Congressional Research Service
Informing the legislative debate since 1914

# Rwanda: In Brief

Updated May 14, 2019

**Congressional Research Service**
https://crsreports.congress.gov
R44402

**CRS REPORT**
Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress

# Summary

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in central Africa's Great Lakes region, has seen rapid development and security gains since about 800,000 people—mostly members of the ethnic Tutsi minority—were killed in the 1994 genocide. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) ended the genocide by seizing power in mid-1994 and has been the dominant force in Rwandan politics ever since. The Rwandan government has won donor plaudits for its efforts to improve health, boost agricultural output, encourage foreign investment, and promote women's empowerment. Yet, analysts debate whether Rwanda's authoritarian political system—and periodic support for rebel groups in neighboring countries—could jeopardize the country's stability in the long-run, or undermine the case for donor support.

President Paul Kagame, in office since 2000, won reelection to another seven-year term in 2017 with nearly 99% of the vote, after the adoption of a new constitution that effectively exempted him from term limits through 2034. Kagame's overwhelming margin of victory may reflect popular support for his efforts to stabilize and transform Rwandan society, as well as a political system that involves constraints on opposition activity and close government scrutiny of citizen behavior. In response to external criticism, Kagame has generally denied specific allegations of abusing human rights while asserting that restrictions on civil and political rights are necessary to prevent the return of ethnic violence.

The United States and Rwanda have cultivated close ties since the mid-1990s, underpinned by U.S. development aid and support for Rwanda's robust participation in international peacekeeping. Congress has helped shape U.S. engagement through its appropriation of foreign aid and other legislative initiatives, along with oversight and direct Member outreach to Rwandan officials. Over the past decade, successive Administrations and Congress have continued to support U.S. partnership with Rwanda on development and peacekeeping, while criticizing the government's human rights record and periodic role in regional conflicts. Congress has notably enacted provisions in aid appropriations legislation restricting U.S. military aid to Rwanda if it is found to be supporting rebel groups in neighboring countries. The Obama Administration temporarily applied such restrictions, along with others pursuant to separate child soldiers legislation, citing Rwandan support for rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi. There have been fewer reports of Rwandan support for rebel groups in recent years.

After meeting with President Kagame in early 2018, President Trump expressed appreciation for U.S.-Rwandan economic ties, Rwanda's contributions to peacekeeping, and Kagame's pursuit of African Union institutional reforms. In line with the Administration's proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide, its FY2020 budget request would provide $117 million in bilateral aid to Rwanda, a 28% decrease from FY2018 levels. U.S. peacekeeping-related military assistance for Rwanda has drawn on regionally- and centrally-managed funds, and is not reflected in these totals. The Administration has also suspended Rwanda's eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, reauthorized under P.L. 114-27), in response to alleged market barriers to U.S. exports of used clothing.

# Contents

Introduction ..... 1
Politics ..... 4
Human Rights ..... 5
Regional Security ..... 6
The Economy and Development ..... 7
U.S. Relations and Aid ..... 8
Legislative Restrictions on Security Assistance ..... 10
Issues for Congress and Outlook ..... 12

## Figures

Figure 1. Rwanda at a Glance ..... 2

## Tables

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Aid to Rwanda, Selected Accounts (State + USAID) ..... 10

## Contacts

Author Information ..... 12

# Introduction

Rwanda has achieved a rare degree of political stability, public safety, and economic growth in a sub-region plagued by armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Government programs to improve health, agricultural output, private investment, and gender equality have received international plaudits and 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, along with members of the tiny indigenous Twa ethnic group and Hutus who opposed the massacres. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized power in mid-1994, stopping the genocide. Since then, President Paul Kagame has been widely viewed as the architect of Rwanda's development "miracle" and of its autocratic political model.[1] He has repeatedly won reelection by wide margins, most recently in 2017 (see "Politics").

