

Going in the “Right” Direction? Promotion of Democracy in Rwanda since 1990

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Abstract

Using diplomacy, military intervention, and aid, external actors have played an important role in brokering peace and fostering democracy in Rwanda since 1990. Rwanda is now stable and at peace, with democratic institutions in place. However, concerns about ethnicity and security underpin a democratic system based on consensus, not competition. External intervention has had both positive and negative impacts, leaving donors with limited bargaining power. Governance is important within donor programs, but activities of promoting democracy are limited. Donors appear to accept the general direction in which Rwanda is going with regard to democracy, yet it is questionable that the endpoint is a liberal democracy along Western lines.

Key words: Rwanda, conflict, democratization, governance, aid, donors, international institutions.

In September 2008, Rwanda held its second legislative elections since the political system was liberalized to allow for multiparty politics in 1990. These elections represented another step on Rwanda’s road to democratization, a road encouraged and supported by foreign countries and institutions. This road has seen the country pass through civil war and genocide, but with this second round of elections, it appeared that democratic principles had become more entrenched. However, these elections also confirmed the dominance of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) over the political landscape, raising questions about the nature of the democratic process which international actors are assisting.

Rwanda formally gained its independence in 1962. This was followed by two periods of *de facto* authoritarian rule under Grégoire Kayibanda (1959-1973) and Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994), which saw political power

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shift from the minority Tutsi to the majority Hutu. Under Habyarimana, the country was considered to be doing well developmentally, in spite of ethnic discrimination against the Tutsi and a record of human rights abuses. Economic crisis fueled political crisis in the 1980s. Civil war broke out in 1990 when the RPF, a primarily Tutsi-based guerrilla movement formed of Rwandan refugees, invaded from Uganda in a bid to force the right of refugees to return and a place for Tutsi within Rwandan political life. The civil war coincided with the beginnings of political liberalization, and the crisis escalated as extremists preached ethnic hatred. In April 1994, following the assassination of Habyarimana, the organized murder of Tutsi and moderate Hutu began. The genocide ended when the RPF ousted the incumbent government in July 1994, and established a power-sharing government, emphasizing inclusion and unity.

Following the conflict, power dynamics in the country were completely reconfigured, with extremist parties rendered illegal; other parties remained within the power-sharing government, but were politically weakened. Until 1998, the country faced instability from incursions by armed groups into Rwanda from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where remnants of the former regime had established themselves. Since 1999, the country has been generally peaceful and stable and has made significant strides in economic and social reconstruction and development. Elections were held in 2003 and 2008 at the national level. Still, tensions persist in Rwanda both politically and socially, and the country falls short of fulfilling the criteria of a liberal democracy.

External actors have employed various tools of diplomacy, aid, and military intervention to foster peace and democratization. This essay explores these activities through examining the positive and negative impacts of external intervention on the democratic process in Rwanda. The first section describes the nature of democracy in Rwanda today. The essay then examines the role of external actors during and after the conflict in relation to Rwanda's democratization process. It concludes that, while external intervention has assisted in laying the foundations for democracy in Rwanda, donor efforts have not been consistent or particularly forceful. Rwanda continues to receive increasing amounts of foreign aid on the grounds that it is going in the "right direction," but what that direction might be is open to question.

Rwanda in 2009: What Kind of Democracy?

In 2008, almost twenty years after competitive politics were introduced, Rwanda held its second national legislative elections. The RPF won over 78 percent of the seats, increasing its dominant position within parliament. The European Union Observer Mission highlighted some fundamental shortcomings in relation to international and regional standards, but nevertheless it described the elections as "an important step in the efforts to further institutionalize the

democratic process.”¹ The concept of democracy as the basis of the political system had been firmly established, with the key institutions of a liberal democracy in place: the 2003 constitution guaranteed fundamental rights and freedoms of the people; there was official separation of powers; a judicial reform had been completed, guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary; and elections at all levels had been held. However, the practice and reality of democracy in Rwanda reflect its particular context and history, and it does not yet fulfill the criteria of a full democracy in a Western, liberal sense; indeed, it is unclear whether this goal is, in fact, the ambition.

Rwanda has certainly moved along the path of democracy. In 1994, the country was in tatters. Five years later, peace had been fully restored to the country, institutions of democracy were being established, and a broad-based transition government was in place. This was based upon the Arusha Peace Accords, signed in 1993, which included provisions for the integration of the armed forces, the creation of a new police force, the reintegration of refugees, the creation of national commissions for human rights and reconciliation, and preparation for elections. However, no elections had been held at any level and the rule of law was weak. Although there was some participation of broader society in policy making, political freedom was restricted, with consensus and unity taking precedence over civil liberties. At this point, Rwanda could be categorized as “politically closed authoritarian.”² The government described this as a period of “democratic consolidation.”³

In 2007, Freedom House considered Rwanda to have moved from a “consensual dictatorship” since 1994 to a “nominal democracy” since 2003⁴; it continues to score poorly in international rankings vis-à-vis governance.⁵ Reports from international human rights groups tend to be critical of Rwanda’s democratic credentials. Following Diamond’s criteria,⁶ Rwanda today could be considered a hybrid regime, which combines authoritarian

¹ European Union Election Observer Mission, “Rwanda 2008: Final Report on the Legislative Elections to the Chamber of Deputies, 15-18 September 2008,” 2008, http://www.eueomrwanda.org/EN/Final_Report.html (accessed February 15, 2009).

² Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes: Elections without Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21-35.

³ Republic of Rwanda, *Réalisations du Gouvernement d'Union Nationale, 19 Juillet 1994 - 19 Juillet 1999* (Kigali, Rwanda: Republic of Rwanda, 1999), 119.

⁴ Jennie E. Burnet, “Rwanda,” *Countries at the Crossroads*, Freedom House 2007, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=140&edition=8&ccrpage=37&ccrcountry=167> (accessed May 21, 2008).

⁵ Freedom House, “Freedom in the World,” 2007, <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed May 21, 2008); Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers, “Polity IV Country Report 2007: Rwanda,” 2007, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/Rwanda2007.pdf> (accessed May 22, 2008); and Daniel Kaufman, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, “Governance Matters VII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996-2007,” Policy Research Working Paper 4654 (Washington, DC: World Bank, June 2008).

⁶ Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes.”

and democratic elements. This corresponds to the category of “hegemonic electoral authoritarian,” in that one party (the RPF) dominates the political scene; competition is minimal as the opposition is weak; elections are held but the outcomes are largely foregone conclusions; there is some space for political opposition; and independent media and social organizations exist, but restrictions are imposed upon them. Moreover, there is evidence of state interference in the affairs of the judiciary and the security forces, and of human rights abuses. Within popular perception, the executive, and by extension the RPF, is seen as being extremely powerful in contrast to the legislature and other political parties.⁷

Categorizing Rwanda’s political system by international standards is a bone of contention for the incumbent government. Indeed, government and donor frustration with these analyses—which they argue do not capture the reality on the ground and are not based on sufficiently robust evidence—led to the adoption of the Joint Governance Assessment (JGA) in 2008. The JGA provides an assessment of Rwanda’s governance in its broadest sense, identifying challenges and targets for improvement which are accepted by both the government and donors.⁸ The nature of Rwanda’s conflict has given the postwar political elite a strong sense of the type of democracy that it believes Rwanda needs at this stage. As several informants said, Rwanda’s democracy is a “bit different”; the regime does not seek to emulate the West, but to build a system which reflects Rwanda’s specific circumstances.⁹ Central concepts focus on inclusion and consensus-building, which are aimed at dissipating ethnic tensions and providing security for the country and people. These reflect Rwanda’s history with regard to democracy.

