront the threat of the Tutsi “invaders,” and, under the pretext of war, to eliminate domestic challengers to the regime. Although the government initially targeted all opposition figures, the “enemy” eventually was defined by the regime as all Tutsi, who regardless of their connection to the RPF were seen as RPF collaborators. Any Rwandan (Hutu included) who “knowingly or unknowingly aided the enemy under the cover of political party

9. Ibid., 76.

10. Alex DeWaal, quoted by Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*.

11. Prunier, *Rwanda Crisis*, 87.

activities” was considered fair game.¹² The war saw a long series of massacres against Tutsi and moderate Hutus, ordered by Kigali and directed by local administrators. Fear and hatred of Tutsis and their “collaborators” were amplified by a burgeoning media propaganda machine, to which Habyarimana gave free rein. In all this, the government enjoyed the continued and uncritical support of the French military.

In 1993, strapped for cash and under intense international pressure, the Habyarimana government signed the Arusha Peace Agreement, which aimed to establish a broad-based transitional government—to include the RPF, the MRND, and other opposition parties. There are strong doubts about whether Habyarimana ever intended fully to implement the Arusha Accords, but anti-Tutsi hard-liners and military officers fearing demobilization were fiercely opposed and accelerated their campaign of “self-defense” against a return to Tutsi dominance. The assassination of moderate Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye in neighboring Burundi in October 1993 was a further catalyst, exploited by opponents of the Arusha Accords as further evidence of Tutsi iniquity. Ndadaye’s death triggered civil war in Burundi. In Rwanda, it was used to consolidate the concept of “Hutu Power” and ramp up training and arming of “civilian self-defense” units throughout the country.

The multiple warning signs in late 1993 and early 1994 of an impending catastrophe are well documented.¹³ Equally well known is the failure of the international community to heed these indicators or pleas from Belgium and the UN commander on the ground for more support, an accelerated deployment of troops, and a stronger peacekeeping mandate. In fact, these pleas were actively thwarted by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Habyarimana was killed on April 6, 1994, when the plane he shared with the new Burundian president, Cyprien Ntaryami-ra, and others was shot down over Kigali.¹⁴

Habyarimana’s death was a trigger, but the ground for genocide had been well prepared. Prominent Hutu and Tutsi opposition figures were the initial targets. But goaded by political leadership and the media, the killing quickly expanded with an intensified focus on Tutsi elimination. “Self-defense” units were quickly and efficiently mobilized by local hard-line Hutu authorities throughout the country. As the killings continued, the RPF reengaged from Uganda, and a conventional war played out alongside the expanding genocide campaign. When the RPF, led by General Paul Kagame, eventually reached Kigali in July 1994, about 800,000 Tutsi and “moderate” Hutu had been killed by militias, government forces, and civilians, acting at the behest of the MRND and Hutu Power leadership. In taking Kigali, the RPF ended the genocide.

As they sought to consolidate control in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, RPF forces themselves engaged in massive violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, with systematic killings and widespread massacres of unarmed noncombatants, including women and children. An investigation team commissioned by the UN High Commission for Refugees reportedly estimated that between April and August 1994, the RPF killed 30,000 people, many of whom were innocent of any engagement in the genocide.¹⁵ Under pressure from the Rwandan

12. This is from a press release issued by the Rwandan army in December 1991, quoted by Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell*.

13. See Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 143–172.

14. Responsibility for the downing of the plane remains unclear. Allegations abound, and the issue remains highly sensitive and controversial.

15. The report was not made public, although an opposition Web site has posted what it claims is a summary presented to the UN panel of experts, available at http://rwandainfo.com/documents/Gersony_Re-

government, the UN ultimately suppressed the report, and the RPF has vehemently condemned this and other independent efforts to shed light on RPF war crimes committed in the aftermath of the genocide. Independent studies also allege widespread war crimes by the RPF in the eastern DRC, as forces hunted down and killed both *génocidaires* and innocent Hutu refugees. These reports, including the recently released 2010 UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights' Mapping Report, have been denounced by the Rwandan government as misinformed and malicious.¹⁶

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has largely skirted—or been forced by the Rwandan government to abandon—investigations and prosecution of RPF war crimes. Similarly, the traditionally inspired *gacaca* court system, set up by the government to process the many thousands implicated in the genocide and provide some measure of justice and community reconciliation, addresses only those crimes committed during the genocide and excludes RPF crimes committed in the genocide's aftermath. The issue of RPF war crimes is highlighted in this report not to obscure or draw parallels to the scope or extreme horror of the 1994 genocide. But the RPF's refusal to acknowledge the extent of those crimes—and its suppression of independent investigations and reporting—is a source of deep and enduring resentment among many Rwandans. Among Hutu who played no part in the genocide, it fuels a sense that the government and justice system accord less value to innocent Hutu lives lost than those of Tutsi.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has largely skirted—or been forced by the Rwandan government to abandon—investigations and prosecution of RPF war crimes.

