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SECUROCRATIC STATE-BUILDING: THE RATIONALES, REBUTTALS, AND RISKS BEHIND THE EXTRAORDINARY RISE OF RWANDA AFTER THE GENOCIDE

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ABSTRACT

Both popular perspectives and theoretical characterizations of Rwanda's remarkable trajectory following the genocide remain polarized more than a generation after the violence. The country has been hailed as a developmental state and denounced as an authoritarian 'ethnocracy'. I introduce the concept of securocratic state-building in response to this polarization. The construct is intended to capture, first, the regime's developmental but non-doctrinaire ambitions, synthesizing liberal and illiberal precepts; and second its prioritization of security over liberty, favouring stability over peace. I then draw on a set of interviews with key Rwandan opinion-makers drawn from across the country's principal political and social divides to elicit the competing rationales given for each of three grand strategic choices made by the regime: why it eschewed competitive politics; why it sought to re-engineer society and efface ethnicity; and why it moved to modernize the state and the economy. The juxtaposition of these opposing opinions exposes a fundamental tension at the heart of the securocratic state-building model: the regime's aspiration for unity is at odds with its preoccupation with security. This strategic contradiction, I argue, places a question mark over the long-term sustainability of the Rwanda model.

Introduction

More than 25 years after the violence that shocked the world, Rwandans' perspectives on their country's trajectory following the genocide remain

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polarized.[1] The country has been praised for its economic resurrection, effective state institutions, results-focused leadership, and political stability in an otherwise volatile region. It could become Africa's Singapore.[2] At the same time, Rwanda has been criticized as an illiberal state, controlled by a hyper-repressive regime and paranoid despot, destined to be violently overthrown. It shares characteristics with North Korea.[3]

Polarization persists in the scholarly debate on Rwanda as well. Theoretical characterizations of post-genocide Rwanda have been dramatically divergent. The country has been acclaimed as a 'developmental state', a 'developmental patrimonial' state, and one with 'high-modernist' ambitions.[4] At the same time, it has been declaimed as a 'surveillance state', an instance of 'authoritarian rule', and an 'ethnocracy'.[5]

The polarization around the country's direction is, in part, a legacy of the civil war and genocide (1990–94). The violence deeply divided Rwandans and these divisions have persisted and shaped Rwandans' narratives on their country's progress in the genocide's aftermath. It is also, in part, simply a function of different normative priorities. Advocates of democracy, civil and political liberties, reconciliation, and justice find much wanting in Rwanda. Human rights NGOs and many foreign academics are critical of the post-genocide regime when judged by these criteria.[6] In contrast, those who value socio-economic development, bureaucratic competence, and a conducive business environment express admiration for the country.

1. This point is cogently made in Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (eds), *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2011).
2. See *Jeune Afrique*, 29 March 2015, Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, praised Singapore's achievements, claimed Lee Kuan Yew as a role model, and stated: 'This is also what we are doing in Rwanda'.
3. In an interview for the Voice of America programme Straight Talk Africa on 26 July 2017, General Kayumba Nyamwasa, exiled chief of staff of the Rwandan Defense Forces, likened Rwanda to North Korea.
4. For the 'developmental state' comparison, see Pritish Behuria, 'Learning from role models in Rwanda: Incoherent emulation in the construction of a neoliberal developmental state', *New Political Economy* 23, 4 (2018), pp. 422–40; Tom Goodfellow, 'Taxing property in a neo-developmental state: The politics of urban land value capture in Rwanda and Ethiopia', *African Affairs* 116, 465 (2017), pp. 549–72. On 'developmental patrimonialism', see David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, 'Developmental patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda', *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 379–403. On 'high modernism', see Barnaby Dye, 'The return of "high modernism"? Exploring the changing development paradigm through a Rwandan case study of dam construction', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 2 (2016), pp. 303–24.
5. For the term 'surveillance state', see Andrea Purdeková, '"Mundane sights" of power: The history of social monitoring and its subversion in Rwanda', *African Studies Review* 59, 2 (2016), pp. 59–86. For 'authoritarian rule', see Susan Thomson, *Rwanda: From genocide to precarious peace* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2018), p. 29. For 'ethnocracy' see Filip Reyntjens, 'Understanding Rwandan politics through the longue durée: From the precolonial to the post-genocide era', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, 3 (2018), pp. 514–32.
6. For an extensive overview of the perspectives critical of the regime, see Filip Reyntjens, *Political governance in post-genocide Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013).

Many foreign donors and outside investors are sanguine supporters of the post-genocide regime's vision on these grounds.[7]

The country's status as pariah or paragon in the international system continues to ebb and flow in the contest between these competing narratives. In a striking example of this polarization and these differing priorities, the British government's decision in 2022 to ask Rwanda to process and settle asylum-seekers to the UK drew starkly divergent reactions on the day the new policy was announced. The government justified its decision by pointing to Rwanda's international recognition 'for its safety, strong governance, low corruption, gender equality and as one of the fastest growing economies across Africa'. Human Rights Watch in contrast, challenged the decision by pointing to Rwanda's 'known track record for extrajudicial killings, suspicious deaths in custody, unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture, and abusive prosecutions, particularly targeting critics and dissidents'.[8] Such divergent reactions to the regime's behaviour on the international stage are not new. Rwanda similarly received praise for its substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping in Africa at the same time as it drew criticism for its role in perpetuating instability and conflict in eastern DRC, for example.

An entire generation has now passed since the genocide. It is a reasonable time then in Rwanda's trajectory to pause and assess this persistent polarization and its implications for the country's long-term social and political stability. The sustainability of peace is an issue of central concern in studies of post-conflict states. Will the regime's strategy pursued in the aftermath of the conflict build a lasting peace?

The article examines Rwanda's extraordinary rise since the genocide and seeks to make three contributions to the ever-expanding scholarship on post-genocide Rwanda. First, theoretically, it introduces a new concept, securocratic state-building, to describe the country's post-conflict strategy. Existing characterizations of Rwanda's chosen trajectory, both favourable and critical, convey essential aspects of the regime's approach. Yet none fully characterizes its choices following the violence. Securocratic state-building aims to capture two essential ideas in the country's post-conflict strategy. It refers, first, to the preeminent role played by security actors and their commitment to coercion to assure the state's security and realize the regime's developmental ambitions. The term refers, second, to the regime's developmental but non-doctrinaire ambitions. Rwanda's military and intelligence communities hold important position and power in the

7. For a treatment of donor perspectives on Rwanda, see Marie-Eve Desrosiers, and Haley J. Swedlund, 'Rwanda's post-genocide foreign aid relations: Revisiting notions of exceptionalism', *African Affairs* 118, 472 (2018), pp. 435–62.
8. See UK Home Office's 'Factsheet: Migration and Economic Development partnership' and Human Rights Watch's Dispatch, 'UK Plan to Ship Asylum Seekers to Rwanda is Cruelty Itself', both dated 14 April 2022.

country because security is the regime's paramount priority. It is not that the regime is ideologically opposed to liberty and equality; it is simply that it unapologetically prioritizes security over both. The regime's aspiration is for progress, not stasis, but its choices are ideologically adaptive, not rigid. The regime's approach synthesizes liberal *and* illiberal tenets because it values outcome over ideology. It aims to develop and modernize Rwanda and it will pursue whatever works to achieve this.