Between 1963 and 1990, Rwanda was ruled by authoritarian regimes. In 1975, Habyarimana abolished all political parties and formed a single party, the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND), creating a totalitarian state with extensive control over the population.¹⁰ When Habyarimana agreed to open the way for multiparty politics in 1990, a number of new parties were formed. These tended to be regionally- or ethnically-based, rather than ideologically distinct, which reflected deeper cleavages among Rwanda’s elite. As the civil war progressed, extremist factions emerged within several political parties, playing key roles in destroying the peace process

⁷ Information based on interviews conducted by author, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2008. See also, Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), *Democracy in Rwanda* (Kigali, Rwanda: IRDP, 2005).

⁸ Republic of Rwanda, “Rwanda: Joint Governance Assessment,” Final Approved Version, October 8, 2008, <http://www.minaloc.gov.rw/spip.php?article193> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁹ Author’s interviews with government representatives, researchers, and donor agencies, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2008.

¹⁰ Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002).

and unleashing the genocide. Consequently, for many people, democracy is associated with ethnic-based violence. This reflects a longer history going back to the independence period when the “social revolution” saw the majority Hutu overthrow the Tutsi minority, which had been favored by the Belgian colonial power. The independence struggle was highly ethnicized, therefore, and “democracy became synonymous with domination by the ethnic majority over the minority.”¹¹ Under both Kayibanda and Habyarimana, Tutsi were excluded from political and civil life by a quota system in place for access to public sector positions and services such as education. Sporadic pogroms against Tutsi led to waves of refugees leaving the country.

This legacy has given many in Rwandan society a profound mistrust of politicians and democracy; civil society and the media were also badly implicated in the genocide, which has left them seriously weakened and more inclined to self-censorship than critique. But it also led to some important internal reflections upon democracy since the genocide. At an elite level, a series of meetings during 1998 and 1999 concluded that democracy should be about people taking responsibility for their problems (ownership and participation), appointing structures to resolve these problems (representation), and representatives not abusing their authority (control and accountability).¹² Research conducted by Rwandan researchers on democracy among different swathes of the population highlights that Rwanda is considered to have no tradition of democracy, and that democracy with its attendant institutions, such as political parties, is perceived as imported from the West. Representative democracy is seen as an empty shell, with elected leaders more interested in pleasing the party hierarchy and state and gaining personal power than in the people. At the same time, for many Rwandans, democracy means having a leader who enables the population at large to benefit from his power, and ensures that the people remain safe, can work, and have the possibility of becoming prosperous.¹³ This research also indicates a general preference for power sharing, which reflects the JGA statement that “many Rwandans express an understandable preference for a consensus mode of politics.”¹⁴

These experiences explain to some extent the quirks of Rwanda’s political system. The 2003 constitution, approved by popular referendum, includes several clauses aimed at promoting inclusion. These include a strict power-

¹¹ Jean-Paul Kimonyo, Noel Twagiramungu, and Christopher Kayumba, “Supporting the Post-Genocide Transition in Rwanda: The Role of the International Community,” Democratic Transition in Post-Conflict Societies Project, Working Paper 32 (The Hague: Clingendael, 2004), 11. See also, Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*.

¹² Republic of Rwanda, *Report on the Reflection Meetings Held in the Office of the President of the Republic from May 1998 to March 1999* (Kigali, Rwanda: Republic of Rwanda, Office of the President of the Republic, 1999), 5.

¹³ IRDP, *Democracy in Rwanda*.

¹⁴ Republic of Rwanda, “Rwanda: Joint Governance Assessment,” 18.

sharing arrangement for the Cabinet, in which only half of the posts can be filled by representatives of the majority party in parliament. All political parties must participate in the Forum of Political Parties, which aims to promote dialogue and consensus, with equal representation between small and large parties. While this enables all political organizations to participate in policy making, it also restricts the possibility for competitive politics. Consequently, there is very little ideological or policy difference among the political parties. In a bid to make candidacy transparent and to limit the space for ethnic-based voting (and to reduce costs), elections at the local level involve queuing behind the candidate of choice, rather than secret ballot. Likewise, the system for legislative elections, in which the electorate votes for a political party rather than for individual candidates, aims to ensure that people cannot vote for a candidate purely on the basis of his or her ethnicity or place of origin.

Two major and interconnected themes underpin the political system in Rwanda and much of the ensuing critiques: ethnicity and security. Ethnicity lay at the heart of the political system until the genocide; since 1994, it has also been central to political debates, but in terms of how to remove ethnicity from politics. This has led to the claim that ethnicity is a taboo subject in Rwanda. However, ethnicity is not denied, nor is it avoided in discussion. What is taboo is the political instrumentalization of ethnicity. Among the fundamental principles of Rwanda's 2003 constitution is the need to eradicate ethnic, regional, and other divisions, and to fight the "ideology of genocide," which prohibits any activity considered to promote discrimination based on ethnicity or region. The existing legislation on this is open to misinterpretation,¹⁵ and the government has been criticized for how it uses the charge of "divisionism" in a political manner.¹⁶

At the same time, fears about mobilization along ethnic grounds are real. A small number of genocide survivors have been killed to prevent them from testifying in court, and claims of ethnic discrimination continue, for example within schools. While some external observers see such fears as a mechanism of the ruling elite to maintain control over the Hutu population and to consolidate their power, it would also be naïve to think that following genocide and decades of ethnic tension these issues have gone away; there appears to be genuine fear among many people about a resurgence of violence.

In July 1994, the Government of National Unity published a *Declaration of Principles*, listing the priorities of the new regime. These included restoring peace and security; organizing the administration; consolidating national unity; improving the well-being of the population; resuming the economy;

¹⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶ See European Union, *Declaration by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on the Statement of the Rwandan Government to the Parliamentary Report on Genocidal Ideology* (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 13110/04, Presse 285, October 6, 2004).

consolidating democracy by combating the culture of impunity; guaranteeing freedom of expression and respect for fundamental human rights; and promoting political and social pluralism. These fundamental principles have remained at the heart of subsequent government documents and policy statements.¹⁷ Within this nexus, national security is arguably the overriding priority. As the government stated in 1999, the election process would have advanced further in the immediate years following the genocide if it had not been for ongoing insecurity in the country and the problems of reintegrating a large returnee refugee population.¹⁸ It was only in late 1996 that the huge number of refugees who had fled the country in 1994 began to return home *en masse*; and it was only in 1998 that peace had been secured throughout the country, following an insurgency fueled by remnants of the former army and militia based in eastern DRC. Between 1998 and 2002, Rwandan troops were embroiled in the civil war in the DRC, officially to address the threat from these forces;¹⁹ this security threat remains a concern, which still has not been definitively resolved.²⁰

