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Summary

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in central Africa's Great Lakes region, has become known for its rapid development gains in the wake of the 1994 genocide, in which some 800,000 people were killed. Since then, efforts by the Rwandan Patriotic Front-led government to improve health outcomes, boost agricultural output, promote investment, and increase women's participation in politics have been lauded internationally. Yet, analysts debate whether Rwanda's authoritarian political system—and its government's periodic support for rebel movements in neighboring countries—could jeopardize this progress in the future, or undermine the case for donor support.

President Paul Kagame, in office since 2000, won reelection to a new seven-year term in August 2017 with nearly 99% of the vote, after a new constitution adopted in 2015 carved out an exception to term limits for him. His overwhelming margin of victory was interpreted by some observers as reflecting popular support for the president's efforts to stabilize and transform Rwandan society, while others viewed it as the product of a political system that involves tight constraints on opposition activity and close government scrutiny of citizen behavior. In response to external criticism of Rwanda's political system and human rights record, Rwandan officials, including Kagame, have often asserted that some restrictions on civil and political rights are needed to prevent the return of ethnic violence.

The United States and Rwanda have cultivated close ties since the 1990s, underpinned by U.S. development aid and support for Rwanda's participation in international peacekeeping missions. Congress has helped shape U.S. engagement through the aid appropriations process, other legislative initiatives, oversight activities, and Member outreach to Rwandan officials. Over the past decade, U.S. officials, including some Members of Congress, have continued to hail Rwanda's development and peacekeeping record while voicing growing criticism of the government's human rights record and its role in regional conflicts. Congress has notably placed restrictions on certain types of U.S. military aid if Rwanda is found to be supporting rebel groups in neighboring countries. The Obama Administration periodically applied such restrictions, and others under separate child soldiers legislation, citing Rwandan support for rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi.

Trump Administration officials have continued to pair support for U.S.-Rwanda partnership on shared objectives with statements of concern regarding political conditions within Rwanda. U.S. interest in partnering with Rwanda on Africa-wide initiatives may increase in 2018 as President Kagame assumes the yearlong rotating chairmanship of the African Union (AU). President Trump met with President Kagame at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2018, after which President Trump expressed appreciation for U.S.-Rwandan economic ties, Rwanda's contributions to peacekeeping, and Kagame's pursuit of AU institutional reforms.

In line with its proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide, the Administration's FY2018 aid budget request would lower annual U.S. bilateral aid to Rwanda from $159 million to $105 million (not including peacekeeping support). The Administration has also initiated an out-of-cycle review of Rwanda's eligibility for trade benefits it receives under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, reauthorized under P.L. 114-27) in response to alleged market barriers to U.S. exports resulting from policies in the East African Community, to which Rwanda belongs.

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Introduction

Rwanda has achieved a rare degree of political stability, public safety, and economic growth in a sub-region marked by armed conflict and violent power transfers. Government programs to improve health, agricultural output, private investment, and women's political participation have received international plaudits and substantial donor support. Rwanda's development and security gains are particularly remarkable in the wake of the 1994 genocide, in which extremist members of the ethnic Hutu majority orchestrated a three-month killing spree targeting the minority Tutsi community and politically moderate Hutus. An estimated 800,000 people were killed.

President Paul Kagame is widely viewed as the architect of Rwanda's purported development "miracle" and of its autocratic political model.[1] He was reelected in 2017 following constitutional changes that exempted him from presidential term limits. Kagame's nearly 99% margin of victory may reflect a mix of popular support for his efforts to stabilize and transform Rwandan society as well as constraints on opposition activism. These include legal restrictions on civil liberties and tight controls on the flow of information, allegedly alongside more brutal tactics.

The United States and Rwanda have cultivated close ties since the late 1990s, underpinned by U.S. aid in support of Rwanda's ambitious socioeconomic development initiatives and participation in international peacekeeping. U.S. executive branch officials and some Members of Congress have nonetheless expressed growing concern in recent years regarding Rwanda's authoritarian political system and its government's history of backing rebel groups in neighboring countries. Congress has held multiple hearings examining these and related issues.[2]

In September 2017, the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, testified before the House that the United States "has a close but complex relationship with Rwanda."[3] Trump Administration officials have voiced support for continued U.S.-Rwanda partnership on shared objectives, alongside ongoing concerns regarding democracy and human rights (see "U.S. Relations and Aid," below). U.S. interest in partnering with Rwanda on Africa-wide initiatives may increase in 2018 as President Kagame assumes the rotating chairmanship of the African Union (AU). President Trump met with President Kagame at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2018, after which the President expressed appreciation for U.S.-Rwandan economic ties, Rwanda's contributions to peacekeeping operations, and Kagame's pursuit of AU institutional reforms.

In line with its broader proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide, the Administration advocated cuts to bilateral funding for Rwanda in FY2018, including health and development aid, though the country would remain a top U.S. aid recipient in Africa if the proposals were fully

[1] See, e.g., Julian Hattem, "Kagame seems set to win again in Rwanda. But is he a 'miracle man' or a nascent dictator?" *Washington Post*, August 2, 2017; *The Economist*, "Paul Kagame, Feted and Feared," July 15, 2017.