The Postconflict Transition and Entrenchment of RPF Preeminence

On coming to power in 1994, the RPF created an ostensible coalition government, based loosely on the power-sharing arrangements envisioned in the 1993 Arusha Accords. Cabinet posts were distributed among the RPF and opposition parties, excluding the MRND and other extremist parties. Faustin Twagiramungu, the Hutu leader of the Movement Démocratique Républicain, (MDR), was named prime minister; and Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu member of the RPF, was named president.¹⁷ Kagame became vice president and minister of defense, although he is widely acknowledged to have been the government's de facto leader throughout the transition period.

port.pdf. Although the summary puts estimated killings at 10,000 to 15,000, according to Des Forges, Gersony himself reportedly estimated that during the months from April to August the RPF had killed between 25,000 and 45,000 persons, between 5,000 and 10,000 persons each month from April through July and 5,000 in the month of August.

16. UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, "Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1993–2003: Report of the Mapping Exercise Documenting the Most Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed Within the Territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003," August 2010, http://www.ohchr.org/socuments/countries/zr/drc_mapping_report_final_en.pdf.

17. The MDR was founded in 1991, in opposition to the Habyarimana government.

The coalition government's facade of inclusivity began very quickly to unravel after 1994. Prime Minister Twagirimungu resigned in 1995, along with four other senior Hutu ministers, complaining of having been marginalized by Kagame and his loyalists. Twagirimungu and RPF interior minister Seth Sendashonga fled to Uganda. Sendashonga was attacked in Nairobi in 1996 and was eventually assassinated in 1998. A wave of judges, senior civil servants, diplomats, journalists, and civil society leaders also departed, most to the safety of exile. In the space of three months in early 2000, the president, the prime minister, and the National Assembly speaker were all forced to resign amid allegations of corruption or divisionism. President Bizimungu went on to found an opposition party (which was promptly banned), and he and the party's cofounder were subsequently sentenced to 15 years in prison for inciting violence and divisionism. National Assembly speaker Joseph Seberenzi, a Tutsi survivor who had pressed Kagame to respect the independence of the legislature, fled the country in fear for his life, having been accused (with no supporting evidence) of corruption and, oddly, of seeking to restore the authority of the Rwandan monarchy.

Kagame replaced Bizimungu as president in March 2000, with elections slated for 2003. His most formidable opponent, Twagirimungu, returned to run against him, but his MDR party was outlawed, having been accused of trying to divide the country. Dozens of MDR supporters were arrested, threatened, or "disappeared." With no legal opposition to speak of, Kagame was elected in 2003 to a seven-year presidential term with 95.5 percent of the vote. The party won an overwhelming majority of seats in the legislature as well, although the remaining non-RPF "opposition" parties in Parliament are largely supportive of President

Despite their overwhelming electoral victory and claims of near universal popular support, Kagame and the RPF have continued to stifle any possibility of genuine political opposition.

Kagame and have never sought to fundamentally challenge the RPF's strategy or political monopoly.

Despite their overwhelming electoral victory and claims of near universal popular support, Kagame and the RPF have continued to stifle any possibility of genuine political opposition. In the period leading up to the 2010 election, key opposition parties were outlawed or prevented from registering, and their leaderships were arrested on charges including divisionism, promoting genocide ideology, and threatening national security. André Rwisekera, an RPF defector who had joined the leadership of an opposition party, was killed by unknown assassins less than a month before the election. Along with opposition party supporters, many journalists and editors were arrested and imprisoned on charges of promoting genocide ideology or incitement to violence.¹⁸ In August 2010, Kagame again won an overwhelming 93 percent of the votes cast.