The strong discourse of national unity and consensual politics, therefore, reflects not only Rwanda's recent history, but also these internal and external security concerns. Demands for human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, popular participation, freedom of civil society activities, and so on, are all tolerated but within strict boundaries. Likewise, political opposition is tolerated only to the extent that it does not challenge national security and stability. Since 1994, the RPF has controlled political space and allowed only a gradual and controlled democratic process to develop on its terms and in such a way as to not threaten national stability and security. Rwanda's future democratic trajectory will be greatly determined by whether the RPF-led regime will permit a true multiparty democracy the space to grow, as laid down in the constitution and as anticipated in the Joint Governance Assessment.²¹ Currently, multiparty politics are viewed as a threat and a potential source of conflict rather than as an instrument for peace. Opening political space

¹⁷ Rachel Hayman, *The Complexity of Aid: Government Strategies, Donor Agendas and the Coordination of Development Assistance in Rwanda 1994-2004* (PhD diss., School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh, 2006), 127-130.

¹⁸ Republic of Rwanda, *Réalisations du Gouvernement d'Union Nationale, 19 Juillet 1994-19 Juillet 1999*, 119.

¹⁹ The involvement of the RPF-led government in the DRC since 1994 has been controversial. For a comprehensive overview, see Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Timothy Longman, "The Complex Reasons for Rwanda's Engagement in Congo," in *The African Stakes in the Congo War*, ed. J.F. Clark (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

²⁰ In November 2008, tensions flared again between Rwanda and the DRC, this time over allegations of Rwandan support for a Tutsi-based rebel group in eastern DRC. However, in January 2009, the leaders of Rwanda and the DRC agreed to work together to deal with the groups threatening Rwanda, with Rwandan troops involved in joint operations with the Congolese army.

²¹ Republic of Rwanda, "Rwanda: Joint Governance Assessment," 18.

too much is seen to carry the risk of extremism reemerging. There is a real threat of this, in that there are armed extremists operating on Rwanda's borders and extremist political views are espoused by opposition groups outside the country; but that threat is not great enough to seriously destabilize the state. Of greater concern, perhaps, is the lack of a democratic culture and the risk that people would easily vote on ethnic or regional grounds rather than on the basis of ideology or policy positions. The general feeling among informants is that more space for genuine political opposition would not threaten the regime, but that some control is also necessary.

Support for the RPF is high, as the 2008 elections testified, but it is hard to judge whether that stems from true faith in the RPF's political position, conformity, or fear. The RPF is a strong political force and highly organized, and other political parties are hard-pressed to offer a real alternative. Within the country, there is arguably a small group at the heart of the regime which has limited interest in establishing an egalitarian, democratic society.²² But there are also those pushing for change; the more moderate members of government and administration appear to be genuinely working for a more inclusive, developmental society. Such people exist throughout the administrative apparatus. Demand is also coming from the general populace, as well as from civil society and the emerging business community. Donors claim that it is these groups that they are seeking to support.²³

Peace and Democracy Promotion during the Conflict

As in many African countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Rwanda was faced with an internal economic crisis, the consequence of external factors and poor economic management, corruption, and nepotism. The weakening grasp of the government on the country's economy enabled demands for political change to emerge internally, influenced by the "wave of democracy" spreading across Africa at this time. External actors were integral to this dynamic, with Rwanda's key allies, such as France, promoting political liberalization. The civil war broke out in this atmosphere, in part enabled by this situation. The new interest in democracy, respect for human rights, and good political governance in the early 1990s was an inherent element of both Rwanda's conflict and attempts to resolve that conflict.

Rwanda has long been a recipient of external assistance. Up to the mid-1980s, it was seen as a beacon of tranquility, orderliness, and successful

²² Filip Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship," *African Affairs*, 103 (2004): 177–210, and Department for International Development (DFID), *Rwanda Country Assistance Plan* (London: DFID, 2004), 6.

²³ For example, the UK Country Assistance Plan for Rwanda of 2004 stresses its support for Rwanda's "drivers of change" and "champions of change," DFID, *Rwanda Country Assistance Plan*, 2 and 6.

development in a troubled region. It was registering reasonable economic performance and was something of a donor “darling,” despite the totalitarian nature of the state. Indeed, “with hindsight the entire period from 1973 to roughly 1988 can be labeled as one of relative political stability, moderate economic growth and a favorable human rights record if compared to a number of contemporary regimes in sub-Saharan Africa.”²⁴ The World Bank was impressed by the country’s political stability, the government’s concern for the rural population, its effective administration, and its sound, prudent, and realistic management.²⁵

This situation gradually changed in the second half of the 1980s. The country was dependent upon exports of coffee and tin, the prices of which both collapsed in the mid-1980s; this led to economic recession, plummeting export earnings, and rising debt.²⁶ Droughts also affected subsistence agriculture, adding to the economic woes of the rural poor. In 1989, the budget was cut by 40 percent, largely offset by reducing social services. Since revenues from the export of commodities fueled the patrimonial society, the only other resource for elite enrichment and patronage was international development aid, upon which Rwanda’s dependency had been steadily growing since the 1970s. Aid constituted 5 percent of GDP in 1965, rising to around 10 percent through the 1980s, reaching U.S. \$200 million by 1986. Around two hundred bilateral, multilateral, and nongovernmental donors were present in Rwanda at this time, and the “aid system was omnipresent in Rwanda, both physically and geographically.”²⁷

To combat the economic crisis, a structural adjustment program (SAP) was implemented in 1990, with the support of the World Bank. Many bilateral donors increased their aid to complement this. Overall aid therefore increased again in the early 1990s, rising to around \$350 million, accounting for nearly a quarter of the GDP by 1992.²⁸ Throughout Rwanda’s civil war, aid was a major source of finance for the government, and donors therefore had a stake in the stability of the country, and, in theory, leverage. For example, a core condition

²⁴ Pyt Douma, “The Netherlands and Rwanda: A Case Study on Dutch Foreign Policies and Interventions in the Contemporary Conflict History of Rwanda” (The Hague: Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, 2000), 19.

²⁵ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1998). Uvin stresses that the international community was seemingly oblivious to social inequalities, discrimination, and political tension in Rwanda. World Bank reports even mention Rwanda’s cultural and social cohesion and ethnic and socio-economic homogeneity as a strength, demonstrating complete “blindness” to the political realities behind this developmental façade.

²⁶ Regine Andersen, “How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda,” *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2000): 441-56, and Uvin, *Aiding Violence*.

²⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 42.