The United States and Rwanda have cultivated close ties since the mid-1990s, underpinned by U.S. aid in support of Rwanda's ambitious socioeconomic development initiatives and participation in international peacekeeping. Over the past decade, U.S. officials and some Members of Congress have continued to promote U.S.-Rwanda partnership on shared objectives, while voicing concerns regarding Rwanda's authoritarian political system and its periodic support for rebel groups in neighboring countries. Congress has held multiple hearings examining these and related issues,[2] and has enacted restrictions on aid to Rwanda if it is found to be supporting rebel groups (see "U.S. Relations and Aid").

In late 2017, then Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Donald Yamamoto testified to Congress that U.S.-Rwandan relations were "close but complex," acknowledging democracy shortfalls and human rights concerns.[3] President Trump met with President Kagame at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2018, and expressed appreciation for bilateral economic ties, Rwanda's contributions to peacekeeping operations, and Kagame's pursuit of African Union (AU) institutional reforms as then-chairman of the institution. In line with the Administration's broad proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide, it has advocated cuts to funding for Rwanda, including health and development aid. In 2018, President Trump also suspended Rwanda's trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, reauthorized via P.L. 114-27) in response to Rwanda's allegedly protectionist policies, in the context of the Administration's skepticism toward nonreciprocal trade preference programs.[4]

International perspectives on Rwanda tend to be polarized. Kagame's supporters assert that he is a visionary and that Rwanda represents an extraordinary post-conflict success story.[5] To some, 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."[6] Others argue that restrictions on

[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] Most recently: 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.

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

[4] See CRS In Focus IF10149, *African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)*, by Brock R. Williams.

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

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

political and civil rights may ultimately undermine Rwanda's hard-won stability, and that limits on civil liberties may mask ethnic, political, and social tensions.[7] Given evident constraints on free expression, some observers argue that "we simply don't know ... what Rwandans want from their political leaders."[8] Some critics separately have questioned the reliability of Rwanda's development statistics—a key justification for donor aid. Critics also posit that the ruling party's reportedly extensive involvement in the economy may be stifling independent private sector growth.[9] Kagame has dismissed external criticism as inaccurate, irrelevant, neocolonialist, and/or morally vacuous given the international community's failure to halt the genocide.[10]

**Figure 1. Rwanda at a Glance**

**Population, growth rate:** 12.2 million, 2.3%
**Languages:** Kinyarwanda, French, English (all official)
**Religions**: Protestant 50%, Roman Catholic 44%, Muslim 2%, other/none/unspecified 5% (2012 est.)
**Median age**: 19.2 years
**Life expectancy**: 64.5 years
**Infant mortality rate: :** 29.1 deaths/1,000 live births
**Literacy:** 70.5% (male 73.2%, female 68%) (2015)
**HIV/AIDS adult prevalence:** 2.7% (2017)

**Comparative size:** slightly smaller than Maryland
**GDP growth, per capita:** 8.6%, $791
**Key exports / partners:** coffee, tea, hides, tin ore / UAE 38%, Kenya 15%, Switzerland 10%, DRC 10%, US 5%, Singapore 5% (2017)
**Key imports / partners**: foodstuffs, machinery + equipment, steel, petroleum products, cement + construction material / China 20%, Uganda 11%, India 7%, Kenya 7%, Tanzania 5%, UAE 5% (2017)

**Sources:** Graphic created by CRS; base map generated from Esri (2013). Data from CIA *World Factbook* and International Monetary Fund (IMF, April 2019); 2018 estimates unless otherwise noted.

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

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

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

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

## The 1994 Genocide[11]

In April 1994, extremist members of Rwanda's ethnic Hutu majority (then estimated at 85% of the population) orchestrated the mass murder of some 800,000 people—over 10% of the population—within a three-month period.[12] The victims were primarily minority Tutsis (roughly 14% of the population), along with politically moderate Hutus and ethnic Twa (<1% of the population). Hardliners coordinated killings and widespread sexual violence, distributing arms and issuing commands via FM radio to grassroots Hutu-led militia groups throughout the country, whose members targeted their neighbors (and even family members) at the local level.