Since 1994, the political opposition in Rwanda has never posed a real threat to the RPF's monopoly. It has been efficiently suppressed; its leadership has been imprisoned, killed, or forced into exile; and potential domestic supporters have become cowed and quiescent. Much more dangerous for the RPF core leadership have been the increasing challenges to Kagame from within the RPF, and in particular from the inner cohort of senior leaders who fought alongside him in Uganda and in the Rwandan civil war. Schisms began to appear during the transition period, but more

18. For a chronology of preelection incidents, see Human Rights Watch, "Rwanda: Silencing Dissent Ahead of Elections," August 2, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/02/rwanda-attacks-freedom-expression-freedom-association-and-freedom-assembly-run-presi>

recent events suggest a fraying consensus within the top leadership. Recent defections include four powerful, high-profile members of the RPF inner circle—General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, former chief of staff of the Rwandan army and a close confidant of Kagame; Colonel Patrick Karegeya, former head of Military Intelligence; Gerald Gahima, former chief prosecutor; and Théogène Rudasingwa, former secretary general of the RPF. In 2010 these four defectors released a scathing critique, decrying Kagame’s ruthless authoritarianism and describing a state apparatus controlled by a small clique of loyalists drawn exclusively from the Tutsi minority group. Kayumba and Rudasingwa were subsequently convicted in absentia to 24 years imprisonment, and Gahima and Karegeya to 20 years. Kayumba was critically wounded in an assassination attempt in South Africa, which the South African government initially linked to Rwandan intelligence operatives.

Vulnerabilities

At present, the RPF remains in firm control, and a dramatic break or political crisis does not appear imminent. The state has a robust and pervasive security and intelligence apparatus; internal opposition is effectively suppressed; and the diaspora opposition remains divided and nascent. There is no question that for many Rwandans, with the civil war and genocide still very much in memory, the stability and modicum of economic security that the country now enjoys is not worth putting at risk. Competitive “democracy” is associated by many with the introduction of multipartyism in the early 1990s, which opened the door to the mobilization of ethnic extremists and a “free” press that actually became a facilitator of genocide. The government is competent and capable, and its success in maintaining stability and driving economic recovery has drawn widespread praise. A short-term visitor to the country comes away with a sense that many within its leadership ranks are genuinely committed to a vision of social transformation, a Rwandan citizenry united by economic progress and able to overcome the traumatic divisions of the past.

There is no question that for many Rwandans, with the civil war and genocide still very much in memory, the stability and modicum of economic security that the country now enjoys is not worth putting at risk.

One also gets a sense, however, that in its moral certitude about its vision and authority, the government leadership fails to adequately acknowledge or account for competing views of who should govern Rwanda, and how. As the country moves away from the genocide, these competing views will likely mount and become more insistent, but as yet the RPF government has shown little indication of how it will manage this competition without resorting to violence or coercion. National institutions of countervailing power—an independent legislature and judiciary, the media, and politically active civil society groups—are very much constrained under RPF control and are thus unable to fulfill their potentially stabilizing role as formal channels for national debate and peaceful political competition. Thus, as the vulnerabilities outlined in the following paragraphs suggest, there are important reasons for concern.

Social Divisions

Underlying Rwanda’s vulnerability in the coming decade will be the enduring legacy of mutual fear and suspicion between Hutu and Tutsi. For Tutsi, memories of the massacres of the early

postindependence years, the forced exile of hundreds of thousands into neighboring countries, and the predations of successive Hutu-led regimes remain very much alive. The 1994 genocide is the cornerstone of the country’s national narrative—commemorated by countless ceremonies and memorials, revived in the *gacaca* truth and justice process, and persistently evoked in political discourse. Most interviews with government officials about Rwanda’s political future begin with a discussion of the genocide and the deep trauma and psychological scars it inflicted. The memory of Hutu Power, the hateful vitriol against Tutsi that spewed from both the media and political leadership, and the willful indifference of the international community to signs of impending catastrophe and the genocide itself will not easily be forgotten. Today, some Tutsi see the RPF government as a bulwark against Hutu domination. Because Tutsi constitute a relatively small ethnic minority—14 percent of the population, to the Hutus’ 85 percent—there is understandable apprehension that a full-fledged opening up of political space would lead, at best, to Tutsi marginalization, and at worst to the racist violence and oppression of previous regimes. The government’s continual evocation of the genocide, which was officially renamed the “1994 Tutsi Genocide,” is an effective way to keep this fear alive, and thus sustain both Tutsi and international support.