²⁸ Krishna Kumar, *Rebuilding Postwar Rwanda: The Role of the International Community* (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development, 1996), 6.

of the SAP was progress with peace negotiations; other donor agencies also stated that aid for economic development would be dependent upon peace being restored.²⁹

The first cease-fire was signed on March 29, 1991, with talks held in Dar-es Salaam under the aegis of the Organization for African Unity and regional governments, notably Tanzania, with UN backing;³⁰ earlier talks had been held in London, Paris, Brussels, and Zaire. The peace process was inextricably linked with democratization; the path to peace was the creation of a broad-based transitional government, including all political parties and, most importantly, the RPF, to be followed by democratic elections. However, sporadic fighting meant that the peace process was frequently stalled over the next two years. In July 1992, the Arusha (Tanzania) peace talks began, following a renewed cease-fire. Over the following year, a series of protocols was negotiated and on August 4, 1993, the Arusha Accords were signed; a UN assistance mission was approved in October 1993. Several months of political wrangling ensued over the establishment of a transitional government, with a view to multiparty elections. Although a transitional government and national assembly were officially formed in January 1994, the composition of their bodies was continually delayed, and they never materialized.

The signing of the Arusha Accords came about through the exhaustion of all parties³¹ and external pressure, rather than through “internal realignments of power and interest.”³² From the outset, there were serious obstacles to the success of the peace process. The commitment of the Habyarimana regime was minimal. The president was set to lose considerable powers in the new arrangements, which would further impact the clique surrounding him. So, even as it was negotiating in Arusha, the president’s party, the MRND, was attempting to derail the process through massacres of Tutsi and political violence against the opposition in order to exacerbate the ethnic, rather than political, dimensions of the conflict. As discussions over demobilization and disarmament were held, militias were being trained and arms continued to be flown into Rwanda. Hutu hardliners never accepted the peace negotiations, particularly the inclusion of the RPF in the transitional government. Violence against Tutsi provoked retaliation by the RPF, which in turn undermined support for the integration of the RPF and Tutsi refugees among more moderate Hutu political groups, and provided fuel for ethnic propaganda. Fundamentally, while the peace process did seek to address most of the obvious root causes of

²⁹ Joseph Voyame, Richard Friedli, Jean-Pierre Gern, and Anton Keller, *La Coopération Suisse au Rwanda* (Berne: Département Fédéral des Affaires Etrangères, 1996), 36.

³⁰ Andersen, “How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda,” 444.

³¹ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 186-190.

³² Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 234-235.

the conflict—the integration of the RPF and opposition forces into Rwandan political life, and the return of refugees—what international actors failed to comprehend was the depth of hostility toward the negotiations among Hutu extremists, and less obviously, the deeply rooted socio-economic and socio-political dynamics within the wider Rwandan population, which would enable the genocide to be planned and orchestrated.³³

Uvin claims that, without international involvement, the peace process would not have advanced as fast as it did, and there might not have been a negotiated settlement at all.³⁴ However, external pressure was neither consistent nor particularly forceful. The UN peacekeeping missions deployed between March 1993 and July 1994 were weak, both in terms of mandate and capacity. International support for the main force, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), was limited from the outset. When France first suggested the idea in March 1993, the United Kingdom and the United States argued that the UN was already overstretched. The vote on the provision of peacekeepers to Rwanda occurred two days after American troops were killed in Somalia. UNAMIR was therefore a compromise mission, small and cheap,³⁵ and doomed to failure. The negotiators at Arusha were aware that the successful transition to democracy in Rwanda depended upon the speedy deployment of a robust international peacekeeping force. Yet, UNAMIR had neither the military capacity nor the political backing to carry out its mandate, which of itself was inadequate to the task. The mission was authorized only as a peacekeeping, not a peace enforcement, operation; it was based on the understanding that both sides were committed to the Arusha Accords. UNAMIR consequently never posed a credible threat to the warring parties, the militia, or the Hutu extremists. When the genocide began to unfold, there was no support in the UN Security Council to change the mandate in order to protect civilians and halt the genocide; rather, the UN operation was scaled back. Belgium, which provided the operation's muscle, withdrew its troops after ten soldiers were killed, arguing that there was no longer a peace for the peacekeeping force to keep. The permanent members of the UN Security Council and the Secretariat kept information about the true extent of the crisis and impending genocide quiet.³⁶ Several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, carefully sidestepped the term “genocide” in order to avoid international responsibilities under the Geneva Convention. The description of events as “tribal” and “chaotic” by journalists helped to present the situation

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 95.

³⁵ Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 77-79.

³⁶ Ibid., and Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2004).

as uncontrolled and uncontrollable.³⁷ It was only when the genocide became an international scandal that the mandate was renewed, by which time much of the killing was already over. At this point, international interest in Rwanda grew exponentially.

The deployment of the UN peacekeeping operation came at a relatively late stage in Rwanda's civil war. Prior to this, international pressure for democratization, and increasingly for peace, had been applied in other forms. Although governance, including democracy, became more prominent in developmental rhetoric in the early 1990s, specific aid activities categorized as "democracy-promoting" were limited. Belgium had a "democracy" budget line before 1994, which funded activities such as seminars for journalists and military observers. Broader governance-related expenditures included institutional support for the prime minister, legislature, and judiciary. Switzerland began supporting human rights organizations and promoting the rule of law through legal assistance activities. Uvin notes one specific democracy project designed by the United States in 1992, but it remained "dead letter."³⁸

Beyond this, there was very little specific support to foster democracy. As the violence, particularly against civilians, began to increase, donor countries applied a greater "stick" approach, threatening to withhold aid unless more efforts for democracy and peace were made. Of all donors, it appears that the United States "acted most forcefully."³⁹ It cut aid in 1992, citing human rights violations, although the amount remained above historic levels, but announced that it would bring aid back up to 1991 levels conditioned upon the "satisfactory handling of public affairs and continuance of democratization." A major report on human rights abuses was submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission in April 1993, leading to a "brief episode of serious pressure on the Rwandan government to change its ways."⁴⁰ Belgium and Germany threatened to cut aid unless the human rights situation improved, but this was never enacted. Belgium and Switzerland briefly recalled their ambassadors. Switzerland "expressed displeasure"⁴¹ but did not change aid allocations, although it approved annual plans only from 1990; Canada announced that it would drastically reduce aid, which did happen, but it was justified by general cuts; the Netherlands drew back; and Austria reduced its activities. The World Bank refused to give more funds until an established government was in place to negotiate commitments, and the European Parliament condemned

³⁷ See Johan Pottier, *Reimagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁸ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 93.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82. Uvin also provides a concise overview of the dates and degrees of human rights violations, coverage by human rights organizations, and international press coverage.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

the violence. The storm then died down, and no more pressure was placed on the Rwandan government. Arguments against conditionality were that “alienating the government undoubtedly could have hampered the peace negotiations in Arusha, which were sponsored by the same Western countries that were Rwanda’s most important donors.”⁴² It was also felt that cutting aid would harm the majority of the population, thereby damaging the chances of democracy taking root.

The steps taken by donors to encourage democracy were undermined at the same time by inconsistencies in their behavior. First, several donors provided military assistance during the civil war, including the United States, Belgium, and France. Indeed, Rwanda’s military expenditure was increasing at a time when public expenditure should have been under tight external scrutiny due to the SAP; further, there is evidence to suggest that program aid was being used for military ends.⁴³ Second, the pressure to end the civil war was set against a general unwillingness to authorize an effective peacekeeping operation.