Decades of misrule had deepened ethnic tensions in Rwanda, producing cycles of anti-Tutsi violence prior to the genocide. Rwanda's pre-colonial kingdom was Tutsi-led, and historically pastoralist Tutsis occupied a higher social status than Hutus, who engaged in sedentary agriculture. Belgian colonial misrule solidified the ethnic divide. In the years leading up to independence in 1962, Hutus mounted a popular uprising targeting Tutsis and ultimately took control of the postcolonial government. By then, about 120,000 people, primarily Tutsis, had sought refuge in neighboring countries. By the 1980s, hundreds of thousands more Tutsi refugees had joined them. In neighboring Burundi, which has a similar ethnic composition and pre-independence history, ethnic Tutsis retained political power at independence and orchestrated anti-Hutu massacres.

Some Tutsi refugees in Uganda—including now-President Kagame—joined a rebellion in that country led by Yoweri Museveni, who took power in Uganda in 1986. With Museveni's backing, Kagame and others then formed a rebel movement, the RPF, seeking a greater Tutsi stake in Rwanda's government and a right of return for refugees. In 1990, the RPF launched an offensive in Rwanda, marking the start of a civil war that Hutu extremists leveraged to spread fear and hatred of Tutsis. The Hutu-led government signed a peace accord with the RPF in 1993, but implementation lagged. When a plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart was shot down over Kigali, Hutu hardliners took control, assassinating moderates in the transitional government and putting in motion a plan to exterminate the Tutsi minority.[13] The U.N. Security Council voted to draw down a U.N. peacekeeping mission, removing forces that could have confronted the militias.[14]

The genocide ended in July 1994, when the RPF seized control of Kigali. At that point, about 2 million mostly Hutu Rwandans—including army officers, militia leaders, and extremist ideologues, along with civilians—fled to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, then Zaire). From there, some launched attacks into Rwanda, laying the groundwork for an enduring regional crisis. Rwanda deployed troops into DRC in 1996 to pursue those who had orchestrated the genocide, and also reportedly targeted civilians on a large scale—its first foray into what would become a years-long regional and civil war in Congo.[15]

In November 1994, the U.N. Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), based in Arusha, Tanzania, to prosecute high-level genocide perpetrators. The ICTR, which received U.S. funding, concluded its work in 2012, having convicted 62 individuals. An appeals chamber continues to hear challenges, while a follow-on "mechanism" continues to seek the arrest and trial of three accused fugitives. The Rwandan government and survivor groups have criticized aspects of the ICTR's proceedings, including early releases granted to some convicts.[16] Domestically, Rwanda organized grassroots "gacaca" trials, drawing on traditional justice mechanisms, to identify and try over a million low-level perpetrators. Rwanda continues to seek the arrest and extradition of alleged perpetrators abroad; in recent years, U.S. federal attorneys have prosecuted several Rwandans in the United States for immigration fraud, citing their involvement in the genocide.[17]

---

[11] The official term within Rwanda (and, as of 2018, in U.N. bodies) is "the Genocide against the Tutsi." The U.S. government has not adopted this terminology, noting that "Hutu and many others were murdered" as well. See U.N. meetings coverage, "General Assembly Designates 7 April International Day of Reflection on 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, Amending Title of Annual Observance," January 26, 2018.

[12] See "U.N. Outreach Program on the Rwandan Genocide and the U.N.," at http://www.un.org.

[13] Authorship of the plane crash is disputed. Official accounts point to Hutu extremists, while some researchers and RPF defectors have asserted that RPF forces shot it down. The government and RPF reject such accounts.

[14] See Samantha Power, "Bystanders to Genocide," *The Atlantic*, September 2001. In remarks in Kigali in 1998, President Bill Clinton expressed remorse and pledged that the United States would do better in the future.