Second, in recognition of the role source selection plays in evaluations of the country's trajectory, the article seeks also to make an *empirical* contribution by purposely seeking out competing perspectives from across Rwanda's principal social and political divides. The article contrasts opposing opinions by design. I draw then on views from Rwandans both inside and outside of the country; political figures in the government and in the opposition; persons born in Rwanda and those who returned to it from exile; the generation born before and after the genocide; members of civil society and the civil service; and naturally individuals from both sides of the historic ethnic divide. In the interests of parsimonious exposition, I classify perspectives into broadly supportive and broadly critical categories, although, unsurprisingly, there is significant pluralism and nuance in interviewees' positions. I collate these perspectives from across the broad panoply of grand strategic choices made by the post-genocide regime. I examine then Rwandans' understandings of the choices made in respect of: (i) the political system; (ii) societal and ethnic relations; and (iii) the state and the economy. The aim is to bring together and explicitly contrast opposing narratives and undertake a more wide-spectrum appraisal of the country's post-genocide trajectory.

Third, methodologically, the article uses narrative analysis and active interviewing to purposely focus on Rwandans' competing *rationales* for the choices behind their country's present situation and future direction. It is not then a historiography of the dramatic events that have shaped post-genocide Rwanda. Nor is it another assessment of the technocratic merits of the regime's policy choices. Others have ably undertaken both critical tasks.[9] The article uses techniques designed to elicit the narrator's understanding of the rationales behind the regime's grand strategic choices: *why* the regime chose to eschew competitive politics and control political space; *why* it sought to re-engineer society and efface ethnicity; and *why* it moved to modernize the state and the economy. It is the narrators' explanations of

9. For differing, wide-spectrum accounts and analyses of post-genocide Rwanda's trajectory, see Maddalena Campioni and Patrick Noack, *Rwanda fast forward: Social, economic, military and reconciliation prospects* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012); Phil Clark and Zachary Kaufman, *After genocide: Transitional justice, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation in Rwanda and beyond* (Columbia University Press, New York 2009); Reyntjens, *Political governance*; Straus and Waldorf (eds), *Remaking Rwanda*.

the underlying logic behind these choices that are the object of study. The goal is to contrast the rationales and counter-rationales and consider what they signify for Rwanda's future social and political stability. What can be said about the risk of future ethnic and political violence in Rwanda if these rationales and counter-rationales continue to hold and to shape the choices and actions of the regime and its critics?

There is evidently more at stake in this debate than just the fate of one small, central African nation. Rwanda's approach is widely regarded as a potential model for other post-conflict states. Its success—or failure—is being closely watched by African governments, foreign donors, and academic experts alike. The AU has proclaimed Rwanda to be a '…valuable symbol of the African Renaissance'. USAID writes the country '… represents one of Africa's most dramatic and encouraging success stories'.[10] The outsized global attention the country draws can be traced in part to its distinctive experience of genocide. The enormous volume of external assistance poured into the country in the aftermath reflects the deep and lasting impression the genocide made on the global conscience. Rwanda has become a high-profile case then in debates on state-building and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa.

Overall, the article finds there is reason to be concerned for the regime's strategy for Rwanda. The juxtaposition of rationales and counter-rationales exposes a fundamental tension at the heart of Rwanda's securocratic state-building model. The regime's preoccupation with security is at odds with its aspiration for unity. This strategic contradiction manifests in each of the areas examined: (i) the ambition to establish consensus over competitive politics is undermined by the practice of coercion. Consensus is not possible in the absence of meaningful political choice; (ii) the desire to engineer a post-ethnic society is contradicted by the regime's own belief in the enduring power of ethnicity in Rwandan society and politics. Its choices reveal its own fear that ethnic extremism is still alive and well in Rwanda; and (iii) the quest to build durable modern state institutions is thwarted by the regime's wish for hegemonic control. The ruling party's expectation that individuals appointed to positions at all levels of the state are not merely competent, but also loyal to its vision for Rwanda undermines the independence of the country's public institutions. Its institutions exhibit effectiveness but not autonomy. The regime's control of access to opportunities such as government jobs reinforces the belief in its bias and undermines its ambition for national unity.

10. See Statement by H. E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, AUC Chairperson, at the 23rd Anniversary Commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide, Kigali, April 2017; USAID, https://www.usaid.gov/rwanda/cdcs (15 December 2020).

The article is structured as follows. I begin with the conceptual framework in which I consider existing constructs used to characterize Rwanda and introduce the notion of securocratic state-building. I then provide a synopsis of each of the regime's grand strategic choices in respect of the political system, ethnic relations, and the state and the economy. I then present the rationales given by interviewees broadly supportive of the regime's choices to demonstrate the validity of the concept of securocratic state-building to describe the regime's chosen strategy. This is then followed by a presentation of the counter-rationales by regime critics which are used to expose the strategic tension within the concept of securocratic state-building. Lastly, I evaluate the competing rationales in terms of the risks they pose to the sustainability of the regime's approach before concluding and discussing the implications for our understanding of post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa.

Conceptual framework

Characterizing Rwanda's unusual pathway since the genocide has been the subject of vigorous scholarly disagreement. The varying constructs used to describe it broadly reflect the polarized positions in the popular discourse on the country's trajectory. Favourable characterizations have emphasized the regime's success in developing Rwanda's economy and in modernizing its state institutions. Rwanda has been described as a 'developmental state'.[11] The regime's significant investment in building strong state institutions staffed by technocratically competent individuals and its heavy-handed intervention in the planning and regulating of Rwanda's economy do indeed follow the pattern of development in the East and Southeast Asian countries in the post-WWII period. In a variation of the developmental state paradigm, Rwanda has alternatively been described as a 'developmental patrimonial' state. The concept is deployed to recognize a ruling elite's decision to construct a system for the central management of economic rents 'with a view to enhancing their own and others' incomes in the long run rather than maximizing them in the short run'.[12] The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF's) controlling interest in several private companies that operate in strategically important sectors of Rwanda's economy lies at the heart of this characterization. The regime enjoys important rents from the hospitality, dairy, transportation, and mining industries in Rwanda. Lastly, Rwanda has also been described as 'high-modernist' state.[13] This term, which has experienced a resurgence

11. See Behuria, 'Learning from Role Models in Rwanda'; Goodfellow, 'Taxing property in a neo-developmental state'.
12. See Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 'Development patrimonialism'.
13. See Dye, 'The return of high modernism'.

in scholarship on Africa, refers to the belief in science and technology as the means to modernity. The regime's heavy reliance on technocratic expertise is consistent with such a conviction. Rwanda has also been at the vanguard of technological experimentation in Africa.

Yet each of these broadly positive normative characterizations overlooks a darker side of the Rwandan model. The terms employed do not capture the intensifying constraints on political freedom and the weakening of social equality in the country.

An alternate set of conceptual constructs then has arisen that characterize Rwanda in strikingly less favourable terms. The country has been called a simple 'dictatorship' or an instance of 'deft authoritarianism'.[14] Proponents point to the limited competition for the chief executive role, the concentration of power in the person (not office) of the president, and the weak constraints on, and limited accountability, of the Executive. In a variation on autocracy, the country has also been described as an 'ethnocracy'.[15] A dominant ethnic group with hegemonic control over the country's power and resources does appear to exist. Rwanda's Tutsi, or more specifically its Tutsi returnees following the genocide (especially those from Uganda) are widely believed to hold this privileged position. The country has also been called a 'surveillance state'.[16] The term, while not intended as a conceptual construct, is used to describe an omnipresent state, with remarkably deep reach, and a high level of social control. The power of the Rwandan state to monitor and enforce its policies at all levels of society has long been highlighted, particularly in relation to popular mobilization during the genocide.[17] Finally, Rwanda has been cited as an example of an 'elite political settlement'.[18] The term, used in the political economy of development, broadly describes a social and political order built not on the strength of formal institutions but on a set of elite power relations and an agreed distribution of rents. The settlement is seen as a necessary antecedent to a country's economic development.