Overall, the reaction of the international community to civil war, ethnic polarization, human rights abuses, and militarization was “business as usual.” There seems to be agreement that international pressure to implement the Arusha Accords did have some effect.⁴⁴ This was “not surprising, given that the Rwandan regime depended entirely on international aid for its survival.”⁴⁵ However, the fluctuations in aid are also considered to have caused deep discord, further weakened Habyarimana, and increased the power of the extremists.⁴⁶ While the international community was aware of the deteriorating situation in 1994, few imagined that the genocide could or would actually happen. It was easy to see the increasing violence as “normal” political violence, which would be halted once “peace-cum-democracy” negotiations at Arusha were concluded.⁴⁷ The international community placed too much faith in the Arusha process, during which the attitude of the participants was at best ambiguous.⁴⁸ By the time it was clear that the genocide might happen, it was too late for policy measures to work, and there was no international commitment to take the prompt military action necessary to stop the killings.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, 33. The most notorious was the exponential rise in imports of machetes as “agricultural” equipment. Machetes were the prime weapons used in the genocide.

⁴⁴ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*; Alison des Forges, “*Leave None to Tell the Story*”: *Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999); and Andersen, “How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda.”

⁴⁵ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 99.

⁴⁶ Andersen, “How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda.”

⁴⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 85.

⁴⁸ Voyame et al., *La Coopération Suisse au Rwanda*, 140.

Aid for Democratization after the Conflict

The genocide marked a real rupture in diplomatic and aid relations. Pressures on the new regime regarding democratization after 1994 were quite distinct from earlier efforts. Initially, such pressures were overshadowed, on the one hand, by the emergency needs of Rwanda, and, on the other, by the legacy of the conflict, which put the international community in a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the new government.

In the early years after the conflict, aid flows reflected the particular context, with often controversial results. In 1993 (until mid-1994), there was a small dip as the crisis escalated and many development programs were suspended, followed by a massive increase from mid-1994 to 1995, when large amounts of humanitarian aid were provided. The majority of this aid went to huge refugee camps outside Rwanda, following the wave of refugees fleeing the RPF advance in 1994. A massive cholera outbreak in the camps and subsequent, widely reported, suffering “almost eclipsed the magnitude of the Tutsi genocide. Western countries mounted the largest, most rapid and most expensive deployment of international humanitarian aid industry in the twentieth century.”⁴⁹ This caused frustration within the new government, which felt that the needs of Rwanda itself were being overlooked and that perpetrators of the genocide were being supported, while the victims were not. It also increased the already tense relations between the international community and the RPF-led government. Moreover, humanitarian aid flows contributed to the continuing conflict and added to insecurity in the region, as they enabled the establishment of a rump state outside Rwanda’s borders. The former regime quickly organized the camps, controlling aid distribution. At first, aid agencies were oblivious to this; then they were impeded by the moral dilemma of whether to halt aid in order to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands, which would have led to enormous suffering among innocent refugees.⁵⁰

By 1997, emergency programs were being wound down and more funds were flowing through bilateral channels, although it took until 1999 for some countries (such as Sweden, Switzerland, and Canada) to shift from “emergency” to “development” programs. But aid flows also declined around 1997, dropping to below preconflict totals. This may be accounted for by the closure of the refugee camps, which led to a decrease in humanitarian assistance, coupled with qualms over the new regime.

Multilateral and nongovernmental channels were favored in the immediate post-conflict period due to the lack of capacity of the new government to handle

⁴⁹ Douma, “The Netherlands and Rwanda,” 25.

⁵⁰ Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

large volumes of aid and the nature of the humanitarian emergency needs. By 1997, government capacity was increasing, emergency needs were diminishing, and the security situation was improving, so many bilateral donors restarted bilateral programs. Since 1999, direct budget support and sectoral budget support have become increasingly important aid modalities. Champions of this approach were the World Bank, European Commission, United Kingdom, and Sweden, all of which argued in the late 1990s that Rwanda's special circumstances warranted more direct support to the central government. This reflected a real shift in Rwanda's aid relations, with Rwanda's "traditional" partners being eclipsed by the rise of "new" donors (notably the Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Sweden) who were particularly supportive of the new regime. These donors became increasingly involved in policy processes and dialogue with the Rwandan government about policy and budget choices.⁵¹ Since 1994, total revenue from external sources relative to internally generated sources has declined, but Rwanda continues to rely on foreign grants and loans for around 45 percent of its revenue. Most Rwandan ministries host foreign technical assistants and policy advisors, and development assistance in all its forms remains vitally important for Rwanda.

At the same time, throughout the post-conflict period, many donors were skeptical about the new regime in Kigali. The ongoing conflict, prevailing insecurity within Rwanda, the lack of democratic reform and inclusiveness, allegations of human rights abuses, and the lack of government administrative capacity to ensure accountability for aid resources are some of the reasons given by different donors for taking a cautious approach. Lower aid flows from countries such as Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland are partially explained by such considerations.⁵² Such concerns diminished on the whole in the early 2000s, with an increase in flows around 2002, linked to the approval of Rwanda's poverty reduction strategy and the withdrawal of troops from the DRC. Aid to Rwanda has increased considerably since 2003.

While emergency and reconstruction needs were the focus of aid activities until the late 1990s, promotion of democracy has been an issue of concern to donors throughout the postwar period. Weak statistical information makes the establishment of a clear picture difficult, but Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) aid statistics plus donor project accounts provide some limited insight into the focus of donor attention.⁵³ Major concerns

⁵¹ Hayman, *The Complexity of Aid*.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Data on aid flows to Rwanda are poor, with no data collected centrally by the government before 2000. Figures available since then need to be treated with caution. The first matrix of aid, produced by the government in 2000, gave accumulated figures for aid to particular sectors up to 2000, with no indication of start or end dates. The 2002 and 2004 matrices are more detailed, but the figures often do not add up. The government admits that the data are incomplete, as

of donors following the conflict were justice, human rights, the return and reintegration of refugees, support for vulnerable groups, and reconciliation. Until 1998, the area which received the most funding was the rule of law (see table 1). *Is Close to here as possible.* Much of this was focused on law enforcement and the justice sector. Although still not sufficient to overcome preconflict weaknesses and the mammoth task of bringing those responsible for genocide to justice, aid has helped toward establishing a judiciary, which is gaining strength and independence, even if it continues to be influenced by the executive. Aid for human rights and civil society has been patchy, although human rights groups have kept a close watch on abuses in Rwanda, including those committed by the new regime. Since 2003, support for civil society and the media have increased. Other areas which have received considerable donor attention have been institutional infrastructure (including public ministries, local government, and the national parliament), decentralization, and demobilization.