[15] See U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), *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.

[16] See Jina Moore, "Betraying Justice for Rwanda's Genocide Survivors," *The New Yorker*, July 9, 2018.

[17] See, most recently, U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, "Rwandan Man Convicted for Immigration

# Politics

The RPF-led government has pursued rapid economic development and social transformation while effectively suppressing political dissent and public discussion of ethnic identity. President Kagame, leader of the RPF and a former military intelligence figure and rebel commander, is widely viewed as the country's preeminent decision-maker. He first ascended to the presidency in an internal party election in 2000, and has won reelection with over 90% of the popular vote in every subsequent contest (in 2003, 2010, and 2017). An RPF-led coalition holds the majority of seats in parliament; nearly all remaining seats are held by parties that refrain from directly criticizing the RPF or Kagame. The State Department has noted concerns with aspects of each election conducted under RPF rule, such as apparent procedural irregularities, a lack of transparency in vote tabulation, media restrictions, and legal challenges, threats, or criminal prosecutions targeting opposition candidates and parties.[18]

Public criticism of the government is rare; human rights advocates assert that "years of state intimidation and interference" have weakened the capacity of local civil society or media outlets to act as a check on state power.[19] Over the years, political opponents have been jailed, fled the country, or died under murky circumstances. Laws criminalizing genocide ideology and denial, along with state security charges, have been wielded against opposition figures, journalists, and other government critics.[20] 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.[21]

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."[22] Rwandan officials generally reject allegations of abusing human rights, while asserting that restrictions on civil liberties are necessary to prevent ethnic violence in a fragile post-conflict setting. Some Rwandans, including journalists and civil society actors, agree.[23]

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, allowing him to run for a third term. He won with 99% of the vote. After Kagame's current term expires, the presidential term is to be shortened to five years per the new constitution; Kagame could then run for two more consecutive terms, thus potentially

Fraud and Perjury in Connection with the 1994 Genocide," April 5, 2019.

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

[19] Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Rwanda: Events of 2018," *World Report 2019*. See also 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.

[20] See State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, "Rwanda," 2018.

[21] 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.

[22] *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.

[23] *Columbia Journalism Review*, "'A fragile period': Journalism in Rwanda, 25 years after the genocide," April 4, 2019.

remaining in office until 2034. He has denied any intention to do so, stating that he is preparing Rwanda for an unspecified future leadership transition.[24]

Tolerance of opposition voices seems to have increased slightly since Kagame's reelection in 2017, although a significant shift in the contours of Rwandan politics appears unlikely. Two prominent opposition figures were released from jail in 2018. Diane Rwigara, a vocal Kagame critic (and daughter of a well-known businessman and Tutsi genocide survivor) who was jailed on charges of forgery and inciting insurrection shortly after seeking to run for president in 2017, was acquitted following international advocacy on her behalf, including from some Members of Congress.[25] Victoire Ingabire, who had sought to run against Kagame in 2010 and was serving a prison sentence for alleged genocide denial and seeking to form an armed group, received a presidential pardon.[26] So did several other members of Ingabire's FDU-Inkingi party ("United Democratic Forces-Pillar"), which remains illegal.[27] Several other FDU-Inkingi supporters remain in prison; others have been killed in unclear circumstances.[28]

Also in 2018, the Democratic Green party, a relatively independent opposition movement (and not affiliated with Rwigara or Ingabire), won two seats in parliament after competing for the first time in legislative elections. The Green party was not granted legal registration in time to run candidates in the 2013 legislative vote; its presidential candidate, Frank Habineza, won less than 1% in the 2017 presidential vote. The party's deputy leader was killed in unclear circumstances prior to the 2010 presidential election, soon after the party was founded in 2009.[29]