[2] For example: House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations ("HFAC Africa Subcommittee"), "Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted," September 27, 2017; Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), "U.S. Policy in Central Africa: The Imperative of Good Governance," February 10, 2016; HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Africa's Great Lakes Region: A Security, Political, and Humanitarian Challenge," October 22, 2015; HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Developments in Rwanda," May 20, 2015; SFRC, "Prospects for Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Great Lakes Region," February 26, 2014; House Armed Services Committee, "Update on the Evolving Security Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Implications for U.S. National Security," December 19, 2012; HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "The Devastating Crisis in Eastern Congo," December 11, 2012; and HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Examining the Role of Rwanda in the DRC Insurgency," September 19, 2012. Additional hearings on the Democratic Republic of Congo and the illicit trade in African "conflict minerals" have also examined Rwandan actions and their impacts.

[3] Written statement to the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted," September 27, 2017.

implemented. Separately, in June 2017, the Administration initiated an out-of-cycle review of Rwanda's eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act in response to protectionist policies in the East African Community (EAC), of which Rwanda is a member. The review also pertains to the AGOA eligibility of EAC members Tanzania and Uganda.

Successive Congresses have enacted foreign aid appropriations measures that restrict certain types of U.S. military aid to Rwanda if it is found to be supporting rebel groups in neighboring countries. Citing these and other legislation related to child soldiers, the Obama Administration at several points suspended some military aid in response to reports of Rwandan support for rebels in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi. The Obama Administration also increased other types of military aid in support of Rwanda's peacekeeping deployments, either by exercising a presidential authority to waive the aforementioned restrictions or else drawing on funds that were not subject to them. The full extent of the Trump Administration's approach to security assistance for Rwanda remains to be seen. (See "Legislative Restrictions.")

Figure 1. Rwanda at a Glance

Comparative size: slightly smaller than Maryland
Population, growth rate: 11.9 million, 2.5%
Languages: Kinyarwanda, French, English (all official)
Religions: Protestant 50.2%, Roman Catholic 44.3%, Muslim 2%, other 0.9% (includes traditionalist/animist), none 2.5%, unspecified <0.1 (2002)
Median age: 19 years
Life expectancy: 64.3 years
Infant mortality rate: 29.7 deaths/1,000 live births
Literacy: 70.5% (male 73.2%, female 68%) (2015)

GDP, GDP per capita: $8.9 billion, $754 per capita
GDP growth rate: 6.2%
Key exports: coffee, tea, hides, tin ore
Top export partners: Democratic Republic of the Congo 31.3%, Kenya 15.7%, United Arab Emirates 13.8%, Switzerland 8.7%, Burundi 5.7% (2016)
Key imports: foodstuffs, machinery + equipment, steel, petroleum products, cement + construction material
Top import partners: China 21.2%, Uganda 11.2%, Kenya 7.8%, India 7.4%, UAE 5.8%, Tanzania 5.3% (2016)

Sources: Graphic created by CRS; base map generated from Esri (2013). Data drawn from CIA, *The World Factbook* and International Monetary Fund (IMF); 2017 estimates unless otherwise noted.

International perspectives on Rwanda tend to be polarized. Supporters assert that Kagame is a visionary and that Rwanda represents an extraordinary post-conflict success story that justifies his continued tenure.[4] Others argue that severe restrictions on political and civil rights may ultimately undermine Rwanda's hard-won stability, and that limits on civil liberties may be masking ethnic and social tensions.[5] Some critics have also questioned the reliability of Rwanda's development statistics—a key justification for donor aid—and some posit that the ruling party's apparently extensive involvement in the economy may be stifling independent private sector growth.[6] To some observers, Rwandan voters' support for Kagame is easily explained: "he has kept them from killing each other ... [and] has also given them a sense of hope and pride."[7] Others argue that—given evident constraints on free expression—"we simply don't know ... what Rwandans want from their political leaders."[8]

President Kagame has defended Rwanda's political system as rooted in popular support, asserting that "imposing a style of democracy without understanding the context, culture or norm of a country is ignorant."[9] Rwandan officials generally reject allegations of abusing human rights, while asserting that some restrictions on civil liberties are necessary to prevent ethnic tensions and violence. Kagame has also rejected some external criticism as inaccurate, irrelevant, neocolonialist, and/or morally vacuous given the international failure to halt the 1994 genocide.[10]

Politics

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is the ruling party and the dominant force in Rwandan politics.[11] An RPF-led coalition holds 76% of seats in the parliament's Chamber of Deputies, with remaining seats held by parties that are supportive of the RPF in practice.[12] Observers, including the U.S. State Department, have raised concerns with aspects of each election conducted under RPF rule, ranging from apparent procedural irregularities and lack of transparency in vote tabulation, to media restrictions and legal challenges, threats, or criminal prosecutions targeting

[4] Andy Kristian Agaba, "The case for Kagame's third term in Rwanda," *Washington Post*, August 3, 2017.

[5] Scott Strauss, "Twenty Years After the Rwandan Genocide," Oxford University Press Blog, April 8, 2014.

[6] An Ansoms et al., "Statistics versus livelihoods: questioning Rwanda's pathway out of poverty," *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 44: 151 (2016); *Economist*, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front's business empire," March 2, 2017.

[7] Stephen Kinzer, "Rwanda and the Dangers of Democracy," *Boston Globe*, July 22, 2017.

[8] Laura Seay, "Is Rwanda's Authoritarian State Sustainable?" *Washington Post*, June 2, 2016.