For Hutu, there is long-standing resentment of the inferior social status that colonial and Tutsi administrators sought to impose on them and a corollary resentment of perceived Tutsi elitism. Today, there is a strong perception that the current government is essentially a “Tutsi” govern-

Today, there is a strong perception that the current government is essentially a “Tutsi” government, that the key positions of power in military and civilian institutions are held by Tutsi, and that public benefits tend to favor Tutsi over Hutu.

ment, that the key positions of power in military and civilian institutions are held by Tutsi, and that public benefits tend to favor Tutsi over Hutu. The government denies these allegations and says that political appointments, military recruitment, and civil service jobs are allocated without reference to ethnicity but instead on the basis of competence and—in political appointments at least—commitment to the vision of consensus democracy and development that the government has laid out. But because the government has prohib-

ited ethnic identification in the public arena, there is no way to independently verify and publicly account for whether there is a reasonably equitable balance or whether there is intentional or unintentional favoritism in the allocation of benefits. In the absence of hard data, the perception of ethnicization remains.

There is also resentment fueled by the perception that victor’s justice—and the victor’s account of history—has prevailed. Some have argued that the government places less value on the lives of the many moderate Hutu who died in the genocide. The term “Tutsi genocide” implies, in the minds of some observers, that Tutsi were the only legitimate victims of the genocide, and to others, that non-Tutsis were therefore collectively responsible.

The issue of war crimes committed against Hutu by the RPF in Rwanda and the eastern DRC is hugely sensitive and politically charged. These crimes are excluded from the proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the *gacaca* process, and any independent reporting or analysis is met with furious indignation by the Rwandan government. For instance, the Hutu opposition leader Victoire Ingabire was charged and imprisoned for “genocide denial” and incitement to violence when she raised the issue on a visit to the Genocide Memorial Museum in

Kigali. Given the hate propaganda that helped drive the genocide, the government is understandably wary of ethnic hate speech. But because the RPF controls all mechanisms of the state, including the judiciary, there is no broadly credible independent adjudicator to determine what constitutes genuine divisionist speech or “genocide denial” versus legitimate debate. The accusation is used liberally by the RPF to suppress a wide range of speech that is deemed critical of the government. There is thus no outlet to diffuse the sense of injustice that a large segment of the population may feel. Although the number of RPF killings comes nowhere near that of the genocide, this issue is highlighted here because it has the potential to become a rallying point for broader Hutu feelings of exclusion or marginalization.

There is considerable debate as to whether the *gacaca* process has had an effective reconciliatory impact on Rwandan communities. *Gacaca* drew inspiration from traditional community-based courts, reconfigured to try the many thousands of Hutus who stood accused of involvement in the genocide, and whom the formal court system had no prospect of prosecuting in a reasonable amount of time. The sheer number of individuals involved in the genocide made any aspiration to perfect justice impossible, and *gacaca* was intended to speed up the process, shed some light on what happened, and bring perpetrators to justice. Since 2005, about 12,000 *gacaca* courts have adjudicated more than 1.2 million cases. The longer-term impact of *gacaca* is as yet unknown, but there are some concerns that the process may have reinforced the notion of collective guilt and inequitable justice on Hutu. Concerns have been raised that defendants (all Hutu) were not given adequate legal protections; that untrained judges may not have been entirely impartial or free from political influence; and that without robust rules of evidence, accusations of involvement were occasionally used to settle personal disputes.¹⁹ Compounding this perception of judicial imbalance has been the exclusion from *gacaca*, as noted above, of crimes committed by the RPF against innocent Hutu.

Since the genocide, there have been multiple allegations of land seizures by returning Tutsi or extralegal allocations of large tracts of land to government officials or their supporters.

Land tenure is another stressor, common to many postconflict states, particularly those with large populations of internally displaced persons or refugees. In Rwanda, tenure of scarce arable land has been used by the political elite to punish or reward since the early days of collusion between the monarch and colonial administrators. The postindependence regime redistributed land that had been vacated by the many thousands of Tutsi who had been killed or displaced by the *muyaga*. Since the genocide, there have been multiple allegations of land seizures by returning Tutsi or extralegal allocations of large tracts of land to government officials or their supporters. Many thousands of Hutus returning from exile have found themselves dispossessed, and the many competing needs of returnees, survivors, orphans, and widows, along with a government restriction on subdivisions smaller than 1 hectare, will exacerbate the political sensitivities that surround land reform. It is unlikely that generation of off-farm employment can keep up with—much less exceed—the country’s population growth.