The RPF's political leadership appears to have narrowed from a diverse set of actors in the 1990s to an apparently small circle around the president.[30] Over the years, various top RPF officials and military officers have faced criminal charges, some on national security grounds, or have fled the country. In 2010, several prominent RFP defectors formed an exiled opposition movement, the Rwandan National Congress (RNC). Some members have been the target of armed attacks or apparent assassinations in foreign countries, including several in South Africa. President Kagame has denied state involvement, while assailing the individuals in question as traitors.[31]

# Human Rights

The State Department's 2018 human rights report on Rwanda cites forced disappearances, alleged extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and torture by state security forces ("including asphyxiation, electric shocks, mock executions"), noting "impunity" involving civilian officials and some members of the security forces. The report also documents political prisoners, threats and violence against journalists, censorship, and "substantial interference" with freedoms of assembly and association, along with "restrictions on political participation." It further finds that "the government continued to monitor homes, movements, telephone calls, email, other private

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

[25] See CNN, "US Congressional Support Builds for Rwandan Opposition Leader," December 4, 2018.

[26] Human rights groups raised due process concerns with Ingabire's trial without directly challenging the veracity of the charges. See Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Rwanda: Eight-Year Sentence for Opposition Leader," October 30, 2012.

[27] Associated Press, "Rwanda's President to Newly Freed Prisoners: Be Careful," September 20, 2018.

[28] See CNN, "Aide to Leading Rwandan Opposition Politician Found Dead," March 11, 2019.

[29] See, e.g., HRW, "Allow Independent Autopsy of Opposition Politician," July 21, 2010.

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

[31] HRW, "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders," January 28, 2014; *Wall Street Journal*, "Rwanda Leader Denies Role in Ex-Spy Chief's Death," January 23, 2014.

communications, and personal and institutional data," often using extrajudicial means and/or embedded informants.

Human Rights Watch has reported patterns of arbitrary detention and torture of Rwandans accused or suspected of supporting the RNC, Ingabire's political movement, or the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia founded in DRC by perpetrators of the genocide.[32] The organization also has accused Rwandan security forces of killing petty criminals extra-judicially, allegations that Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) has rejected.[33] Rwanda has expelled international researchers working for Human Rights Watch; in 2018, a local employee was temporarily detained incommunicado.

In 2018, the government shuttered thousands of churches and dozens of mosques, citing safety violations or other regulatory concerns, and proposed stricter registration requirements for religious groups. One expert asserted that these moves targeted non-denominational places of worship (i.e., not affiliated with Roman Catholicism or established Protestant denominations) because they "are harder to control because they don't report to a central hierarchy."[34]

# Regional Security

Rwanda is a top peacekeeping troop contributor in Africa; U.N. officials and donors value its military professionalism and commitment to civilian protection.[35] As chair of the AU in 2018, President Kagame also sought to bolster the financial sustainability of African-led stability operations. At the same time, Rwanda has a history of unilateral military intervention in DRC, and reportedly has periodically provided support to rebel groups in DRC and Burundi.[36] Its reasons for doing so may reflect a mix of national security concerns (e.g., a desire to counter DRC-based armed groups led by individuals implicated in the 1994 genocide), ethnic solidarity with the Tutsi minority in Burundi and persecuted communities of Rwandan descent in DRC, and economic motivations linked to resource smuggling in DRC.[37]

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 insurgent group known as the M23.[38] The M23 originated as a rebellion among members of a previous Rwandan-

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

[33] 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.

[34] Timothy Longman, interviewed in *World Politics Review*, "Church and Mosque Closures in Rwanda Show the Increasing Power of the State," April 12, 2018.

[35] Providing for Peacekeeping, "Peacekeeping Contributor Profile: Rwanda," 2015; "Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power at a UN Ministerial Meeting on the Future of Civilian Protection in Peace Operations," Belfer Center, May 11, 2016. Citing Rwanda's experience in 1994, in which U.N. peacekeepers withdrew as massacres were spreading, Rwandan officials have sought multilateral support for robust implementation of peacekeeper mandates for the protection of civilians, via commitments known as the "Kigali Principles."