[9] *The Independent*, "Kagame scoffs at critics of Rwanda's democracy model," July 23, 2017; and remarks at the Council on Foreign Relations, September 19, 2017, as reported by the official Twitter feed of the Rwandan presidency.

[10] See, e.g., David Pilling and Lionel Barber, "Interview: Kagame Insists 'Rwandans Understand the Greater Goal,'" *Financial Times*, August 27, 2017; and *Yale News*, "Rwandan president addresses critics in Yale lecture," September 21, 2016.

[11] A former rebel movement founded by Tutsi exiles in neighboring Uganda, the RPF seized power in 1994, ending the genocide. Kagame and other Rwandan exiles had earlier joined the National Resistance Army (NRA) insurgency in Uganda in the 1980s. The NRA seized power in Uganda in 1986 and its leader, Yoweri Museveni, became president. Kagame reportedly then served as head of Ugandan military intelligence. The RPF was formed in 1987 and launched an offensive in Rwanda in 1990. Paul Kagame commanded RPF forces during the ensuing 1990-1994 civil war between the RPF and Rwanda's then-government. Between 1994 and 2000, Kagame served as Vice President and Defense Minister in transitional governments.

[12] Rwanda has a bicameral parliament consisting of the Senate (26 seats, all either indirectly elected or appointed, with members serving eight-year terms) and the Chamber of Deputies (80 seats; 53 members directly elected by proportional representation, 24 women elected by special interest groups, and three selected by youth and disability organizations, with members serving five-year terms). See CIA *World Factbook*, "Rwanda."

opposition candidates and parties.[13] It is difficult to determine whether or how such factors might affect electoral outcomes.

President Kagame, leader of the RPF and a former military intelligence figure, is widely viewed as the country's preeminent decision-maker. He first won the presidency in an internal party election in 2000, and he has won reelection with over 90% of the popular vote in every subsequent contest (in 2003, 2010, and 2017). Under Kagame's leadership, the government has pursued economic development and social transformation while effectively suppressing political dissent and public discussion of ethnic identity. Some researchers have described pervasive official surveillance and involvement in citizens' daily lives, part of an apparent effort to ensure rapid implementation of development initiatives, mobilize support for the RPF, suppress criminal activity, and monitor potential opposition activity, ethnic tensions, or security threats.[14]

In the 2017 election, two opposition candidates together won about 1% of the vote. One was Philippe Mpayimana, an independent. The other was Frank Habineza of the Democratic Green Party, the only legally recognized party that has openly criticized the RPF and Kagame. The Green Party was participating in elections for the first time: Habineza had been denied registration as a candidate in 2010, and then spent two years in exile after his deputy was killed under unclear circumstances.[15] Diane Shima Rwigara, a vocal Kagame critic and would-be first female independent presidential candidate, was denied registration as a candidate in 2017. She was also subjected to an apparent online smear campaign.[16] She was arrested for tax evasion shortly after the vote, and in October, she was charged with forgery and inciting insurrection and was denied bail. A previous opposition presidential contender, Victoire Ingabire, is serving a prison sentence after being convicted of genocide denial and seeking to form an armed group, and her party has been denied legal registration.[17]

Kagame would have been subject to a constitutional two-term limit on the presidency in 2017, but a new constitution approved in 2015 via referendum—with a reported 98% of the vote—exempted the sitting president (Kagame), allowing him to serve a third seven-year term. He may also run for two more consecutive five-year terms, thus potentially remaining in office until 2034—although he has denied any intention to do so, stating that he is preparing Rwanda for an unspecified future leadership transition.[18] The new constitution shortens the presidential term from seven to five years, but that change does not take effect until 2024. It also grants the president immunity from prosecution after he leaves office, including for treason or constitutional violations. The referendum was organized after parliamentarians voted overwhelmingly in favor of removing the term limit for Kagame. That vote, in turn, followed a petition to remove term

[13] See State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, "Rwanda," 2003, 2008, 2010, and 2013; and State Department press statement, "Presidential Election in Rwanda," August 5, 2017.

[14] See, e.g., Anjan Sundaram, *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship*, Doubleday: 2016; Filip Reyntjens, *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, Cambridge University Press: 2015.

[15] See, e.g., Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Allow Independent Autopsy of Opposition Politician," July 21, 2010.

[16] Diane Shima Rwigara, "I wanted to be Rwanda's first female president. Then fake nude photos appeared online." *Washington Post*, August 2, 2017.

[17] Human rights groups have raised due process concerns regarding Ingabire's trial without commenting on the veracity of the charges. See HRW, "Rwanda: Eight-Year Sentence for Opposition Leader," October 30, 2012.