While each of these critical theoretical descriptors captures the concern for the limits on liberty and equality in Rwanda, they do not reflect the

14. On dictatorship, see Filip Reyntjens, 'Rwanda, ten years on: From genocide to dictatorship', *African Affairs* 103, 411 (2004), pp. 177–210. On 'deft authoritarianism', see Straus and Waldorf (eds), *Remaking Rwanda*, p. 4.
15. Reyntjens, 'Understanding Rwandan politics', p. 524.
16. Purdeková, 'Mundane sights', p.63.
17. See Scott Straus, *The order of genocide: Race, power, and war in Rwanda* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2006); Omar Shahabudin McDoom, *The path to genocide in Rwanda: Security, opportunity, and authority in an ethnocratic state*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021).
18. Tom Goodfellow, 'Rwanda's political settlement and the urban transition: expropriation, construction and taxation in Kigali', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, 2 (2014), pp. 311–29.

regime's developmental ambitions and achievements. They imply an undesirable stasis or retrogression in how the country is governed and miss the regime's vision and forward trajectory for the country.

One concept that seeks to steer a path between these two theoretical poles is illiberal peacebuilding. The term recognizes the aspiration to (re-)build the state following violence but to do so in ways that deviate from the strong liberal and neo-liberal ideals of democracy and a market economy. It is a response to the various critiques of liberal peacebuilding that have emerged from the experiences of places such as Angola, Mozambique, and pre-genocide Rwanda. The best-known of these critiques argues that far from laying the foundations for peace, the competition induced by political and economic liberalization destabilizes war-shattered societies. These criticisms have continued notwithstanding the well-known prescription of institutionalization before liberalization to mitigate the latter's destabilizing effects.[19] In contrast, illiberal peacebuilding generally sees regimes pursuing strategies that emphasize order and stability over individual freedom and human rights, and clientelism and rent-seeking over the rule of law and free markets.[20] On the continent, Angola, Ethiopia, and Sudan each exhibit these characteristics to varying degrees and have been cited as instances of illiberal peacebuilders.[21]

Yet the term illiberal peacebuilding is conceptually amiss when applied to Rwanda. There are at least three reasons to query its suitability. First, a profound theoretical tension exists between the notions of peace and polarization. It is difficult to claim a peace is being built when Rwandans hold such strongly opposing views on their country's future and when a growing number of Rwandan political actors find themselves in exile. Political exclusion is not conducive to peacebuilding. Second, the notions of peace and coercion also sit uncomfortably together. The regime has demonstrated its resolve to use high levels of force to maintain order and to secure its developmental objectives. Yet ensuring stability is analytically distinct to building peace. It is entirely possible to exercise a level of social control that precludes violence but does little to address popular grievances or heal fractured relations. Third, the epithet 'illiberal' suggests an ideological basis to the regime's choices, one defined in explicit opposition to liberal precepts. As we shall see, however, the regime's approach comprises both illiberal

19. Roland Paris, 'Peacebuilding and the limits of liberal internationalism', *International Security* 22, 2 (1997), pp. 54–89.
20. Lars Waldorf, Gerard McCarthy, Claire Smith, and Rajesh Venugopal, 'Illiberal peacebuilding in Asia: A comparative overview', *Conflict, Security and Development* 20, 1 (2020), pp. 1–14.
21. For an analysis of illiberal peacebuilding in these countries, see Will Jones, Ricardo Soares De Oliveira and Harry Verhoeven, 'Africa's illiberal state-builders' (Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper Series No. 89, Oxford, 2012).

and liberal elements. Its decisions are driven more by political expediency and pragmatism than by doctrine.

In recognition of the conceptual unsuitability of illiberal peacebuilding, I propose an alternate construct to characterize the Rwandan regime's approach: securocratic state-building. The term seeks to capture the preeminent power and position held by security actors within the regime and their paramount concern for security, and at the same time the regime's ambition, not so much for positive peace, but for the economic and political transformation of the country. The approach is, first, 'securocratic' because the regime is dominated by the military and intelligence members of an armed group. Their hegemonic position can be traced to the group's outright victory on the battlefield and the reluctance to criticize it in diplomatic circles, given international inertia to stop the genocide. The term is preferable to 'illiberal' because it implies no doctrinaire basis to the regime's decision-making. The regime is ideologically neutral, and its approach is flexible and adaptive. The term also suggests security is the regime's supreme priority. It is not that the regime is ideologically opposed to liberal ideals of liberty and equality. It is simply that they are secondary to security. Second, the approach is better described as 'state-building' because the regime exhibits a genuine desire for progress and to modernize the country following the violence. It is not a stasis in which the victorious rebel group sits back and reaps the spoils of its success on the battlefield. The term is also preferable to peacebuilding given the noted tension with the highly coercive character of the regime. The regime's willingness to use force to secure both its hegemonic position and its developmental aspirations are key features of its approach. In this article, I assess the regime's chosen approach of securocratic state-building against the rationales and counter-rationales offered for and against its strategic choices. As we shall see, the juxtaposition of competing rationales points to a tension in the securocratic state-building model between the aspiration for unity and the emphasis on security.

Methodology

The project's central methodological approach relies on narrative analysis and active interviewing. Narrative research does not purport to capture objective reality or to adjudicate 'truth', but rather aims to reflect how the narrator experiences and portrays this reality.[22] It is part of an epistemological tradition that values the importance of interpreting the meanings and understandings that motivate the research subject's words even when the

22. Cigdem Esin, Mastoureh Fathi, and Corinne Squire, 'Narrative analysis: The constructionist approach', in Uwe Flick (ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (Sage, London, 2013), pp. 203–16.

chosen words may not reflect the speaker's true beliefs. This does not mean narratives have no positivist explanatory or predictive value. To the contrary, how individuals perceive and communicate their world is an insight into the beliefs behind past and future decisions that have shaped and that will shape their world objectively. While this approach will not insulate the conclusions of this article from polarized reactions, it may help non-specialists understand and assess the perspectives of the various Rwandan stakeholders engaged in the debate over the country's direction.

Active interviewing involves the interviewer purposely eschewing neutrality and instead seeking to influence the interviewee's responses by presenting competing narrative positions and alternate arguments.[23] The narrative is co-created. This technique has similarities to the established practice of 'phased assertion' or 'baiting' in which the interviewer may purposely make an incorrect assertion—or an assertion with which the interviewee would disagree—to encourage the interviewee to engage with and correct them.[24] It is particularly well-suited to research in authoritarian political contexts. In such contexts dissenting views may either be self-censored or else only expressed from the safety of exile. What interviewees do not say in such contexts are not missing data. Their silence reflects contextual constraints. However, even if willing to speak up, there may be limited opportunities for regime supporters and opponents to engage each other directly in such contexts. Active interviewing becomes then a form of engaged scholarship. As the interviewer I served as an intermediary between individuals whose positions on opposing ends of Rwanda's various divides meant direct interaction between them had been limited. The interview created the opportunity for these individuals to test the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments against those of their critics.

The primary evidentiary basis for the article comprises a set of 50 original interviews with elite opinion-makers and individuals specially chosen from across Rwanda's various divides and conducted inside and outside of the country over a two-year period. Appendix A describes important biographical and contextual aspects of these interviews to help readers understand the interviewees' positionality and interpret the responses given in the article. Not all interviewees are cited, in part because of space constraints, but also because the aim was to be representative of the spectrum of political opinion rather than comprehensive. The same rationale or explanation was given by multiple interviewees as the saturation points were generally low in relation to the three grand strategic choices studied. My interviews

23. For more on active interviewing, see A. D. Hathaway, 'Active Interviews', in P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug and R.A. Williams (eds), *SAGE research methods foundations* (Sage, London, 2019).
24. See P. Collings, 'Participant observation and phased assertion as research strategies in the Canadian Arctic', *Field Methods* 21, 2 (2009), pp. 133–53.

did, nonetheless, over-represent Tutsi. This was likely because Tutsi are dominant in government agencies and civil society organizations, and I gave priority to the position or role held when selecting individuals. Similarly, my classification of the various perspectives into favourable and critical narratives will inevitably overlook some of the variation 'within' these positions. There exist counter-currents among both regime supporters and critics that may themselves prove to be a force for change one day. The primary function of the dichotomous classification, however, was to assess the coherence and expose potential inconsistencies in the rationales given for the grand strategic choices made. As we will see, the regime cites security and unity as its principal rationales and views them as complementary. However, when juxtaposed against its critics' counter-rationales, the regime's choices made in the interests of security have worked against, more than toward, its aspiration of unity.