[36] See CRS Report R43166, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Background and U.S. Relations*, by Alexis Arieff, and CRS Report R44018, *Burundi's Political Crisis: In Brief*.

[37] 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.

[38] 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.

backed armed group, and was the latest in a series of Rwandan-backed rebellions originating among communities of Rwandan descent in eastern DRC since in the late 1990s. In 2015 and 2016, reports suggested Rwandan involvement in the recruitment and training of Burundian refugees for a rebellion against the government of Burundi, again prompting donor criticism.[39]

Credible reports of direct Rwandan involvement in regional conflicts have since diminished, although the country's relations with DRC remain volatile. Tensions with Burundi also have endured, with Rwanda accusing Burundian authorities of stoking ethnic tensions while Burundi has accused Rwanda of espionage and interference.[40] Relations with sometimes-ally Uganda also have soured in recent years.[41] Rwandan officials, including President Kagame, have openly accused Uganda of backing Rwandan armed dissidents (apparently referring to the RNC) as well as the FDLR, while Ugandan officials have accused Rwanda of espionage.[42]

Ongoing insecurity and illicit resource extraction in eastern DRC remain flashpoints for regional tensions and spillover of conflicts. In late 2018, U.N. DRC sanctions monitors reported that the RNC was mobilizing armed combatants in DRC's South Kivu province, with apparent Burundian support.[43] Some researchers posit that Rwanda-Uganda friction is rooted in competition over access to DRC minerals; U.N. DRC sanctions investigators reported in 2018 that "gold sourced in high-risk and conflict areas [of DRC] was exported illegally to Uganda and Rwanda."[44]

# The Economy and Development

Donor aid, political stability, low corruption, and pro-investor policies have enabled high economic growth rates (4-9% annually) over the past decade. Rwanda remains one of the world's poorest countries, although it ranks higher than many other sub-Saharan African countries on the 2018 U.N. Human Development Index (at 158 out of 189 countries assessed). About 75% of Rwandans are engaged in agriculture, many for subsistence; the country is nonetheless reliant on food imports, in part due to having the highest population density in continental Africa.

The government seeks to transform the economy into one that is services-oriented and middle-income, launching programs to expand internet access, improve education, and increase domestic energy production. Key growth sectors include tourism, coffee, tea, tin mining, construction, and an emerging financial services sector.[45] The government also aims to turn Rwanda into a regional trade, logistics, and conference hub. It has invested in the construction of new business class hotels and a convention center in Kigali, a planned new airport, and an expansion of the national airline RwandAir—which is pursuing U.S. federal approval for direct flights between Kigali and

[39] 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.

[40] See, e.g., *Newsweek*, "Burundi and Rwanda: East Africa's Bad Neighbors," May 17, 2016.

[41] *The East African*, "Kagame on African Union, EAC and What Keeps Him Awake at Night," February 19, 2019.

[42] *African Arguments*, "Closed Borders and Fighting Words: Rwanda and Uganda's Deepening Rift," March 12, 2019; tweet by Rwandan Minister of State Olivier Nduhungirehe on May 3, 2019.

[43] U.N. Security Council, *Midterm Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, December 18, 2018.

[44] Institute for Security Studies (South Africa), "The Great Lakes Can't Afford More Instability," March 18, 2019; U.N. Security Council, *Final report of the Group of Experts*, June 8, 2018, U.N. doc. S/2018/531.