[18] *Jeune Afrique*, "Kagame: Ce sera sans doute mon dernier mandat," May 22, 2017.

limits that received some 3.7 million signatures—over half the electorate.[19] Kagame has disavowed responsibility for the initiative.[20]

Some observers describe a narrowing of the RPF's political leadership from a diverse set of actors in the 1990s to an apparently small circle around the president today.[21] Over the years, various high-profile figures have faced criminal charges, some on national security grounds, apparently after falling out with the president. Some have left the country, and several prominent figures have sought to mobilize external opposition movements. These include individuals formerly thought to inhabit the inner-most leadership circle of the RPF, namely, those who fought alongside Kagame in the armed wing of the RPF before it took power.[22] A few prominent exiled dissidents have been violently attacked or killed in what critics portray as state-backed assassination attempts.[23] The Rwandan government has repeatedly denied involvement.[24]

Public criticism of the government is rare; there are few independent critical media and civil society groups, and they reportedly operate with difficulty.[25] Human rights advocates assert that laws and taboos prohibiting public acknowledgement of ethnic identity have been wielded as tools to silence meaningful criticism of the government, and that "years of state intimidation and interference" have weakened the capacity of civil society to operate effectively.[26] Over the years, various political opponents, critics, and journalists have been criminally prosecuted or have fled the country. There have been reports of arbitrary detention and torture of Rwandans accused or suspected of supporting the exiled opposition Rwanda National Congress (RNC), Ingabire's political movement, or the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia founded in DRC by perpetrators of the 1994 genocide.[27] U.S.-based Human Rights Watch has also accused Rwandan security forces of extra-judicially killing petty criminals, allegations which Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has sought to discredit.[28]

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[19] According to Rwandan lawmakers who engaged citizens about the proposed amendments, only 10 people—out of millions consulted—opposed extending Kagame's mandate. Agence France-Presse, "Only 10 Rwandans oppose Kagame third term: report," August 11, 2015 and Ludovica Iaccino, "Rwanda Third-Term Bid: Term limits 'nothing to do with democracy' says President Kagame," *International Business Times*, June 22, 2015.

[20] Stephanie Aglietti, "Rwanda counts referendum vote for extra terms for Kagame," AFP, December 18, 2015.

[21] See, e.g., "Rwanda's Leader Must Step Down," an anonymous Op-Ed in the *New York Times*, December 17, 2015.

[22] Exile-based opposition initiatives include the Rwandan National Congress (RNC), founded in 2010 by prominent RPF dissidents including the former army chief of staff Gen. Kayumba Nyamwasa, presidential chief of staff and Rwandan ambassador to the United States Theogene Rudasingwa, attorney general Gerald Gahima, and head of external intelligence Patrick Karegeya (who was subsequently killed in South Africa).

[23] HRW, "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders," January 28, 2014; *Globe & Mail*, "Rwanda's Hunted," May 2, 2014; BBC News, "Rwandan Nyamwasa Murder Plot: Four Guilty in South Africa," August 29, 2014.

[24] Kagame denied involvement in the murder of prominent dissident Patrick Karegeya in South Africa in January 2014, while stating, "I actually wish Rwanda did it." *The Wall Street Journal*, "Rwanda Leader Denies Role in Ex-Spy Chief's Death," January 23, 2014.

[25] U.N. Human Rights Commission, "Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association at the conclusion of his visit to the Republic of Rwanda," January 27, 2014. Civil society groups are reportedly able to operate freely only if they align with the government and its development agenda.

[26] HRW, "Rwanda: Events of 2016," *World Report 2017*.

[27] HRW, "'We Will Force You to Confess': Torture and Unlawful Military Detention in Rwanda," October 10, 2017.

[28] The NCHR asserts that some individuals are still alive, or died of other causes, which Human Rights Watch disputes. HRW, "'All Thieves Must Be Killed': Extrajudicial Executions in Western Rwanda," July 13, 2017; and "Rwanda: Cover-Up Negates Killings," November 1, 2017.

Regional Security

Rwanda's military is among sub-Saharan Africa's most effective, and Rwandan troops participate in multiple U.N. and African-led peacekeeping operations on the continent. Rwandan peacekeepers are reportedly "particularly valued due to their training, discipline, the development ethos they bring to deployments," and for the number of women trained and deployed.[29] Citing their country's experience during the 1994 genocide, in which the U.N. Security Council withdrew peacekeepers as massacres were spreading, Rwandan officials have sought multilateral support for robust implementation of peacekeeper mandates for the protection of civilians, including via a set of commitments known as the "Kigali Principles." Ahead of assuming the chairmanship of the AU in 2018, Kagame has pressed for institutional reforms to improve the AU's capacity to finance and sustain African-led stabilization operations, among other goals.

Rwanda also has a history of unilateral intervention in the sub-region, notably in DRC.[30] Rwanda first deployed its military into DRC (then known as Zaire) in 1996 to oust genocidal Rwandan militias from cross-border safe-havens. It played a key role in backing Laurent Désiré Kabila's rebellion in DRC in 1997, though as president, Kabila later fell out with Rwanda and sought to expel Rwandan forces that had deployed to support his new government. Rwanda has since reportedly backed successive rebellions in DRC led by individuals of Rwandan descent.[31] While denying specific allegations of doing so, Rwandan officials often voice potential justifications for such actions. In particular, Rwandan officials note that the DRC has failed to rein in—and indeed has, at times, collaborated with—the FDLR, a group founded by Rwandan genocide perpetrators that continues to seek the overthrow of the RPF government. Officials also sometimes point to the persecution of ethnic communities of Rwandan origin in the DRC—suggesting that they require protection. Economic interests related to resource smuggling in eastern DRC have long been reported to represent another potential motivation.[32]

In 2012-2013, Rwanda faced acute international criticism and cuts to donor aid, including from the United States and European countries, for providing support to a DRC-based insurgency known as the M23.[33] The group had begun as a mutiny among soldiers involved in an earlier Rwandan-backed armed group that had been integrated into DRC's military. Rwandan officials denied accusations of backing the M23, blaming the conflict on DRC's institutional dysfunctions and lack of political will to confront security challenges. Rwandan support nonetheless reportedly dissipated in response to criticism, and in late 2013, the M23 was defeated by DRC military forces backed by U.N. peacekeepers.[34] The M23 has since been largely inactive, apparently leaving eastern DRC without an evident Rwandan armed proxy for the first time in two decades.[35]

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[29] Providing for Peacekeeping, "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Rwanda," 2015.