Grand strategic choice I: impose 'consensus politics'

The RPF won an outright military victory in 1994. Unusually, however, the rebel group chose not to take power exclusively in a winner-takes-all move. It instead established a power-sharing arrangement involving a grand coalition of political parties with a preeminent Presidency controlled by itself. It then set a long transition period, ultimately nine years, before adopting a new constitution and holding Rwanda's first post-genocide elections in 2003. During these years several high-level departures occurred from both within its coalition partners and the RPF itself, culminating in the replacement of president Bizimungu, a Hutu, by then vice-president Paul Kagame, a Tutsi. Critics claim the regime also implemented a 'Tutsizisation' of state institutions and the coalition was purged of dissenters and challengers.[25] It came as little surprise then that Kagame and the RPF would easily win the 2003 elections, albeit described as flawed, with a 95 percent strong majority. Having secured this victory, the RPF would then intensify their control of Rwanda's political sphere, and, through both co-optation and coercion, it would ensure neither opposition parties nor civil society, including the free press, would jeopardize the political order it envisioned.[26] It enacted powerful laws, outlawing ethnic divisionism in 2002 and genocide ideology in 2003 to help it do so. The weakness of independent, opposing voices would ensure further victories in the 2010 and 2017 elections for the RPF and Kagame, and ultimately a constitutional amendment that would allow him to stay in office potentially until 2034.

25. This point is also made by Reyntjens, 'From genocide to dictatorship'.
26. For an analysis of the relationship between the state and civil society, see Paul Gready, 'You're either with us or against us: Civil society and policy making in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Affairs* 109, 437 (2010), pp. 637–57.

i. Pro-regime narrative on 'consensus politics'

Rwanda is often misunderstood as simply yet another instance of authoritarianism in Africa, regime supporters claim. The aspiration instead, they say, is to create an entirely new type of political system appropriate for the country. In my conversations with senior government officials several openly admitted Rwanda had purposely moved away from competitive politics. The country does not aspire to be a liberal democracy. They speak instead of 'democracy with Rwandan characteristics'. The move is towards what they term 'consensus politics'.

The rationale for consensus over competitive politics is clear: national unity. Consensus advocates point both to Rwanda's own history of competitive democracy and the experience of other African countries to underline their argument that it is divisive and destabilizing. Unity is necessary for state-building. They are convinced that Rwanda's two previous encounters with competitive party politics and elections, first in 1961 and then in 1991, ruptured the political sphere along ethnic lines. Senior presidential adviser, Jean-Paul Kimonyo, put it baldly: 'Competitive politics simply do not work in extremely poor countries. Look at all the Sahelian countries and those in central Africa. They immediately fragmented when elections were held'.[27]

The regime then is forging its own path. The ambition appears not simply to be for consensus to operate among political parties but for consensus to operate across *all* of Rwanda, encompassing civil society and even the general population. A senator, a Rwanda-born Tutsi, told me he believes the Senate's role is to 'advise, not supervise' the Executive.[28] The managing editor of Rwanda's main daily newspaper, a Ugandan-born Tutsi, while insisting on the paper's independence, told me it nonetheless 'shares and aims to actively support RPF values' which he specifies as 'unity and reconciliation, prosperity, fairness, development, and truth'.[29] A senior employee in the Rwandan chapter of Transparency International (TI), a Tutsi returnee from Burundi, while stating the organization operates freely without government interference, said: 'We know what we all want. We have security and now must develop economically. TI aims to help the government achieve that'.[30] A major Rwandan businessman, also a Tutsi returnee, told me 'the government is the partner of the private sector and we share a common vision for rebuilding Rwanda'.[31]

The central idea running through each of these views, spanning the political class, civil society, the business sector, and the media, is that these

27. Interview, Rwanda, 6 March 2018.
28. Interview with Dr. Laurent Nkusi, former Minister of Information, by phone, 12 September 2017.
29. Interview with Collin Haba, Managing Editor of the New Times, by phone, 24 August 2017.
30. Interview with Francine Umurungi, by phone, 7 June 2017.
31. Interview with Albert Rudatsimburwa, by phone, 14 September 2017.

respondents believe their role is not to *challenge* the government but to *collaborate* with it. The objective of that collaboration is the building of a new Rwanda. State-building requires cooperation between rulers and the ruled. New institutions have been created to help promote consensus. For political parties there is the National Consultation Forum for Political Organizations; for civil society, the Rwandan Civil Society Platform; for leaders of the public and private sectors, 'Umwiherero' or annual National Leadership Retreat; and for the general population, the innovative 'Umushyikirano', or annual National Dialogue Council.

For some, the ambition in fact is not merely to change the political system. It is to alter the political philosophy of the country. In this perspective, a consensus-based system is not simply a step in some transitional period toward liberal democracy. It is the endpoint. The argument then is not that Rwandans are not yet ready for competitive politics. It is that a competitive political system is altogether inappropriate for Rwanda. As Anastase Shyaka, then head of the Rwandan Governance Board, put it:[32]

> We used to have confrontational politics. We are now a consensus democracy. That is of paramount significance for unity and reconciliation. We are changing the political philosophy of the nation. The future of this system depends on our ability to achieve diversity of opinion without entering identity politics. If we succeed, the system will be forever sustainable. Otherwise, the devil of identity politics will stay alive. That is why we must manage society.

Beyond the avoidance of competitive elections, a second important and implied feature of Rwanda's consensus-based system is the recognition of limits on political freedoms. The rationale is again clear: security. Supporters of the regime believe it is entitled, if not required, to protect the country from individuals pushing liberal ideals to their limits, given the risk of ethnic divisions engulfing the country once more in violence. Security, like unity, is also necessary for state-building. These limits are most visible in the areas of freedom of speech, in particular press freedom, and freedom of association, specifically the right to form political parties and stand for election. The memory of the country's last experience with liberal rights, in the run-up to the genocide, has left a lingering distrust of the media and party politics among some. As one Tutsi returnee put it: 'Given the history of the country we have to be careful. There are journalists who are not educated in what is acceptable ethical behaviour. They are publishing conflict-sensitive things. That is why we see problems with the media in Rwanda'.[33] Another Tutsi returnee, himself a local media entrepreneur, was more specific: 'The

32. Second interview with Dr. Anastase Shyaka, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.
33. Interview with civil society leader, by phone, 2 June 2017.

ruling party is not above the law. But the lines are clear. We don't have political parties insulting each other. We don't have confrontation. And we don't allow negationism, divisionism, or claims about a double genocide'.[34]

For some, the limits on political freedoms extend as far as prohibiting statements or actions that might jeopardize the position of the regime and the president. It is here that that the tension between legitimate dissent and inflammatory speech becomes most apparent. The editor of the largest pro-government newspaper in Rwanda, a Ugandan Tutsi returnee, rationalized this immunity from criticism. He equates the prevention of ethnic violence and the development of the country with the survival of the regime and the president. The rationale is discernible in his explanation of why the constitution was amended to allow Kagame to stay in office potentially until 2034:[35]

> The reason they changed the constitution is that there were fears if he was not there. 'Fears of what exactly?' Going back to ethnic politics. Undoing all the development. There are people who have invested in Rwanda. It's a big risk for the country. It's just not the right time.