[45] "Rwanda – Market Overview," http://www.export.gov, March 28, 2019.

the United States. Much investment has been concentrated in Kigali, which has received international plaudits for its clean and safe streets.[46]

Rwanda was ranked 29 out of 190 on the World Bank's 2019 *Doing Business* report, the only low-income country and one of only two African countries (along with Mauritius) in the top 50. Rwanda's continual improvements in the annual rankings reflect its efforts to reduce bureaucratic red-tape, protect property rights, improve access to credit, expand the supply of reliable electricity, and ensure contract enforcement. The State Department has nonetheless documented various challenges for foreign investors, including "payment delays with government contracts," inconsistent adherence to incentives offered by the Rwanda Development Board, infringements on property rights, and "competition from state-owned and ruling party-aligned businesses."[47]

Human development gains since the genocide have been dramatic in relative terms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), from 1990 and 2016, life expectancy increased from 48 to 66 years; the child (under five) mortality rate fell from 152 to 42 deaths per 1,000 live births; and the maternal mortality rate decreased from 1,300 to 290 deaths per 100,000 live births.[48] Through a donor-backed national community-based health insurance system, Rwanda provides near-universal health coverage for basic primary care, with the cost fully or partially subsidized based on income level.[49] As of 2015, about 39% of Rwandans reportedly lived below the poverty line, compared to 56% in 2006 and 78% in 1994.[50] Some researchers have questioned the reliability of Rwanda's poverty statistics, noting that they are based on household-level survey data and may be subject to interference; the World Bank has rejected some of this criticism, asserting that Rwanda's official statistical methodology "is technically sound."[51]

# 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.[52] Those remarks arguably set the tone for a relationship defined, in part, by a sense of guilt among U.S. policymakers 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 the executive branch and Congress working together to provide substantial aid to support Rwanda's development efforts and peacekeeper deployments. Yet, over the past decade, executive branch officials and some

[46] Police reportedly systematically detain and sometimes abuse individuals engaged in begging or informal commerce; see *Mail & Guardian*, "The Kigali Paradox: How did Rwanda's capital become Africa's cleanest city?" March 6, 2019.

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

[48] WHO, *World Health Statistics 2016*.

[49] See University of Rwanda, Management Sciences for Health, and the Rockefeller Foundation, *Technical Brief: The Development of Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda: Experiences and Lessons*, March 2016.

[50] CIA *World Factbook*; Partners in Health, "Rwanda's Rebirth: A blueprint for health systems strengthening," February 2013.

[51] *Review of African Political Economy blog*, "A Straightforward Case of Fake Statistics," April 18, 2019; World Bank factsheet, "Q&A on Rwanda Poverty Statistics," April 22, 2019.

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

Members of Congress increasingly have criticized Rwanda's involvement in regional conflicts and expressed concern with its domestic political and human rights conditions.[53]

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."[54] In September 2017 congressional testimony, then Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Yamamoto 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."[55]

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."[56] In response to Member questions at the September 2017 hearing, Ambassador Yamamoto affirmed that "we are unable to assess this election as free and fair."[57] At his Senate confirmation hearing in late 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."[58]

President Trump suspended duty-free treatment of Rwandan apparel exports to the United States under AGOA in 2018, as noted above, citing Rwandan protectionist policies. The suspension came after the Administration initiated an out-of-cycle review of Rwanda's eligibility in 2017. In addition to concerns about trade barriers, Ambassador Yamamoto testified in 2017 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

[53] 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 criticized Rwanda for supporting the M23 rebel movement in DRC. See State Department, *FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations*, February 27, 2015; 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.

[54] 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.

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

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

[57] 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.

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

AGOA eligibility."[59] The impact may be largely symbolic: in 2017, U.S. imports from Rwanda totaled $44 million, of which $5 million were under AGOA.[60] U.S. exports to Rwanda totaled $64 million that year.

U.S. bilateral aid to Rwanda aims to promote economic growth, food security, health, and military professionalism. The State Department has drawn on additional regionally- and centrally-managed funds to provide military aid to build Rwanda's peacekeeping capabilities, including under the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP) initiative, launched under President Obama in 2014. (The Trump Administration has not requested new appropriations in support of APRRP, but has continued to implement funds allocated in prior years.) APRRP was conceived to complement the State Department's Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), in which Rwanda also participates. The United States also provides humanitarian assistance for international organizations caring for Congolese and Burundian refugees in Rwanda.

**Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Aid to Rwanda, Selected Accounts (State + USAID)**

$ millions, appropriations

| | FY2013 | FY2014 | FY2015 | FY2016 | FY2017 | FY2018 | FY2019 (req.) | FY2020 (req.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DA | 61.9 | 65.0 | 54.7 | 49.8 | 46.0 | 46.0 | 13.7 (ESDF) | 12.2 (ESDF) |
| GHP (USAID + State) | 134.5 | 122.5 | 113.8 | 108.4 | 96.1 | 114.6 | 99.5 | 103.8 |
| IMET | 0.3 | - | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| P.L. 480 Title II (FFP) | 6.9 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Sub-Total** | **203.6** | **187.5** | **169.2** | **158.7** | **142.8** | **161.3** | **113.6** | **116.6** |
| Selected additional peacekeeping obligations[a] | 1.0 *GPOI* | 1.4 *GPOI* | 2.8 *GPOI* | 2.3 *GPOI* | 1.2 *GPOI* | 2.6 *GPOI* | *TBD* | *TBD* |
| | - | 12.3 *APRRP* | 9.2 *APRRP* | 27.0 *APRRP* | - | 6.4 *APRRP* | *TBD* | *TBD* |

**Source:** State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, FY2015-FY2020; State Department 653(a) estimated allocations, FY2017; State Department congressional notifications and responses to CRS queries.

**Notes:** May not include all regionally- and centrally-managed funds. Totals may not sum due to rounding. DA=Development Assistance; FFP=Food for Peace; FMF = Foreign Military Financing; GHP = Global Health Programs; IMET = International Military Education and Training. ESDF refers to a Trump Administration proposal to merge DA and several other aid accounts under a new Economic Support and Development Fund.

a. GPOI=Global Peace Operations Initiative; APRRP=Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership. Funding for these programs has been drawn from Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) and the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF) accounts.

## 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 suspended certain types of military aid—

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

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

namely, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET)—citing Rwandan support for rebels in DRC and, later, Burundi. Military aid in support of Rwanda's peacekeeping capabilities was exempted from such restrictions via 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 Obama 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 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 Obama 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 such funds unless Rwanda 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 applied that act's prohibition on various other 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 Obama Administration had not requested FMF for Rwanda in its budget proposal, and none was provided. The State Department again designated Rwanda under CSPA, but President Obama waived the act's aid prohibitions, citing the end of the M23 insurgency—thus allowing IMET, for example, to resume.[61]

**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 Obama Administration did not request or provide FMF funds for Rwanda, in any case. IMET continued.

**FY2017:** The Obama Administration (in mid-2016) designated Rwanda under CSPA in connection with its reported support for Burundian rebel groups' recruitment of child soldiers. President Obama waived CSPA restrictions on IMET and several other types of security aid, however, and no FMF funding was requested for Rwanda or provided.[62] The appropriations act restricted certain types of 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(a) of Division J). The State Department provided some IMET funds for Rwanda, but once the act passed into law, did not support activities that would have been prohibited in such a scenario.

**FY2018-FY2019 to date:** Appropriations measures have continued to restrict certain types of IMET programs for any country in the Great Lakes region until the Secretary of State determines and reports that it is "not facilitating or otherwise participating in destabilizing activities in a neighboring country, including aiding and abetting armed groups" (most recently, P.L. 116-6 §7042(a) of Division F). The Trump Administration has not designated Rwanda under CSPA. It also has not requested or provided FMF for Rwanda.

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

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

# Issues for Congress and Outlook

Congress has shaped U.S. policy and assistance to Rwanda through its authorization and appropriation of U.S. assistance, and through oversight 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.

## Author Information

Alexis Arieff
Specialist in African Affairs

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.