[30] See CRS Report R43166, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Alexis Arieff and Tomas F. Husted.

[31] See, e.g., Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality*, Zed Books: 2007; Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*, Oxford University Press: 2008; René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, University of Pennsylvania Press: 2009; Jason Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, PublicAffairs: 2011.

[32] See, e.g., *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, April 2001, U.N. doc. S/2001/357.

[33] See Testimony of then-Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson before the HFAC Africa subcommittee, hearing on "The Devastating Crisis in Eastern Congo," December 11, 2012.

[34] Jason Stearns, "As the M23 nears defeat, more questions than answers," *Congo Siasa*, October 30, 2013.

[35] *Congo Siasa*, op. cit. In early 2017, clashes were reported between ex-M23 fighters and the Congolese military,

In 2015 and 2016, reports suggested Rwandan involvement in the recruitment and training of Burundian refugees to participate in a rebellion against the government of Burundi, again prompting donor criticism.[36] The reports emerged after Kagame openly criticized Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term in 2015, which stoked a violent political crisis. Rwandan officials also accused Nkurunziza's party of harboring FDLR rebels,[37] and Rwanda welcomed prominent Burundian dissidents who fled their country. Burundi's government, for its part, accused Rwanda of espionage and interference in its politics.[38]

Reports of Rwandan involvement in regional conflicts have dwindled since 2016, suggesting that the government may fear donor or regional reactions, and/or that it has been focused on domestic issues. The government also may no longer perceive a strong external threat as emanating from eastern DRC, as the FDLR has been weakened by an internal split and by a string of Congolese-led operations targeting the group. Tensions between Rwanda and several other countries in the region, including DRC, Tanzania, and South Africa, appear to have eased in line with these trends, and in connection with a change of government in Tanzania in late 2015.[39]

The Economy and Development Issues

Donor aid, political stability, low corruption, and pro-investor policies have contributed to economic growth in Rwanda averaging 7.6% per year over the past decade—albeit from a very low base.[40] Human development gains since the 1994 genocide have been dramatic in relative terms, notably with regard to life expectancy, child and maternal mortality, and access to healthcare.[41] Rwanda nonetheless remains one of the world's poorest countries. About 75% of Rwandans are engaged in agriculture, many for subsistence, and about 39% reportedly live below the poverty line (compared to 56% as recently as 2006, and 78% in 1994).[42] Rwanda has the highest population density in continental Africa, and despite fertile land, it relies on food imports.

Key foreign exchange earners include tourism and exports of coffee, tea, and minerals. The government has undertaken ambitious efforts to transform Rwanda's low-income, agrarian-based economy into one that is services-oriented and middle-income by 2020.[43] These include programs to improve healthcare, expand internet access, and increase domestic energy production through hydroelectric infrastructure and the exploitation of large methane gas reserves under Lake Kivu. To achieve its economic goals, the government has sought to counter what it identifies as key

leading to speculation over whether the M23 was regrouping.

[36] Refugees International, "Asylum Betrayed: Recruitment of Burundian Refugees in Rwanda," December 14, 2015; *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, May 23, 2016, U.N. doc. S/2016/466. See also CRS Report R44018, *Burundi's Political Crisis: In Brief*, by Alexis Arieff.

[37] *Al Jazeera*, "Rwanda says Burundi leaders 'killing own people,'" November 9, 2015; and *New York Times*, "Fragile Burundi Casts a Wary Eye on Rwanda," August 3, 2015.

[38] Conor Gaffey, "Burundi and Rwanda: East Africa's Bad Neighbors," *Newsweek*, May 17, 2016.

[39] Between 2010 and 2015, strains in Rwandan relations with South Africa and Tanzania erupted over alleged Rwandan-backed attacks on exiled dissidents living in South Africa, disagreements over how to address the unresolved FDLR insurgency, Rwandan support for the M23, and apparent Rwandan involvement in Burundi's conflict.

[40] IMF Global Economic Outlook database, April 2017, GDP growth % 2007-2016.

[41] According to the World Health Organization (WHO), from 1990 and 2016, life expectancy increased from 48 to 66 years; the mortality rate of children under five fell from 152 to 42 deaths per 1,000 live births; and the maternal mortality rate decreased from 1,300 deaths to 290 deaths per 100,000 live births. (WHO, *World Health Statistics 2016*). See also Partners in Health, "Rwanda's Rebirth: A Blueprint for health systems strengthening," February 25, 2013.

[42] CIA *World Factbook* (July 2017); and Partners in Health, "Rwanda's Rebirth," op. cit.