19. Human Rights Watch, *Justice Compromised: The Legacy of Rwanda’s Community-Based Gacaca Courts* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The Brittle Nature of the RPF Government

Among the greatest vulnerabilities that Rwanda will confront in the coming decade is the unyielding nature and occasionally brutal tactics of the RPF. Without exception, prominent critics of the RPF are now dead, in prison, or living in exile. Although domestic “opposition” parties can critique certain policies and programs, there is no possibility of more fundamental debate on how the government deals with issues of accountability, ethnic equity, or state legitimacy. The government’s absolute suppression of dissent ultimately adds to its own fragility and thus makes even a

gradual opening of political space increasingly difficult. The multiple waves of defections from the RPF have included centrist Hutu politicians, who felt marginalized in a largely Tutsi-led government; Tutsi survivors, who felt marginalized by the clique of anglophone Ugandan returnees who make up the inner core of the RPF; and most recently, by some elements of the RPF inner core, who feel marginalized by the power and influence of the

The government’s absolute suppression of dissent ultimately adds to its own fragility and thus makes even a gradual opening of political space increasingly difficult.

president himself. These defections indicate a fraying of the RPF political coalition and the “consensus democracy” it has sought to establish.

President Kagame and the ruling RPF are clearly aware of the fragility of the RPF’s control. Criticisms of the RPF by Rwandans and by external actors are met by the country’s leadership with a level of outrage and vehemence that belie the RPF’s stated confidence in its popular appeal. Domestic critics are dismissed as corrupt, personally ambitious, or seeking to foment division. “The system relies on people committed to the process and willing to sacrifice,” according to a senior official, “and those who don’t share that vision have no place in today’s Rwanda.”²⁰ Domestic critics are effectively silenced through exile, intimidation, imprisonment, or assassination.²¹ International critics are dismissed as ill-informed, distorting facts for personal or institutional motives, or trying to assuage their guilt for the international failures of 1994. National institutions of countervailing power within Rwanda—the legislature, the judiciary, the media, and politically active civil society groups—are very much under RPF control and are thus unable to fulfill their potentially stabilizing role as formal channels for national debate and peaceful political competition. This inability to manage political competition within a democratic framework may ultimately radicalize opponents, who will find other means to challenge the regime if open political discourse is not an option.

Opposition may coalesce in a number of ways. The Hutu/Tutsi divide abides, and, as noted, mutual fear and suspicion, if not openly expressed, are still real. Many view the RPF as an essentially Tutsi government, and as a fairly narrow segment of Tusti at that, with its power brokers largely drawn from anglophone Kagame loyalists. Perhaps most alarming from an RPF perspective has been the rising challenges from within that narrow segment of loyalists. There is some specu-

20. Author’s interview with senior official in Kigali, January 23, 2011.

21. An alarming number of critics, both inside Rwanda and in exile, have been assassinated, although the Rwandan government denies involvement. Most recently, in May 2011, a Rwandan dissident living in London received a note from Scotland Yard: “The Rwandan government poses an imminent threat to your life. The threat could come in any form.”

lation that some of the RPF defectors, like General Kayumba, may continue to hold the loyalty of some segment of the Rwandan military. And if his closest cohorts continue to abandon him, President Kagame will have a very narrow political base indeed.

Because organizing a genuine political opposition within Rwanda is so heavily proscribed, a viable opposition movement is most likely to coalesce outside the country. It will likely unite factions driven by ethnic grievances, democratic aspirations, political ambition, or disgruntlement with President Kagame's overweening role within government. Former prime minister Twagirimungu is seeking to create such a broad-based coalition from his exile in Belgium. He has reached out to Gahima, Rudasingwa, and their fellow RPF defectors, who have formed the Rwanda National Congress, also based in exile, which in turn has reportedly signed a pact with Victoire Ingabire, who remains in jail in Kigali.

...though Rwanda's current economic achievements are significant, there are nonetheless important limits to the authoritarian-led development model on which the government has staked its domestic and international legitimacy.

A threat to the RPF leadership may also come from Kigali, from within the high leadership ranks of the RPF itself. This would likely be sudden and unpredictable, because Kagame is certainly alert to this possibility and has installed a robust intelligence apparatus. But the number of high-level defectors in recent years gives some indication that patience with Kagame's leadership style may be wearing thin.