Table 1. Rwanda—Support for the Promotion of Democracy

Year after conflict	Total (US\$ m commitments)	Elections/ political process	Rule of law	Institutional infrastructure	Civil society, media	Civil-military relations
1 (1993)						
2 (1994)						
3 (1995)	25.9	0	13.9	5.9	6.1	0
4 (1996)	24.6	0	17.8	2.0	4.8	0
5 (1997)	21.3	0	14.1	1.0	5.4	0.8
6 (1998)	20.1	0	16.0	1.1	1.3	1.7
7 (1999)	18.9	0.1	10.2	4.5	4.1	0
8 (2000)	53.9	2.0	18.8	24.5	8.6	0
9 (2001)	18.3	1.1	6.6	5.5	3.5	1.6
10 (2002)	74.2	0.7	31.6	14.5	2.0	25.4
11 (2003)	44.7	6.4	22.9	8.7	6.5	0.2
12 (2004)	82.2	0.4	6.3	57.7	9.4	8.4
13 (2005)	41.1	0	11.7	12.7	14.0	2.7
14 (2006)	38.8	1.1	25.9	2.7	9.1	0

Source: OECD, Creditor Reporting System, September 2008.
 Note that data prior to 1995 are not available.

they depend upon donor cooperation, which is often limited. OECD statistics likewise need to be treated with caution, as donors often have very different ways of categorizing their aid. The statistics at least provide some useful indication of the priorities in relation to the promotion of democracy.

The increase in projects with a democratization element after 1995 implies that it took genocide before there was real action to promote democratization, although by the mid-1990s, governance, both political and administrative, was seriously taking root within wider donor policy and practice.

Democracy has been featured at a diplomatic level ever since the conflict, always coming up at the UN-sponsored Round Table Conferences held in 1995 and 1996 and at subsequent annual partnership talks between government and donors. While some donors concerned themselves merely with expressing support and solidarity with the new Rwandan regime, other donors, such as France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany, outlined areas in which they wanted to see progress, notably refugee return and justice. Some were very explicit. For example, at the Round Table Conference of January 1995, Germany made a direct link between aid and progress on democracy and human rights; France and Belgium expressed a desire for a national dialogue among political groups, including the former regime.⁵⁴

More recently, many bilateral donors have incorporated specific “democracy” elements into their programs. For example, Germany, the United States, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have specific “democracy” pillars. One of Germany’s five criteria for cooperation and a condition for political dialogue is the involvement of the population in the political process; the “democratization” axis has been central since 2003. Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom all have budget lines for promoting democratic systems. Canada and Belgium have broader “governance” pillars, as does the European Commission (EC).

The program of the EC demonstrates the shift in support for democracy over the years. Under its rehabilitation programs which ran until 1999, the “Human Rights and Democracy” budget line was devoted almost entirely to rehabilitation of the justice sector. Since 2000, it has had a “good governance” line, which is much more diverse, funding public administration, the establishment of sector policies, transition to democracy, human rights, institutional capacity, reconciliation, and civil society. The EC’s new Country Strategy for 2008-2012 stresses that there will be a “high priority [given] to human rights and good governance issues.” This reflects a trend evident with other donors who are providing increased funds for issues such as “voice and accountability.” For example, the United Nations Development Program and the United Kingdom approved a U.S. \$10 million dollar joint program for 2007-2011, aimed at strengthening accountability through support for parliament, government oversight bodies, the media, civil society, and human rights.⁵⁵ Over the whole period, the most consistent donor with regard to promotion of

⁵⁴ Hayman, *The Complexity of Aid*, 103.

⁵⁵ See Rwanda: Programme for Strengthening Good Governance, <http://www.undp.org/rw/Democratic-project46259.html?id=112> (accessed August 2008).

democracy has been the Netherlands.

Despite diplomatic pressure regarding elections, which began to increase by 1998, direct aid for the electoral process has been fairly limited, except in 2003; most of the funding for elections has come from Rwandan public and private sources.⁵⁶ Aid has certainly helped toward improving the capacity of the National Electoral Commission to run elections. And some donors see themselves as having played a crucial role; for example, the United States claims that “[w]ithout USAID’s election-related interventions, the March 2001 elections might never have taken place, and certainly would not have run as smoothly.”⁵⁷ The main example of political conditionality specifically linked to democracy came with the 2003 referendum on the new constitution and the legislative and presidential elections. There was strong criticism of the government, notably around the squeezing of the opposition and disappearances of politicians.⁵⁸ Monitors held conflicting opinions on the conduct and outcome of the elections, with the overall results considered to be more or less accurate, but irregularities were recorded.⁵⁹ Some aid was withheld; for example, the Netherlands refused to disburse some assistance,⁶⁰ and the United Kingdom suspended support of the media sector because the government did not liberalize the airwaves. These actions did not change the course of events, with the elections going ahead on the government’s terms. However, the financing of the elections led to budget unpredictability, contributed to Rwanda going off-track with the International Monetary Fund, and caused considerable bitterness within the government toward the international community. Government statements about not being able to rely on donors for elections between 2008 and 2011 are directly attributable to this experience.⁶¹ Overall, aid for elections has helped but it has not been decisive, with Rwandan actors in firm control of the form and content of the electoral process. Indeed, “aid has an impact on the development of democratic practices in Rwanda only in as much as it meshes with the government’s vision of democratization, which includes carefully controlled elections.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Kimonyo et al., “Supporting the Post-Genocide Transition in Rwanda,” 17. Also based on figures and information obtained from the National Electoral Commission.

⁵⁷ USAID, *Annual Report FY 2002* (Kigali, Rwanda: USAID, 2002), 5.

⁵⁸ Peter Uvin, “Wake Up! Some Policy Proposals for the International Community,” unpublished paper, June 2003, and Reyntjens, “Rwanda, Ten Years On.”

⁵⁹ European Union, “Rwanda: Election présidentielle, 25 août 2003. Elections législatives, 29 et 30 septembre, 2 octobre 2003,” *Mission d’Observation Electorale de l’Union Européenne, Rapport Final*, 2003, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/rwanda/moe_ue_final_2003.pdf (accessed September 2008), and Adamou Kombo, “The Preparation and Conduct of the Legislative and Senatorial Elections in Rwanda: 29th September-02nd October 2003,” 2003.

⁶⁰ Kimonyo et al., “Supporting the Post-Genocide Transition in Rwanda,” 20.

⁶¹ “Donors to Release Election Funds Today,” *The New Time*, May 29, 2008.

⁶² Kimonyo et al., *Supporting the Post-Genocide Transition in Rwanda*, 29.

Apart from the aid withheld during the 2003 elections, punitive conditionality has rarely been applied in Rwanda. The few instances where aid has been frozen or halted have been linked less to democracy *per se* than to other issues, notably human rights and regional conflict. For example, aid was frozen by the EC, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States⁶³ in 1995, when government forces massacred a disputed number of civilians in Kibeho while rooting out extremists; the Dutch made strong statements.⁶⁴ However, aid was quickly reinstated when the government produced a requested report on the incident. During the second DRC war (1998-1999, although Rwandan troops were finally withdrawn only in 2002), considerable pressure was placed upon the Rwandan government over human rights abuses, the presence of troops in the DRC, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources. International pressure, including the approval of the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, is seen as facilitating the final withdrawal of troops and Rwanda's adherence to the international peace agreements signed in Lusaka in 1999 and Pretoria in 2002. Another example is the threat of the Netherlands to suspend support to the local justice system (*gacaca*) in 2003 over the issue of independent monitoring.⁶⁵ In December 2008, budget support was frozen by the Netherlands and Sweden over Rwanda's alleged support for rebel movements in the DRC.