In sum, for regime supporters Rwanda is not simply another dictatorship masquerading as a democracy. The country is aspiring to build a new and distinctive consensus-based political system. In explaining the choice of consensus over competitive politics, supporters articulate two rationales: unity and security. Both are seen as necessary to realize the regime's state-building ambitions. Importantly, the regime's choice is not a rejection of liberal ideals and the embrace of illiberalism. It is rather the prioritization of security and unity over liberty. For supporters then, the regime is not a thinly-veiled military autocracy. It is willing to permit multipartyism, elections, and even dissent but only insofar as they do not jeopardize the country's stability and the regime's developmental ambitions.

ii. Critical counter-narrative on 'consensus politics'

For skeptics, there is an equally clear counter-rationale for the regime's choice of consensus politics: the regime's illegitimacy. The RPF assumed power through military means. Moreover, opponents believe it could never win a genuinely free and fair competitive election because it represents a narrow social base: the Tutsi minority and, possibly even more narrowly, the Tutsi returnee minority. The RPF cannot give Rwandans a true political choice and hope to remain in office. Critics believe any apparent

34. Interview with Albert Rudatsimburwa, by phone, 14 September 2017.
35. Interview with Collin Haba, by phone, 24 August 2017.

support from across the ethnic divide reflects not consensus but coercion. Rwandans fear expressing their opposition to the regime. Support is dissimulated.

Several interviewees, all Hutu living in exile, described the country as either under minority rule, a Tutsi ethnocracy, or even more trenchantly as a quasi-monarchy. Former Prime Minister Faustin Twagarimungu said: 'Frankly, I do not care if it is a Hutu or Tutsi president. I just want the freedom to choose. Kagame is a pseudo-monarchist. We cannot come back to this time when we [the Hutu] lived as slaves'.[36] He would mention several times in our conversations that Kagame was of the 'Abega' clan, from which the Queen Mother often came.

The regime's low legitimacy makes political survival a key rationale for imposing limits on political freedom. 'The survival of the regime has become equated with the security and success of the country. To attack the regime then has become an act of treason', says Bernard Ntaganda, founder of the opposition Social Party Imberakuri and erstwhile presidential candidate.[37] For opponents, instead of protecting the country against divisionism and negationism, Rwanda's laws proscribing genocide ideology have been used coercively to silence and punish legitimate criticism of the regime. The regime prohibits dissent. The justification for coercion is not only the risk to the security and unity of the country; it is also the risk to the regime's state-building project.

For some, the rationale for consensus politics goes beyond simple regime survival. The objective is to establish regime 'hegemony'. In this perspective, Rwanda's consensus system does not reflect the convergence of multiple viewpoints. It represents the imposition from above of a single viewpoint. For critics, Paul Kagame and the RPF occupy a hegemonic position in Rwanda's political system. It is for this reason that disloyalty draws such severe reprisals. Critics point to prosecution, imprisonment, and exile for the fortunate; and to torture, disappearance, and extra-judicial execution for others. They also point out that even *Tutsi* dissenters are not tolerated. Former Secretary-General of the RPF, Theogene Rudasingwa, now in exile, puts it succinctly: 'The accusation is genocide ideology if you are Hutu and corruption if you are Tutsi'.[38] Any seeming consensus is achieved through the exclusion of dissenters.

Dissenters point to another rationale for hegemonic control of Rwanda's political space: an implicit longstanding distrust of civil society and the wider population, in particular its Hutu majority, whose roots lie in the

36. Interview, by phone, 9 August 2017.
37. Interview, by phone, 5 March 2017.
38. Interview, by phone, 23 August 2017.

genocide. Frank Habineza, who left the RPF to found the opposition Democratic Green Party, put it like this:[39]

> Do you think people can change the dominant ideology in 24 years? Remember some Rwandans also have connections to those people outside of the country. We cannot deny ethnic thinking still exists and is real. Changing this is a process. It exists in the hearts of ordinary Rwandans. They were brought up with it.

The regime for its part denies it harbours ethnic distrust. As we shall see, it actively promotes an overarching, unifying Rwandan national identity and a narrative of a post-ethnic Rwanda.

In the critical counter-narrative, then, the regime is not seeking consensus. It seeks instead control. The control the regime exercises is hegemonic because it is not willing to allow Rwandans choice that could result in a different regime. The preeminent rationale for this coercive control is regime illegitimacy. The regime understands this and does not trust the Hutu electorate enough to allow it to choose for itself. This distrust belies the regime's appeal for national unity and ambition of nation-building.

Grand strategic choice II: engineer a post-ethnic society

Ethnicity's central role in the genocide unsurprisingly moved the post-genocide government to take several major decisions aimed at constraining its power and influence in Rwandan society and politics. The decisions involved ambitious, far-reaching, and rapid social re-engineering. To address the deep division that the ethnically-shaped violence had forcefully etched into the country's social fabric, the government began with a broad national unity and reconciliation programme. Its highlight was an innovative experiment in transitional justice that adapted a Rwandan customary conflict-mediating institution, *gacaca*, to deal with the extraordinary scale of civilian participation in the genocide. *Gacaca's* defining feature was the involvement of local communities in administering justice for genocide-related crimes committed within them and aimed both to punish perpetrators and to reconcile communities.[40]

At the same time, the regime also engaged in more coercive practices to address the ethnic question. It launched a major social re-education programme to efface ethnic-based thinking from within the country.[41] It also

39. Interview, by phone, 17 August 2017.
40. Bert Ingelaere, *Inside Rwanda's gacaca courts: Seeking justice after genocide* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2016).
41. Stefan Vandeginste, 'Governing ethnicity after genocide: Ethnic amnesia in Rwanda versus ethnic power-sharing in Burundi', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, 2 (2014), pp. 263–77.

enacted broad laws outlawing genocide ideology and sectarianism. Its effect was to silence public discourse on ethnicity and to push critics into exile. It also created residential 'solidarity camps', *ingando*, in which targeted constituencies were brought to live together and undergo a civic education programme whose goals included the promotion of social cohesion and a supra-ethnic Rwandan national identity. And it revised the national curriculum to ensure what it considered the true history of Rwanda be taught in classrooms emphasizing a precolonial era when, according to the narrative, Rwanda's three ethnic groups peacefully co-existed.[42] It also invested heavily in the memorialization of the genocide and amended the constitution to clarify it was a genocide specifically of the Tutsi.[43] Finally, it created an institution, the Genocide Survivors' Assistance Fund (FARG), to assist Tutsi survivors who lacked the financial means of rebuilding their lives after the genocide.

i. Pro-regime narrative on ethnic engineering

The stated rationale for de-ethnicizing the country is, again, national unity. The rationale is founded on the belief that historically, beginning in the colonial era, ethnic identities in Rwanda have been instrumentalized and politicized to divide Rwandans and that they may be used again to do so if their role is not altered. The genocide was simply the most recent and most devastating expression of this instrumentalization. Laurent Munyandilikirwa, former president of the Rwandan human rights organization, LIPRODHOR, is critical of the regime but shares its concern for the destructive potential of ethnicity:[44]

> Ethnicity has always been used to maintain power in our country. Before 1960, three-quarters of positions were held by Tutsi. The succeeding regimes continued to use ethnicity. They said they were the majority in order to justify their monopoly on power.

Ethnicity then is viewed as a security risk. It is why the state's security apparatus polices ethnic expression so vigorously. The ambition, however, is not a return to a supposed precolonial golden age of ethnic harmony. It is to construct an entirely different national identity from the past. It is one that emphasizes not merely unity, but also a shared ambition to re-build the country. A precursor of the country's Vision 2050 strategy speaks of building a 'national mindset for development' as part of a 'transformation

42. This point is made in Elisabeth King, *From classrooms to conflict in Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013).
43. For an account of the politics of memorialization and its effect on transitional justice in Rwanda, see Timothy Longman, *Memory and justice in post-genocide Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017).
44. Interview, by phone, 9 August 2017.

of attitudes and behaviour' necessary for the strategy's success.[45] Unity is a prerequisite for state-building. The idea has already been internalized by some. The Director of the Rwanda News Agency, a Tutsi returnee from Burundi, tells me:[46]

> Every Rwandan must consider his compatriot as a force to rebuild a 'patrie commune' for all. We have to create justice and inclusive growth. We have to build solidarity together. We must not forget there are always antagonistic forces who promote hatred. We must always fight these forces.