[43] Republic of Rwanda, *Rwanda Vision 2020*, available via the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning website.

constraints: low agricultural productivity and a narrow economic base, a landlocked geography, an insufficiently skilled work force, and limited infrastructure.[44] The State Department has documented a number of additional constraints on foreign investors, including "limited access to affordable financing," "payment delays with government contracts," a periodic failure by immigration and tax authorities to honor incentives included in deals signed by the Rwanda Development Board, and difficulties encountered by foreign firms "in registering patents and having rules against infringement of their property rights enforced in a timely manner."[45] The Department has also reported private investor complaints about "competition from state-owned and ruling party-aligned businesses." Notably, Chrystal Ventures, reportedly owned by the RPF, controls an array of domestic enterprises, while Horizon Group, affiliated with the Ministry of Defense, holds a key position in the domestic construction and logistics sectors.[46]

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has praised the transformation of Rwanda's economy over the past 15 years, citing the effect of strong public investment and efficient management in shifting away from agriculture and towards services and some industry. The Fund noted in 2017 that "the challenge is whether the private sector can complement the infrastructure assets put in place by the public sector and maintain economic momentum."[47] The Fund has called on the government to continue efforts to raise education standards, and lower electricity and transportation costs.

Donor aid is a key source of funding for Rwanda's development initiatives. Economic growth dipped from 8.8% in 2012 to 4.6% in 2013 after several top European donors reduced or redirected budgetary support due to Rwanda's support for the M23, but has since rebounded. In response to the aid cuts, the government launched a sovereign wealth fund, Agaciro, to which it called on all Rwandans and "friends of Rwanda" to contribute, including members of the local business community.[48] In 2016, the government introduced a "Made in Rwanda" policy designed to reduce the country's trade deficit by promoting consumption of domestically produced goods. In recent years, some critics have questioned the reliability of Rwanda's development statistics, in part on the grounds that political conditions and the nature of the data released by the government make them difficult to verify independently.[49] Notwithstanding debates over the precise contours of poverty in Rwanda, most observers agree that development advances have been substantial.

U.S. Relations and Aid

In 1998, President Bill Clinton delivered a speech in Kigali in which he expressed remorse for not having intervened more forcefully to end mass killings in 1994, and pledged that the United States would do better in the future.[50] Those remarks arguably set the tone for a relationship

[44] *Rwanda 2020,* op. cit.

[45] State Department, Investment Climate Statements for 2017, "Rwanda."

[46] *The Economist*, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front's business empire," March 2, 2017.

[47] IMF. *Rwanda: Selected Issues.* IMF. Country Report No. 17/214. July 2017.

[48] The fund aims to raise the equivalent of $236 million by 2020. See Steven Muvunyi, "Agaciro Development Fund calls for more contributions," *New Times,* December 3, 2016.

[49] An Ansoms et al., "Statistics versus livelihoods: questioning Rwanda's pathway out of poverty," *Review of African Political Economy,* vol. 44: 151 (2016); and *Review of African Political Economy* Blog, "Rwandan Poverty Statistics: Exposing the 'Donor Darling,'" May 31, 2017. Accounts by exiled dissidents have contributed to this analysis. See, e.g., David Himbara, "Why I quit as Rwandan President Paul Kagame's economic advisor," *Quartz,* January 16, 2015.

[50] President William J. Clinton, "Remarks to the People of Rwanda," March 25, 1998, transcript as written. Clinton's remarks, in which he committed the United States and international community to "strengthen our ability to prevent

defined, in part, by a sense of international guilt about the genocide and admiration for the RPF's role in stopping it. U.S. support for the RPF-led government has continued across successive Administrations and across partisan lines, with executive branch officials and Members of Congress working together to provide substantial aid to buttress Rwanda's development efforts and peacekeeper deployments. Yet, over the past decade, U.S. officials, including some Members of Congress, have increasingly criticized Rwanda's involvement in regional conflicts and expressed concern with its political and human rights record—including reports of assassination plots targeting exiled dissidents. During the Obama Administration, such criticism provoked strident objections by Rwandan officials, including President Kagame.[51]

After meeting with President Kagame in Davos in January 2018, President Trump praised the United States' "great relationships" with Rwanda, including bilateral trade, and stated that "the job they've done is absolutely terrific."[52] Previous statements by Administration officials had expressed concerns about Rwanda's respect for human rights and democracy alongside praise for the country's development progress and peacekeeping contributions. In his September 2017 congressional testimony, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Yamamoto referred to U.S.-Rwandan relations as "close but complex": he praised Rwanda's "remarkable gains" in health and development, and characterized the country as "a major contributor to regional peace and security," while asserting that "Rwanda's record in the areas of human rights and democracy, while improved in some areas, remains a concern." He called on the government "to take steps toward a democratic transition of power."[53]

Regarding Rwanda's 2017 presidential election, the State Department stated that "we are disturbed by irregularities observed during voting and reiterate long-standing concerns over the integrity of the vote-tabulation process."[54] In response to questioning from House Africa Subcommittee Chairman Chris Smith at the September 2017 hearing, Ambassador Yamamoto

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and, if necessary, to stop genocide," presaged various subsequent U.S. policy initiatives to prevent and respond to the threat of "mass atrocities" abroad.