Overall, there is more evidence of positive conditionality, such as aid to specific sectors to promote democratization and the rule of law. For example, European Commission sectoral budget support for the justice sector was linked to progress on *gacaca*.⁶⁶ The recent increase in general budget and sectoral budget support reflects growing confidence in government accountability systems. The Joint Governance Assessment of 2008 includes a framework of indicators against which progress can be assessed, and which will feed into discussions about aid allocations.⁶⁷ Donors such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have consistently stressed an approach which is supportive yet critical where necessary. The Netherlands sought to engage with the Rwandan government during the conflict as a "neutral" force; it then called for

⁶³ There are conflicting accounts about the position of the United States over Kibeho. Pottier claims that the United States supported the government position over the Kibeho massacres, while other accounts note that, at this time, the United States placed nonhumanitarian aid on hold (i.e., applied political conditionality).

⁶⁴ Pottier, *Reimagining Rwanda*, 164-166.

⁶⁵ Laure-Hélène Piron and Andy McKay, "Aid in Difficult Environments: Rwanda Case Study," Background Paper 4 for ODI study on Poor Performing Countries (London: ODI, 2004), 27.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ This reflects shifts in the approach to conditionality, with emphasis under the aid effectiveness agenda on "mutual commitments" and "mutual accountability," and new methods of framing the relationship between donors and government, such as memoranda of understandings and common assessment frameworks.

donors not to apply conditionality in the immediate aftermath, but instead to support the establishment of law and order under the logic of being supportive to prevent chaos.⁶⁸ It did apply conditions over the Kibeho incident and the DRC war, and the Dutch parliament refused to provide general budget support until very recently. However, it has followed a strategy of “critical dialogue,” drawing on its good bilateral relations. The United Kingdom has been even more supportive, preferring to use “behind-the-scenes” diplomacy to encourage the government “in the right direction,” rather than using aid conditionality.

The use of conditionality is framed by the record of the international community during the genocide. Guilt constituted a major reason for coming to Rwanda’s aid in the aftermath of the genocide; and the RPF-led government has been apt at using this “genocide credit” when faced with external criticism. As far as the RPF is concerned, by its failure to prevent or stop the genocide and its provision of aid to camps where the guilty were fed alongside the innocent—in quantities which dwarfed aid to Rwanda itself—the international community had lost its right to criticize the new regime.⁶⁹ Indeed, as one informant said, if the international community had tried to make too many demands they would not have worked, given that donors had no credibility. The moral dilemma for many donors has been the imperative to provide aid to Rwanda to compensate for the lack of support during the conflict, to render the country more stable, and to prevent a relapse to war; yet, this is set against incidents of human rights abuses and stalling on democratization by the new regime. The outcome has been statements about the need to address democracy at international meetings but little real application of conditions.

Moreover, Rwanda has a large and diverse donor presence. Coherent action is constrained by differences among donors in terms of strategic and developmental objectives as well as by their individual relations with the new regime. Some, notably those which are supportive of the government’s agenda, provide budget support, and have strong diplomatic influence, have more leverage than others. The moral imperative to act in Rwanda is stronger than strategic imperatives, so there are limited constraints in political terms at domestic levels.

Different donors have therefore adopted different strategies with regard to conditionality, which impacts its effectiveness. For example, Switzerland was initially very hesitant about engaging more positively with the Rwandan government, preferring to “monitor events”; Rwanda continues to have “special status,” as it does not meet certain criteria for a full bilateral program, due

⁶⁸ Douma, “The Netherlands and Rwanda,” 44, 47.

⁶⁹ Rachel Hayman, “Rwanda: Milking the Cow? Creating Policy Space In Spite of Aid Dependence,” in *The Politics of Aid: African Strategies for Dealing with Donors*, ed. Lindsay Whitfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 156-184.

to concerns about human rights, inadequate democratization, and Rwanda's strained regional relations. Norway provided much assistance after the genocide, but did not begin a full bilateral program because of concerns over human rights. The Netherlands is an important donor, but limits were set on the program over democracy-related issues. Ireland chose not to make Rwanda a priority country due to human rights concerns. Germany made Rwanda only a "priority" country in 2002. These decisions often are couched in language of administrative constraints, such as overall budget cuts, but real reasons are often more political. At the other end of the spectrum is the United Kingdom, which has been very supportive of the Rwandan government since 1995. From a background of no bilateral relationship at all, the United Kingdom became the largest bilateral donor by the end of the 1990s. A note of caution crept into the British program in the early 2000s, with budget support installments delayed in 2004 and 2005 over Rwandan intentions in the DRC, but overall support remains positive for the RPF-led government. Nevertheless, donors are often inconsistent; the Netherlands, for example, withheld aid for elections, while continuing to invest in justice infrastructure and decentralization. The end result is that the Rwandan government sees individual instances of donors applying conditions as a nuisance rather than as a serious problem.⁷⁰

On the whole, the international community has accepted the direction that the Rwandan government has taken. No punitive action was taken when the initial transition period, which was due to end with national elections in 1999, was extended. Security concerns have been considered legitimate by many donors, and the conduct and outcome of elections have been accepted as "understandable," given the context.⁷¹ Donors often have been skeptical about some of the government's initiatives, but then come on board when they have seen positive results. The RPF-led regime is also resistant to pressure that does not suit its own interests and is effective in keeping the donors on-board, while essentially pursuing its own agenda; this even results in harsh counter-criticism of donors. For example, the Dutch were accused of being "divisionist" when they withheld funding for the 2003 elections. In the face of Rwanda's history and the pride of the government, donors have much more leverage when they act as "friends" of the regime and engage positively with it; there is pressure to democratize, but Rwanda does not take kindly to being pushed.⁷² So, although in theory donors have superior bargaining power in that they effectively hold the purse-strings of the Rwandan government, the "genocide

⁷⁰ Hayman, *The Complexity of Aid*, and id., "Rwanda: Milking the Cow."

⁷¹ Interviews by author, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2008. See also, Peter Uvin, "Difficult Choices in the New Post-Conflict Agenda: The International Community in Rwanda after the Genocide," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2001): 177-89, and Reyntjens, "Rwanda, Ten Years On."

⁷² Hayman, "Rwanda: Milking the Cow."

credit,” Rwanda’s strong stance on its particular priorities, uncoordinated donor positions, and different donor agendas give the government considerable room for maneuver.

Rwanda is considered by most major donors to be doing well in terms of social and economic transformation: the administration is functioning more effectively; health and education services are improving; the economy is developing; and the government seems genuinely committed to its poverty reduction strategy. This is a country where donors can “get things done,” as several informants observed. Donors have varied prerogatives with regard to aid, without taking into account broader foreign policy objectives. Supporting the regime enables donors to work toward their own stated development goals, of which political liberalization is arguably not the most pressing priority. Although Rwanda is not considered to be ideal with regard to democracy, it is still viewed as going in the “right direction.” Hence, external actors have accepted the type of developmental state that Rwanda represents, in the hope that this perhaps will bring about a more liberal democratic state over time.