In this view, to speak of ethnicity is implicitly failing in one's duty as a Rwandan to rebuild the nation. It is antithetical to the goal of building a new Rwanda.

The official position is that the regime's chosen strategy of suppressing ethnicity and promoting a Rwandan national identity is working. Justice following the genocide, while not perfect, has been largely served and the country has made progress towards interethnic reconciliation. The Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer is often cited as evidence. Fostering pride in being Rwandese is an important dimension of the government's vision for building a new Rwanda. Yet there also appears to be some relaxation of the official line on ethnicity and a willingness to admit that perhaps it was naïve to think ethnic identities could be engineered out of existence altogether and so quickly. Minster of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Olivier Nduhungirehe, reminds me: 'We have no law that prevents people from using the terms Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. We cannot control how they wish to identify in private'. When asked whether his own children know their ethnicity (he is Hutu), he replies:[47]

> We have a new generation born after the genocide who do not know about ethnicity. My children do not know their ethnicity. At least not from me. Perhaps they learned it from school—especially in April [when the commemoration of the genocide occurs]—when children might tease them about it. You cannot eliminate it altogether. But they cannot see the difference.

Regime supporters who do not hold official positions are more candid in admitting ethnicity still exists as a social force inside the country too,

45. See presentation by Rwandan Minister of Finance, Claver Gatete, at the National Dialogue Council, 16 December 2016, <http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Hon_Gatete_Umushyikirano_Presentation_2016.pdf> (6 January 2020).
46. Interview with André Gakwaya, by phone, 8 August 2017.
47. Interview with Olivier Nduhungirehe, Rwanda, 5 March 2018.

at least among certain demographic groups. A Tutsi survivor points to the generation born before the genocide and to those living in rural areas.[48]

> On the hills, it is different. As things do not change so quickly, it's still powerful there. In big towns where there is viable economic activity, it is disappearing. The economic activity keeps you busy and distracts you. But on the hills there is nothing else to do.

The pro-regime narrative in fact is evolving from the assertion ethnicity exists no longer to the claim there is no more ethnic discrimination and favouritism. Rwanda is becoming a meritocracy. A Tutsi returnee from Burundi articulates this nuance:[49]

> It [ethnicity] has not disappeared yet. But in my understanding when the government speaks of disappearance, they do not mean there are no Hutu or Tutsi. It means the use of ethnicity to discriminate against citizens has disappeared. You may not know who is who when you first meet someone, but people know in private. It will not disappear soon, not tomorrow. But it will not stop you from enjoying your rights as a Rwandan citizen.

For regime supporters then, ethnicity is not a matter for the private sphere. It is a security challenge and the state must be involved in its management. The construction of a new, post-ethnic national identity is indispensable to the regime's ambition to build a new Rwanda. Ethnic engineering is a central pillar of securocratic state-building.

ii. Critical counter-narrative on ethnic engineering

The principal counter-rationale offered for the regime's proscription of ethnicity in official discourse is simple: obfuscation of Tutsi hegemony. Critics claim Tutsi returnees' ascendant position in both public and private spheres would become readily apparent if, for instance, statistics on ethnic representation were collected. They are also firm in their belief that ethnicity remains an inescapable social fact in contemporary Rwanda.[50] Ironically, they attribute its continued salience in part to decisions taken by the regime. 'How can ethnicity not be known in Rwanda?' says Ntaganda, former 2010 presidential candidate.[51]

> The signs are everywhere. The FARG means Tutsi survivor children get free schooling, but Hutu children do not. Also, only Hutu children will

48. Interview on condition of anonymity with Tutsi survivor, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.
49. Interview with Francine Umurungi, by phone, 7 June 2017.
50. The claim that ethnicity remains salient in Rwanda is also made in Bert Ingelaere, 'Peasants, power and ethnicity: A bottom-up perspective on Rwanda's political transition', *African Affairs* 109, 435 (2010), pp. 273–92.
51. Interview, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.

> have parents in prison. And then so many Hutu families have been expropriated of their land, forced to sell it to pay damages ordered during *gacaca*.

The intensive memorialization of the genocide and constitutional amendment to specify it was a genocide solely of the Tutsi also ensure ethnicity remains a significant form of identification in Rwanda.[52] When pressed, Minister of State Nduhungirehe, recognizes this reality. The blame he says lies not with the regime, however.

> *But you remind them every year in April that it was a genocide of Tutsi?* Yes, but this is the fault of the genocidaires who started saying it was a Hutu genocide.

Critics also do not believe the regime's sanguine claims regarding interethnic reconciliation.[53] David Himbara, Paul Kagame's former principal private secretary, now exiled, warns: 'No-one in government knows what the Hutu population in the country thinks. But look how many of them are in prison'.[54] To take a perspective from below, a Hutu farmer from Kigali-Ngali stated it is too soon to expect reconciliation given the pain on both sides:[55]

> Following genocide, it [reconciliation] is very hard. We are talking about human emotions. If someone killed a family member, you cannot reconcile with them in a short time. Also, if you put someone in prison for life, it is difficult to reconcile with those who accused them.

Even senator and former minister Laurent Nkusi, a Rwandan-born Tutsi and a staunch supporter of the regime, admits the official survey results on reconciliation may not be reliable. 'It is always difficult to know the truth in the human sciences. Rwandans dissimulate, yes. But then do not Americans or British people do so too?'[56]

Critics attribute the absence of broader reconciliation to two particular grievances. First, they believe justice following the genocide has been fundamentally unfair. Second, they believe ethnic favouritism and discrimination persist in post-genocide Rwanda.

52. This point is made in Gretchen Baldwin, 'Constructing identity through commemoration: Kwibuka and the rise of survivor nationalism in post-conflict Rwanda', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, 3 (2019), pp. 355–75.
53. The claim that reconciliation remains elusive in Rwanda is also made in Susan Thomson, 'Whispering truth to power: The everyday resistance of Rwandan peasants to post-genocide reconciliation', *African Affairs* 110, 440 (2011), pp. 439–56.
54. Interview, by phone, 3 August 2017.
55. Interview on condition of anonymity, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.
56. Interview, by phone, 12 September 2017.

The proposition that accountability for the genocide has amounted to victor's justice is most forcefully articulated by the Rwandan Hutu refugee population. They point out that the institutions created to administer justice both locally and internationally, *gacaca* and the ICTR respectively, did not investigate and adjudicate on the killing of Hutu civilians by RPF soldiers.[57] In my conversations with the leadership of the refugee community, they alleged atrocities were committed (i) inside Rwanda and then in the DRC where Hutu refugees were pursued as far as Kisangani (1994–96); (ii) in attacks on Hutu refugee camps in the DRC (1996–97); and (iii) during the north-west insurgency (1997–98). Karoli Karere, former president of the RDR, an erstwhile political party representing the exiled Rwandan refugee community, expressed his frustration that the international community has not been willing to recognize gross human rights violations suffered by Hutu civilians. Karoli is also clear he believes there was a double genocide. 'I can accept the killings (of Hutu by RPA soldiers) were simply acts of vengeance in 1994. But from 1996, in the DRC, there was an ideology and a systematic attempt to eliminate the refugees'.[58] He does not claim then the numerical losses were equivalent, but he believes the genocidal intent was comparable.