[51] The Obama Administration referred to Rwanda as "one of Africa's most dramatic and encouraging success stories," but expressed concerns about political conditions surrounding the 2010 presidential elections and 2015 referendum, and critiqued Kagame's decision in 2016 to run for reelection. A State Department official testified to Congress in 2015 that the Department was "troubled by the succession of what appear to be politically motivated murders of Rwandan exiles." In 2016, a State Department official raised reports that "the Rwandan government has been involved in destabilizing activities in Burundi" in congressional testimony. In 2012-2013, top officials, including President Obama in a phone call with President Kagame, criticized Rwanda for supporting the M23 rebel movement in DRC. See State Department, *FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*, February 27, 2015; then- U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Samantha Power, "Remarks at a UN Ministerial Meeting on the Future of Civilian Protection in Peace Operations: Endorsing and Implementing the Kigali Principles," May 11, 2016; White House, "Statement on the National Elections in Rwanda," August 13, 2010; White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Ned Price on Rwandan Constitutional Referendum," December 19, 2015; State Department, "Reaction to Rwandan President's Decision To Run for Third Term," January 2, 2016; Then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Steven Feldstein, testimony before the HFAC Africa subcommittee, hearing on Rwanda, May 20, 2015; then-Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield, testimony before SFRC, "U.S. Policy in Central Africa: The Imperative of Good Governance," February 10, 2016; The White House, "Readout of the President's Call with President Kagame," December 18, 2012.

[52] The White House, "Remarks by President Trump and President Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda After Expanded Bilateral Meeting," January 26, 2018. The meeting and remarks followed public allegations that President Trump had used a disparaging term to refer to countries in Africa in the context of debates over immigration.

[53] Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto, testimony before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted," September 27, 2017.

[54] State Department press release, "Presidential Election in Rwanda," August 5, 2017.

affirmed that "we are unable to assess this election as free and fair."[55] In an earlier message marking Rwanda's National Day, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson expressed an intention to "work with Rwanda on expanding efforts to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights."[56] At his Senate confirmation hearing in December 2017, the U.S. Ambassador-designate to Rwanda described his four top policy goals as the following: continuing the United States' "development partnership" with Rwanda, promoting U.S. business and economic ties, supporting Rwanda's continued peacekeeping role, and advancing "democratic ideals."[57]

In 2017, the Administration initiated an out-of-cycle review of Rwanda's eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, reauthorized under P.L. 114-27) in response to allegedly protectionist policies in the East African Community (EAC), of which Rwanda is a member state.[58] The review has been interpreted as an example of a broader Administration push to reexamine U.S. trade policy and achieve better terms and/or outcomes for U.S. firms.[59] Ambassador Yamamoto subsequently testified that U.S. officials had also "raised concerns ... regarding harassment of political opposition leaders and [non-governmental organizations] as well as restrictions on media freedom with the context of AGOA eligibility."[60] The impact of any change to Rwanda's AGOA eligibility may be largely symbolic: in 2016, U.S. imports from Rwanda totaled $25 million, of which $2 million were under AGOA.[61] U.S. exports to Rwanda totaled $73 million.

U.S. bilateral aid programs in Rwanda have focused on improving health, food security, economic growth, and other development goals. During the Obama Administration, such funding for Rwanda rose slightly before falling again toward the end of the Administration, although security assistance related to peacekeeping increased under regional initiatives. The Administration also suspended certain military aid for Rwanda specifically due to Rwanda's involvement in regional conflicts (as discussed below), though this had a limited impact on the total size of the bilateral aid budget. The Trump Administration requested $105 million in bilateral aid to Rwanda for FY2018, proposing cuts to health and development funds (**Table 1**, below), in the context of broader proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide.[62]

U.S. support for Rwanda's involvement in peacekeeping missions is provided separately from bilateral aid allocations. In addition to U.S. financial contributions to U.N. operations, the United States provides many African troop contributors to U.N. and AU-led missions with training and equipment. Under its African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP), an initiative launched in 2014, the Obama Administration provided substantial additional military aid to Rwanda.[63] APRRP was conceived to help selected African countries develop relatively high-level

[55] Testimony before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, September 27, 2017, op. cit. The hearing also featured extensive discussion of reported Rwandan assassination attempts, centering around the testimony of two exiled Rwandans.

[56] Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, press statement, "Rwanda National Day," July 1, 2017.

[57] Ambassador-designate Peter Vrooman, testimony before SFRC, December 19, 2017.

[58] The decision followed a petition by the U.S. Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association asserting that an EAC ban on imports of second-hand clothes violates the terms of AGOA. Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), "Request for Comments and Notice of Public Hearing Concerning an Out-of-Cycle Review of Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda Eligibility for Benefits Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act," June 20, 2017. As of December 2017, the review appeared to be ongoing, according to USTR statements.

[59] *Africa Confidential*, "The EAC's used clothes," September 8, 2017.

[60] Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto testimony, op. cit.

[61] U.S. International Trade Commission data, consulted January 2018.

[62] State Department, *FY2018 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*, May 23, 2017.

[63] Rwanda notably received two Cessna aircraft and related training, water purification and bridge building equipment

capabilities for use in peacekeeping operations, and to complement the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, in which Rwanda also participates. The future of APRRP is uncertain, as the Trump Administration's FY2018 budget request did not include funding for it "in order to reduce duplication with existing programs."