Conclusion

Political space was opened up in Rwanda in 1990 under duress. Internal economic and political pressures coincided with external expectations about the establishment of multiparty democracy. Democracy was introduced within the context of civil war and rising ethnic tension, in a country with no positive history of democracy and where political commitment was extremely weak. External actors, through diplomacy, aid, and military intervention, played a key role in fostering a peace process which was intertwined with a democratization project. The result is well-known. The civil war descended into genocide and the international community did nothing to stop it. Almost twenty years later, however, Rwanda has emerged as a stable, nominally democratic state; it may not fulfill the criteria of a Western, liberal democracy, but the political elite have formally committed themselves to working toward the establishment of a free and open democratic system. The genocide, therefore, can be seen as an inherent part of an ongoing democratization process, which began in 1990; this included both civil war and internal political restructuring, the legacy of which underpins the current political system.

Since the conflict, aid and aid agencies have been integral to the functioning of the Rwandan state, and aid has played a major role in building the institutions of democracy. While details of aid figures are not comprehensive, donor support has been crucial for reconstructing and reorganizing the justice sector and the national civilian police force, decentralization, and building national and local administrative capacity. Local civil society groups, especially those engaged in advocacy and human rights work, could not function without financial and political support from external actors. While not flowing in the quantities or the way that the RPF-led government may have preferred in the early post-

conflict years, Rwanda did receive a considerable amount of humanitarian and developmental aid. It can be surmised from this that external intervention has been instrumental in laying the foundations for a state based on the rule of law, public accountability, and democratic principles.

The contribution of external aid to the narrower democratic process is more ambiguous, however. Aid for the electoral process has been fairly low overall, and when some of it was withheld in 2003, the course of events did not significantly change. However, if the RPF-led regime had not received aid following the conflict, and if “champions” such as the Netherlands, World Bank, and United Kingdom had not come forward to bolster it, Rwanda might have been less democratic than it is today, and the conflict might have continued.

On the other hand, external intervention in the democratization process also has had negative effects. Andersen argues that the three strategies being promoted by development agencies in the early 1990s—economic adjustment, multiparty democracy, and peace negotiations—while all integrated, also had mutually conflicting effects. Economic crisis and shifts in global politics gave strength to internal calls for change, but they also were a factor in the start of the civil war, and created space for ethnic-based politics to arise. Pressure to end the civil war through a negotiated peace deal, which included commitments to democracy, rendered the peace process incredibly complex and contributed to the weakening of the Habyarimana regime, thereby enabling extremism to gather strength. Donors were inconsistent in their messages: no real support was provided to promote democracy; no real punitive action was taken in response to human rights abuses; and the weakness of the peacekeeping force sent a clear signal to the extremists that action was unlikely. Consequently, “the democratization process effectively undermined the peace efforts and finally shattered all prospects of peace.”⁷³ In the aftermath of the genocide, support for the refugee camps outside Rwanda enabled extremists to regroup and launch attacks into Rwanda, thus contributing to regional conflict, which in turn fostered a political obsession with security.

Although weak and flawed, the Arusha Accords signed in 1993 constituted the basis upon which the post-conflict state was built. International mediation and pressure went some way toward ensuring that this agreement was reached in the first place. Had that agreement not existed, the basis for the post-conflict state could have been much different. Diplomatic pressure and aid conditionality (positive and negative), both during and after the conflict, appear to have had a marginal, though positive, effect upon the establishment of democratic institutions. Democracy, representation, and inclusion were core themes of the RPF war-time political agenda. Since the conflict, the RPF-led government has constructed its legitimacy in the eyes of the local population,

⁷³ Andersen, “How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda.”

the African continent, and the world on the back of its adherence to the Arusha Accords and democratic ideals, in contrast to the “enemies of peace” who thwarted them.⁷⁴

An informant advanced two explanations for the democratic system in Rwanda: to maintain vital links with donors, and to use it in the struggle to retain power. The latter reflects the fears of the political elite that their hold on power is not secure. Consequently, democracy has an internal and an external logic. Today, Rwanda is continuing down a path toward democracy: elections have been held; there is some separation of powers; and Rwanda is a more open and inclusive society than it was prior to the conflict. However, Rwanda is not necessarily moving toward the Western notion of a liberal democracy. The regime has a paternalistic attitude toward the population, seeing its role as nurturing notions of responsibility and accountability within a populace that once associated, and may continue to associate, democracy with ethnic discrimination, majority rule, and violence. Rwanda’s elite would not consider Rwanda to be a hybrid democracy, but rather a “different model,” with priority given to unity and consensus over competition. Issues of security on an individual and national basis remain overriding and the system is tightly controlled. For many, it is a “necessary control,” yet this is probably weakening the whole endeavor. Under the surface, tensions around ethnicity, equality, and participation remain, reflecting societal cleavages which existed before the war. The economic situation remains precarious, and issues such as land pressure remain important. At the same time, many among the political elite seem genuinely committed to constructing a strong, benevolent, developmental state. Democracy in terms of (controlled) popular participation is part of that vision, within a framework built around “inclusive governance.”⁷⁵

Rwanda’s democratic situation has been critiqued heavily by human rights groups and political analysts. However, the donor community has largely bought into the government’s perspective about the right type of democracy for Rwanda in light of its security concerns and past, accepting that, despite its flaws, the country generally speaking is going in the right direction. Governance matters to current donor agendas. Donors need to see democratic progress and elections; but they also know that they cannot have full faith in those elections. In addition, they need to see progress in social and economic development to fulfill their broader development commitments, and Rwanda is performing relatively well in this regard. The Rwandan government is resistant to negative pressure, and donors who are supportive and encouraging rather than confrontational and critical are much more likely to have some influence;

⁷⁴ Faustin Twagirimungu, “Discours program du Premier Ministre du Gouvernement De Transition à Base élargie, son Excellence Monsieur Faustin Twagirimungu” (Kigali, Rwanda: Prime Minister’s Office, July 19, 1994).

⁷⁵ Republic of Rwanda, “Rwanda: Joint Governance Assessment,” 16.

aid matters, but only insofar as it suits the regime. There have been instances in which conditionality or diplomatic pressure has made a difference, although this has tended to focus more on Rwanda's activities in the wider region than its democratic development.

The Joint Governance Assessment represents an attempt to reach agreement on the realistic expectations that donors can have regarding governance in Rwanda, laying down benchmarks against which the government is willing to be assessed. Donors, like the government, make constant reference to Rwanda's history and post-conflict context whenever the subject of democracy arises. In the fifteen years since the genocide, Rwanda has put in place many of the institutions of a liberal democracy, with significant external assistance. Although there has been a recent increase in aid to strengthen "voice and accountability," there is limited real pressure to push for greater change due to Rwanda's past, the strength of its leadership, and different donor prerogatives. The RPF continues to expand its control over political space in Rwanda, and donors have been active agents in this through their support of the regime. International intervention in post-conflict Rwanda has certainly made a difference to stability, both in terms of national security and capacity, and it has helped to foster a democratic process. Whether we can consider Rwanda to still be in transition toward a truly liberal democracy is debatable; rather, donors may be supporting a democratic outcome which is "different." It is not clear that a liberal democracy is what many Rwandans or the political elite want, nor is it evident that this is the primary priority of external actors in Rwanda.