The one-sided nature of Rwanda's post-genocide justice is also a source of resentment for some Hutu within the country. As one Hutu farmer simply put it: 'In 1994 they say the Hutu killed the Tutsi. But when the RPF came, they committed revenge killings [*kwihorera* in Kinyarwanda]. So there were also Hutu killed. Only those who were lucky were put in prison. But we cannot talk about this. *Gacaca* was only to punish the Hutu'.[59]

A second, strongly-felt grievance that critics claim obstructs reconciliation and that belies the regime's post-ethnic narrative is that equal opportunity does not exist in Rwanda. Ethnic favouritism and discrimination remain lived realities. They claim an informal hierarchy of preferences exists. A former human rights professional in the region described it like this:[60]

> Ethnicity still plays a big role in getting jobs and doing business. The Tutsi returnees—particularly those from Uganda—do best. Then there are the Tutsi survivors. Then the third group are those who support the government. But if you are not in one of these categories, then you cannot do well.

57. Chakaravarty argues *gacaca* also functioned to reinforce the RPF's political authority at the local level. See Anuradha Chakravarty, *Investing in authoritarian rule: Punishment and patronage in Rwanda's Gacaca courts for genocide crimes* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016).
58. Interview, by phone, 11 September 2017.
59. Interview on condition of anonymity, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.
60. Interview on condition of anonymity, by phone, 8 June 2017.

The favouritism pervades all spheres of activities, critics claim. The list of areas they cited as being over-represented by Tutsi is long: the legislature, the judiciary, the civil service, the intelligence services, the senior ranks of the military, local government leadership, university faculty, the managerial echelons of parastatals, regulatory bodies, and civil society organizations, and the ownership of major private businesses. Relatedly, they claim discrimination against Hutu and cited examples such as political party registration and the competition for civil service jobs, educational scholarships, and government contracts. Senior opposition politicians, Victoire Ingabire and Bernard Ntaganda, issue a stark warning in relation to these grievances.[61]

> …existential group grievances and systemic failures to address them could lead to another implosion in Rwanda and send in smoke the achievements made in Rwanda in the last 26 years with substantial financial support from abroad.

The disjunction between the regime's rhetoric of non-discrimination and the perception of persistent ethnic bias then represents a potential security risk. Ethnic grievance threatens the regime's aspiration of national unity and its broader state-building objectives.

Grand strategic choice III: upgrade the state to modernize the economy

Faced with a country in which almost all economic activity had abruptly halted and a dearth of personnel needed to provide essential public services, the new regime set itself the ambitious objective of building a technocratic state capable of facilitating Rwanda's transformation into a middle-income economy. It invested in a merit-based civil service; created a zero-tolerance environment for corruption; set standards for accountability of public officials through performance contracts known as *imihigo*; decentralized decision-making in a number of areas; and implemented a mandatory villagization progamme in order to provide public services more efficiently. Rwanda's small territorial size and unusually high population density have helped the regime to broadcast the state's power and to implement its policies at all levels. The regime envisioned that a more effective state, respected for its good governance, would stimulate the private sector and modernize Rwanda's economy. It held up Singapore as the model of the developmental state. As in Singapore, it invested in human capital to increase the skill set and productivity of its workforce. Tuition for primary and secondary

61. Press release, 'Roadmap for a Promising Future', communicated directly to author, 1 July 2021.

school was to become free and a national university system, with scholarship opportunities, would be built with campuses across the country. At the same time, Rwandans were to have state-subsidised health insurance plans.

The regime's approach to the economy synthesized liberal and non-liberal principles and practices. It embraced free trade and joined several regional agreements including the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and most recently the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018. It built a pro-business regulatory environment to attract foreign direct investment and encourage local entrepreneurs. Rwanda was ranked second in Africa, behind Mauritius, in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2020 index. It promoted private sector development and sought to diversify the economy away from agriculture. ICT, financial services, and energy have become important sectors for private investment. Agriculture was itself set to become more efficient and export-oriented with an emphasis on larger landholdings and cash crops. The state would redistribute land to achieve this. At the same time, contrary to free market principles, the regime has created rent opportunities for itself in certain sectors. In hospitality, transportation, and mining, the ruling party and Rwandan military have established private companies and profited from their investments. This high modernist but non-doctrinaire vision for developing Rwanda would receive considerable material support from aid donors.

i. Pro-regime narrative on modernization

The rationale for modernizing the economy is clear: through growth will come security. Tackling poverty and food insecurity are particularly important for the regime because it believes the vulnerability of the population to social division and conflict is linked to the scarcity of resources in Rwanda. The regime believes the resulting human security will become the basis for lasting physical security. The regime then has an almost-Malthusian interpretation of popular participation in the genocide. The roots of the violence lie in the competition over Rwanda's limited resources. The director of a prominent NGO with a poverty-reduction mission, and an ardent RPF supporter, corroborates this thinking:[62]

> Our problem is resources. We are too dependent on agriculture. The poor do not have enough to feed their families or to sell in the market. The most vulnerable are not able to satisfy their basic needs. And the population is increasing exponentially relative to the land. Everyone understands the

62. Interview with Prosper Sebagenzi, Programme director CARITAS Rwanda, by phone, 13 September 2017.

> dangers of this. There is not enough for everyone. And people will kill to survive.

This interpretation of the violence explains the regime's choice of securocratic governance. Until Rwanda achieves some stabilizing level of shared prosperity, security must be the state's paramount priority. It is why the securocrats are in charge and it is why Rwanda has been described as an 'army with a state'.[63] The Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), in particular, are believed to surveil the country through an extensive network of agents and informants from the highest echelons of government to the lowest levels of society. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior government official confirmed this view of Rwanda as a securocracy.[64]

> The country is potentially explosive. The poverty and lack of resources are a problem. Yes, the surveillance is heavy. Rwanda is now effectively ruled by securocrats. But people have learned to live with it and some people have begun to appreciate it. We also need it because of the RNC [organization led by exiled RPF senior members] and other groups outside Rwanda.

When confronted with this view, Shyaka corroborated it but defended the power of Rwanda's securocrats as a transitional phase in the regime's state-building project:[65]

> I think economic transformation will create more balance. The stronger the human security, the more the security organs will weaken. Look at the West. When insecurity happens—like a terrorist attack—then the security organs dominate. For us in Rwanda sensitivity about security is much higher than elsewhere.

For the regime the means to this economic transformation is the state. It sees a modern state, one that exhibits high technocratic competence and low corruption, as necessary to lead the country's economic growth. It strengthened the state to ensure it has the capacity to plan the macroeconomy. It also invested in a merit-based civil service and prioritized education to upgrade the supply of qualified labour. Asked whether there is favouritism in the allocation of public sector jobs, supporters deny it but some admit appointments are not an entirely impersonal process.[66]

63. Filip Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth, dealing with dissent, domesticating the world: Governance in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Affairs* 110, 438 (2011), p. 2.
64. Interview, Rwanda, exact date withheld, 2018.
65. Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth'.
66. Interview with Samba Cyuzuzo, Chief editor *Umuseke* newspaper, 14 September 2017.

> Is there a bias in government jobs? Not really. Yes, we have many survivors who have good jobs. But they got the jobs because they are qualified. Merit matters. It is only when there is doubt about qualifications, then personal connections may matter.

Yet the regime has not embraced the classical model of the developmental state. Its approach differs in one crucial respect. The regime does not simply intervene in and regulate the private sector. It behaves as a private sector actor itself. Its activity is not limited to the public sphere. The RPF has made investments in the dairy, transportation, mineral, and hotel industries, among others. The officers and shareholders of the companies it created include senior military figures within the regime. The securocrats have extended their activities to the private sphere too and in so doing created serious conflicts of interest.