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Aid to Rwanda, Selected Accounts

millions of current dollars, by year of appropriation

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017 (Estimated)	FY2018 (Request)
DA	61,9	65.0	54.7	49.8	46.0	15.0 (ESDF)
GHP	134.5	122.5	113.8	108.4	96.2	89.5
IMET	0.3	0,0	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
P.L. 480 Title II (Food for Peace)	6.9	0.0	0,0	0,0	0.0	0,0
Sub-Total	**203.6**	**187.5**	**169.2**	**158.7**	**142.7**	**105.0**
Add'l aid for peacekeeping (PKO, GSCF)	1.0 *ACOTA*	1.4 *ACOTA* 12.3 *APRRP*	2.8 *ACOTA* 9.2 *APRRP*	2.3 *ACOTA* 27.0 *APRRP*	1.2 *ACOTA*	*To be determined*

Source: State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, FY2015-FY2018; State Department 653(a) estimated allocations, FY2017; State Department congressional notifications and responses to CRS queries.

Notes: This table includes only bilateral assistance funds administered by the State Department and/or USAID. Totals may not sum due to rounding. DA = Development Assistance; GHP = Global Health Programs; FMF = Foreign Military Financing; IMET = International Military Education and Training; PKO = Peacekeeping Operations; GSCF = Global Security Contingency Fund. ESDF refers to a Trump Administration proposal to replace DA and several other aid accounts with a consolidated Economic Security and Development Fund.

Legislative Restrictions on Security Assistance

Successive Congresses have enacted foreign aid appropriations measures restricting certain types of U.S. military aid to Rwanda if it is found to be supporting rebel movements in neighboring countries. Citing such provisions, as well as the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457), the Obama Administration periodically suspended certain types of military aid—namely, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET)—in connection with reported Rwandan support for rebels in DRC and, later, Burundi. U.S. military aid to build Rwanda's peacekeeping capacity was exempted from such restrictions due to a combination of legislative provisions (e.g., §1208[f] of P.L. 113-4, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which excepts peacekeeping aid from child soldiers-related restrictions) and executive branch waivers. The executive-legislative branch interplay under the Obama and Trump Administrations (to date) is detailed below.

FY2012-FY2013: The Administration invoked a provision of the FY2012 appropriations act (P.L. 112-74, §7043(a) of Division I), extended into FY2013 via continuing resolutions, to suspend FMF for Rwanda, citing its support for the M23 rebellion in DRC. The provision stated that FMF

and training, heavy vehicles, and rapidly deployable field hospitals. The White House, "FACT SHEET: U.S. Support for Peacekeeping in Africa," August 6, 2014; State Department, "U.S. Peacekeeping Capacity Building Assistance," January 25, 2017.

could be made available for Rwanda or Uganda "unless" the Secretary of State had "credible information" that either government was supporting armed groups in DRC.

FY2014: The Administration continued to suspend FMF, consistent with a provision in that year's appropriations act (P.L. 113-76, §7042(l) of Division K) restricting FMF for Rwanda unless it was "taking steps to cease" support to certain armed groups in DRC. It also designated Rwanda under CSPA in connection with the M23's reported use of child soldiers, and fully applied the act's prohibition on various forms of military aid, including IMET.

FY2015: The appropriations act prohibited FMF for Rwanda unless the Secretary of State certified to Congress that the government was "implementing a policy to cease" support to armed groups in DRC (P.L. 113-235, §7042[l] of Division J). The Administration did not request FMF funds for Rwanda in its budget proposal, in any case, and none were provided. The State Department again designated Rwanda under CSPA, but the President waived the act's aid prohibitions, citing the end of the M23 insurgency—thus allowing IMET, e.g., to resume.[64]

FY2016: The State Department did not designate Rwanda under CSPA, and that year's appropriations act (P.L. 114-113) did not restrict security assistance for Rwanda. The Administration did not request or provide FMF funds for Rwanda, in any case. IMET continued.

FY2017: The State Department again designated Rwanda under CSPA in connection with its reported support for Burundian rebel groups' recruitment of child soldiers. The President waived CSPA restrictions on IMET and several other types of security aid, and no FMF funding was requested for Rwanda or provided.[65] The appropriations act restricted certain IMET programs for any country in Africa's Great Lakes region unless the Secretary of State certified that it was "not facilitating or otherwise participating in destabilizing activities in a neighboring country" (P.L. 115-31, §7042 of Division J). The State Department obligated some IMET funds, but once the act passed into law, did not support activities that would have been prohibited in such a scenario.

FY2018: The Trump Administration did not designate Rwanda under CSPA. FY2017 appropriations provisions restricting IMET for Rwanda and neighboring countries have been carried over via continuing resolutions and are again included in House and Senate appropriations bills for FY2018 (Division G of H.R. 3354, and S. 1780, respectively).

Outlook and Issues for Congress

Congress has shaped U.S. policy and assistance to Rwanda through its authorization and appropriation of U.S. assistance and through oversight activities and Member engagement. In 2012-2013, and again in 2015-2016, the application of legislative restrictions on U.S. security assistance—along with other donor criticism and aid suspensions—appeared to contribute to a decrease in Rwandan support for the M23 in DRC and may conceivably have dissuaded Rwanda from intervening more heavily in Burundi. Members may seek to derive lessons from this sequence of events as they consider pending appropriations bills and/or any future legislative proposals regarding U.S. aid to Rwanda. With regard to Rwanda's domestic conditions, questions remain around how the United States can best support the country's continued stability and growth, including whether continued U.S. support for Rwanda's development efforts can or should be premised on evidence of greater respect for political pluralism or individual liberties.

[64] Presidential Determination with Respect to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, September 30, 2014.

[65] Presidential Determination with Respect to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, September 28, 2016.

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