The Limits of Development without Competitive Politics

The ruling RPF has made service delivery, development, and economic growth the cornerstone of its stated strategy and its principal means of political legitimation. The country is tiny, landlocked, and extremely poor; its population density is among the highest in the world; it lacks any significant resources, and the government is heavily reliant on donor funding. Despite these challenges, growth and investment rates posted in the last decade have been impressive, and the president has a far-reaching strategy of economic modernization and regional integration that is well worth pursuing. But economic growth may not be enough to stave off instability. Although today's situation is very different from that of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is worth remembering that Rwanda under President Habyarimana was viewed by many in the international community as a development model, with little debt, low inflation, and strong economic growth. The regime was authoritarian, but the president's "benevolent authoritarianism" was considered a better alternative than the decades of massacres that had preceded it. Thus, though Rwanda's current economic achievements are significant, there are nonetheless important limits to the authoritarian-led development model on which the government has staked its domestic and international legitimacy—with three main factors to consider.

First, demands for political change will likely outstrip the stabilizing or conciliating effects of economic growth, which may take many years to be fully felt by Rwandan citizens. This will be particularly true if economic benefits are perceived as skewed toward a particular segment of the population. Much of the growth has been in the service sector, concentrated in Kigali, largely by-

passing rural populations. Political competition among elites may increase over access to the spoils of Rwanda's investment boom. The RPF's inner circle has pervasive influence within the Kigali business sector, with a lucrative and extensive portfolio that includes aviation, banking, agriculture, telecommunications, energy, construction, real estate, communications, and manufacturing. Although there has been laudable transparency in the use of development assistance, there are few oversight mechanisms to regulate or make public the RPF's vast investment portfolio or revenues. Critics allege favoritism, corruption, and liberal mixing of government and private funding flows.

The second factor—as is true for any developing economy—will be vulnerability to external shocks. Rwanda's economic base is tiny—the growth rates that the RPF projects may not be possible, as commodity prices, energy prices, food crises, and global economic trends can waylay economies far more robust than Rwanda's. The dramatic drop in coffee prices in the late 1980s dealt a serious blow to the previous Rwandan government's "development without politics" strategy, adding to the state's fragility and to some extent catalyzing the events that followed. Donor assistance is another exogenous factor, and external funding may wane significantly as the RPF's

cumulative record of repression and violence begins to dawn on Rwanda's most reliable supporters. For instance, Scotland Yard recently alleged that the Rwandan government is seeking to assassinate dissidents living in London, reportedly spurring a major internal debate on Britain's continued assistance to Rwanda.

Third and finally, despite the government's forward-looking strategies to move Rwanda away from agricultural dependence, the authoritarian nature of political life—and the

An economic recession, withdrawal of donor funding, or a major setback in the government's development strategy may open the way for opposition groups to assert themselves and speak to the economic distress of rural Rwandans.

government's heavy influence in the country's big investment sectors—may stifle healthy competition and the kind of entrepreneurial culture and risk taking that ultimately drive economic breakthroughs. Further, the government's centrally planned approaches to rural transformation—villagization, crop regionalization, the enforced elimination of thatched huts (*nyakatsi*)—may hit the rural population hard. Although these policies may make theoretical sense, similar top-down social engineering approaches elsewhere in Africa have met with little success. They are rarely implemented without resort to coercion or political favoritism; they generally fail to take farmers' accumulated knowledge, risk aversion, or preferences into account; and they often have ended up stirring rural resentment, fueling local tensions, and increasing economic vulnerability. The Rwandan government has pressed forward, despite considerable observer and donor skepticism and mounting evidence that such policies may ultimately prove deeply unpopular and counterproductive.

Ultimately, whether or not economic fortunes rise, political competition and ambition are natural and inevitable, and the government's eventual time line for opening political space is unlikely to satisfy up-and-coming challengers. An economic recession, withdrawal of donor funding, or a major setback in the government's development strategy may open the way for opposition groups to assert themselves and speak to the economic distress of rural Rwandans. Because economic development is the cornerstone of the RPF's legitimacy, economic setbacks could be politically devastating and potentially destabilizing.

Regional Factors: The DRC

A final dynamic that bears watching in the coming decade will be Rwanda's engagement with the DRC, with whom it shares a long and tangled history. After chasing thousands of *génocidaires* (known as Interahamwe) deep into eastern DRC (then Zaire), the RPF supported the local Tutsi minority—the Banyamulenge—and Rwandan Tutsi refugees to serve as security proxies against potential Hutu counterattacks. Zairian president Mobutu Sese Sekou opposed the intervention, and Rwanda, in concert with Uganda and Angola, helped install the more cooperative Laurent-Désiré Kabila in his stead. Kabila turned against his former supporters, and although he sought to expel all foreign troops from the DRC, Rwanda continued to give military support to Banyamulenge and Tutsi militias, ostensibly to defend themselves against Hutu incursions into Rwanda. Economic motives mixed with security objectives, as Rwandan military commanders benefited extensively from the region's abundant mineral resources. Militias on all sides were implicated in horrific human rights abuses against civilians, and Rwandan troops and their proxies were viewed with deep animosity by local populations. Laurent Kabila was assassinated in 2001, and then replaced by his son Joseph Kabila as the conflict continued. Ultimately, an accord was signed in 2002, with Rwanda promising the withdrawal of 20,000 troops, and Kabila promising to dismantle the Interahamwe. Tutsi militias continued to battle DRC forces and their proxy militias, and accusations persisted that Rwanda was supporting former RPF member Laurent Nkunda, as he led a particularly brutal and effective militia in the DRC.

Can the DRC government eliminate the security threat in the east to Rwanda's satisfaction? If it cannot, Rwanda will likely have few compunctions about taking matters into its own hands.

A significant rapprochement between Kabila and Kagame occurred in 2008, when Rwanda agreed to capture Nkunda, and Kabila invited Rwandan troops into the DRC to help eliminate the Hutu militia threat. The rapprochement has held to date. But Rwandan influence in the DRC is a source of great resentment to many Congolese, and President Kabila is often described as a proxy for Rwandan interests. Big questions arise on the future relationship: Will Rwanda's heavy hand become a political liability for Kabila? Can the DRC government eliminate the security threat in the east to Rwanda's satisfaction? If it cannot, Rwanda will likely have few compunctions about taking matters into its own hands. If the Kinshasa-Kigali relationship deteriorates dramatically, could the security vacuum of eastern DRC become a launching pad for anti-RPF attacks? The DRC's future during the next decade is extremely uncertain, and answers to these questions are hard to predict. In the long term, Rwanda and the DRC should have every interest in a robust, regulated economic partnership, but there is little indication that the DRC's leadership is looking to the long term.

Potential Scenarios

Rwanda's history points to the potential for devastating levels of violence. A repeat of the circumstances of 1994, however, are unlikely. The genocide was meticulously planned, with arms, training, and a hierarchy of command established over several years. Today, the strength and pervasiveness of the RPF intelligence apparatus, as well as domestic and international vigilance, would almost certainly detect and preempt that level of organization. The international community is far

more attuned today to Rwanda and to the consequences of inaction, and thus would, one hopes, intervene far more promptly for either crisis prevention or response. And though economic growth cannot prevent political conflict, it does give political elites—both those in power and those vying for it—a greater stake in peace.

In the coming decade, the RPF may well be able to maintain its pervasive and uncompromising grip on political discourse and competition within Rwanda. To do so, however, it will need to resort increasingly to coercive measures that in turn will fuel resentment and reinforce its own fragility. The hypothetical scenarios given here suggest potential trajectories that could drive a more open, and possibly violent, confrontation between the government and its opponents. The brittleness of the government will mean that once that confrontation takes place, it will be difficult to predict how it unfolds—a single confrontation might be easily tamped down, but might also become the opportunity for a venting of grievances and perceived injustices that so far have been suppressed. The scenarios are as follows:

- A stalling of the government’s development program could provoke a more sustained opposition push for political opening. A profound economic shock could undermine the model of

growth and social transformation on which the Rwandan government has staked its reputation and political legitimacy. Shocks might include a steep decline in a key commodity price, for example, coffee; a rise in fuel prices; a prolonged food crisis or drought; or a combination of several of these factors. A significant withdrawal of donor support could further reduce government service provision, and a reduction of direct budget-

A stalling of the government’s development program could provoke a more sustained opposition push for political opening.

ary support (the United Kingdom’s principal mode of assistance) could limit the government’s ability to make good on its growth strategy. Cumulative evidence of egregious human rights abuses or further allegations of planned political assassinations could drive a major rethinking among donors. It is unlikely that these factors would precipitate an immediate crisis, but their cumulative effect would be to embolden an opposition movement to press harder for reform and to take greater risks within Rwanda to precipitate change. Drawing on examples from the Middle East, North Africa, and neighboring Uganda, leading opposition figures might try to stage public protests in Kigali. In the midst of an economic crisis, protests might focus on food prices, wages, or government services. But they might also focus on the major social cleavages related to issues of exclusion and impunity, as noted above. Such protests might not be widely attended, but, as in Uganda, a disproportionate security response from the government could lead to escalation.

- An unraveling of the current rapprochement between the DRC and the Rwandan government could raise fears in Kigali that the eastern DRC would become a base for Rwandan opposition forces. If the Rwandan government were to lack confidence in the DRC’s ability to adequately monitor and eliminate potential threats, Kigali would have little hesitation in intervening directly. A violation of the DRC’s sovereignty could reignite a cross-border conflict or, more likely, a return to proxy warfare in the eastern DRC. A sustained military campaign launched from the eastern DRC by opposition figures does not appear imminent, although Kigali has ac-

cused opposition figures of having links to militia groups there. However, within a 10-year time frame, if opposition forces are given no legitimate options to compete for political power, this possibility becomes more likely.

- The assassination of a high-level figure within the RPF or in the opposition could provoke, on the one hand, a disproportionate security response from the RPF; or, on the other hand, a spontaneous popular uprising.
- The question of who will succeed President Kagame—and when—will be a source of uncertainty and possible contention. The RPF’s power, decisionmaking, public relations strategy, and legitimacy rest overwhelmingly with Kagame, and his departure would dramatically change how the regime is perceived. The elections in 2017 could be a moment for a significant political break. Kagame is constitutionally prohibited from running for a third term, although given the RPF’s control over the legislature and the legislature’s deference to him, a term extension is very plausible.

Rwanda’s last two elections do not bode well for its next one.

Constitutional changes of this kind are becoming less and less acceptable to African regional bodies and the international community. Forcing through such a change in Rwanda in 2017 could provoke a more sustained campaign by opposition leaders, particularly if backed by diplomatic support from African regional bodies or the international community. If Kagame were to step down, it is today hard to imagine that the RPF would countenance any election process that might entail their defeat. Opposition parties in the diaspora appear to be building toward a unified cross-ethnic platform, and by 2017 may be adequately resourced and organized to present a real challenge in a free and fair election process. Rwanda’s last two elections do not bode well for its next one. There is some possibility—albeit slim—that President Kagame will be pushed out of office by elements within the RPF. That some of his most senior confidants have defected in recent years underscores this possibility—some of these former commanders may still enjoy the allegiance of a segment of the RPF or the military forces. Kagame is surely attuned to this possibility, and he has replaced these senior leaders with a younger set of loyalists without popular constituencies or alliances of their own, who are entirely beholden to him.

Conclusion

There are two competing narratives on Rwanda’s current trajectory. The first emphasizes the country’s promising economic growth, its stability, and the competence and vision of its leadership. The second, which is gaining adherents, stresses the government’s failure to open the political arena, the narrowing of its support base, and its continued willingness, 17 years after the genocide, to use often brutal tactics in silencing dissent. The government’s reluctance to open up to genuine competition is understandable on one level, but as time passes, this reluctance will in fact put Rwanda’s stability at greater risk. The danger is a vicious cycle in which RPF repression breeds resentment, mounting resentment imperils the RPF, and the RPF’s sense of vulnerability drives even greater levels of repression. If current trends persist, an opening of political space in Rwanda will become increasingly difficult for the RPF to countenance. The first step must be to build truly national institutions that are—in both perception and fact—genuinely independent of RPF control. If the ruling party chooses this route, its first priority should be the country’s judicial system. A credible,

impartial judiciary will help adjudicate the inevitable political, social, and economic tensions that will arise as Rwandans chart their way forward.

In this situation, political competition and ambition are unavoidable. The question is whether they will be constrained within legitimate democratic institutions or be compelled, for lack of better options, to take a more disruptive and possibly violent course. There is nothing preordained in Rwanda's future, but current trends there should be cause for considerable concern.



CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

1800 K Street, NW | Washington, DC 20006
Tel: (202) 887-0200 | Fax: (202) 775-3199
E-mail: books@csis.org | Web: www.csis.org