When confronted with this further allegation, Shyaka again defended the decision as part of the regime's state-building model. The RPF took a risk by establishing itself as the first market entrant in these sectors because other private actors were unwilling to enter them. The party played a catalytic role in developing these strategically important sectors. Its behaviour is a form of benevolent development patrimonialism.[67]

> The rationale behind this is not the RPF but Rwanda. Take *Inyange* [RPF company in the dairy sector], take milk. Local people have pushed for a price for milk the private sector cannot sustain. But there is this public interest to lower the price. These sectors in which the RPF invested were a public investment. Growing these companies is about making strategic investments. Are we the only ones to do this? What do you do in Europe? Do you not have such conflicts of interest also?

The regime's overarching rationale for its transformation of state and economy then is simply security. It wishes to raise the living standards of Rwandans because it sees shared prosperity as the cornerstone of social stability. Until it reaches a security-assuring level of prosperity, security actors must be involved in governing the country.

ii. Critical counter-narrative on modernization

Regime detractors believe an alternative rationale for the modernization of the state and economy: regime entrenchment and endurance. They acknowledge the country's economic transformation but believe its benefits are skewed. The developmental gains have not been equitably distributed; moreover, this inequality is not accidental. It is not simply a disparity between urban and rural areas or even between Hutu and Tutsi.

67. See Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 'Development patrimonialism'.

Critics emphasized the growing divide between Tutsi returnees and everyone else. A Tutsi survivor put it like this:[68]

> Those in exile did not have easy lives as some could not get citizenship. But now in Rwanda they have a head-start. They get the best jobs in the public and private sector. The vision for the country's future is good in the short-term. But we risk creating two social classes. Those who have access to progress and economic development and those who do not. 'You mean rural and urban differences?' No, there is inequality in the town also. In town, there are those who live in tiny spaces and earn 20USD/month while others make 500USD. And it is not ethnic inequality either. It is the advantage of those who returned and who have access to good jobs and credit to start businesses.

As we saw previously, critics believe a hierarchy of preferences exists. Tutsi returnees benefit the most, followed by Tutsi survivors, and then regime supporters more broadly. Jobs, credit, scholarships, licenses, and business opportunities are allocated accordingly. The regime is incentivizing support and rewarding loyalty to support its hegemonic control. Contrary to the regime's narrative of equal opportunity, critics believe the rents and other opportunities the regime controls have become instruments of patronage.[69]

Critics also claim the ruling party itself has directly benefited from the chosen economic strategy. They do not see the RPF's majority shareholding in private companies as an attempt to jumpstart markets in underdeveloped industries. Former presidential candidate, Ntaganda, says the conflicts of interest represent corruption.

> It is total economic control. All domains are controlled by the RPF. How can it not be corrupt? Yes, corruption is low in Rwanda. But the RPF is the exception. It is the most corrupt. 95 percent of public markets are in RPF hands. It is the RPF that appoints the CEOs of these companies. Even Ministers get appointed.

Critics also acknowledge the improved bureaucratic capacity of state institutions but warn of their political capture by the party. State institutions are capable but they are not autonomous because the party exercises hegemonic control over appointments, policies, and performance at all levels of the state. It is not that merit does not matter in such appointments. It is that it is insufficient. Appointees must be both competent *and* loyal.

68. Interview on condition of anonymity, Rwanda, 7 March 2018.
69. This point is also made by Pritish Behuria, 'Centralising rents and dispersing power while pursuing development? Exploring the strategic uses of military firms in Rwanda', *Review of African Political Economy* 43, 150 (2016), pp. 630–47.

Rudasingwa, an exiled, senior RPF insider, explained how political loyalty and political power are assured in Rwanda. He described the power structure as a pyramid with Kagame at its apex, followed by the intelligence services, then the military, the ruling party, and lastly, at the bottom, the civilian government. The civilian state institutions at the bottom, he says, have little independence as the individuals appointed to them serve only at Kagame's pleasure.

> That is where he [Kagame] puts the Hutus. He makes them Ministers. But it is not even the Minister who has the last word. The DMI [intelligence agency] deploys within the Ministry and these are the ones who decide matters. Sometimes the Ministers would even use the term *Afande* for Kagame. 'What is that?' That is the term a soldier uses to address a superior in Swahili. Everyone who works in the Ministries knows where the real power lies. No-one would defy Kagame's word.

The second rationale critics offer for the improved state performance is the regime's need to deliver public goods: security, education, health, infrastructure among others. It is to make up for its low legitimacy and its restrictions on political freedom. Exiled opposition leader, Joseph Bukeye of the FDU-Inkingi, acknowledges the regime has delivered on some of these promises but sees them as a side-payment and one that is not worth the price.

> Although I am from the opposition, I can see there have been achievements. Especially in economic development. But the problem is the cost at which they have been achieved. One of the costs is the freedom of the people. Now they are suppressing dissenting voices. Look at the number of refugees outside of country. People are leaving Rwanda because they value freedom.

Former Prime Minister, Faustin Twagarimungu put it more bluntly.

> I am not blind. But to tell me Rwanda is like Singapore does not impress. The main achievement is just Kigali city. There must also be security in body *and mind* for the people. I value freedom and openness more than order and development.

Critics then offer two powerful counter-rationales for the regime's ambitions for the state and economy. First, they say the true aim is to enrich and entrench the ruling party to ensure its hegemony and longevity. While state institutions have become more technocratically capable, they have become captured by the RPF. It controls appointments to ensure loyalists hold key positions at all levels of the state. And while the private sector has developed, the key beneficiary has been the ruling party itself.

Second, critics rationalize the regime's aspiration to deliver a higher quality of life for Rwandans as a response to its natural legitimacy deficit. It is simply a side-payment for authoritarianism. The regime knows it must perform to buy popular support and to secure acquiescence in its limitations on individual freedoms.

The risks of Rwanda's grand strategic choices

Across all three strategic choices, regime supporters have offered explanations that implicitly share the same two underlying rationales. Both security and unity are needed to re-build the post-genocide state and nation. If there is unity, there will be security. And until there is unity, the regime must guarantee security. At the same time, regime critics have offered counter-narratives that expose a structural tension between these two rationales and that present strategic risks for the regime's state-building model.

In its first grand choice, the aspiration for unity through consensus politics, the regime has excluded individuals and parties it considers challenges to its power and authority. Criticism of the president and the RPF remains the third rail of Rwandan politics, even if dissent in other domains is tolerated. The regime invokes security to justify its exclusion, deeming such critics divisionist and purveyors of genocide ideology.[70] Yet a consensus established through the exclusion of dissent is fictitious. It also undermines the prospect of durable unity. As the regime's critics make clear, for those opposed to the RPF and Kagame, there is no institutionalized mechanism for choosing change. Dissenters must instead accept exile. Such a consensus—one built without meaningful choice—is hollow. Moreover, political exclusion, particularly when it coincides with ethnic boundaries, is the basis for powerful grievance. The situation today is darkly parallel to the position of the Tutsi exiled following Rwanda's revolution (1959–62). The refugees concluded then that armed return was the only option available to them and the civil war and genocide followed. Even among those who do not choose exile, the regime cannot know whether it rules with their consent or merely with their compliance. Outward consensus may be dissimulation. It can never know when it is safe to relax its control of Rwanda's political space.

In its second grand choice, the aspiration for unity through ethnic re-engineering, the regime's ambition of a post-ethnic society is thwarted by its own prohibition on ethnic identification in the public sphere. The regime's proscription precludes it from countering the incendiary claims of ethnic bias in Rwanda. It cannot say how many Hutu or Tutsi hold

70. For a detailed account of how the regime has dealt with dissent, see Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth'.

office, obtain credit, secure jobs, and win scholarships for instance. Ironically then, the prohibition serves instead to keep the longstanding debate on ethnic balance alive in Rwanda, albeit in subterranean form. The regime censored ethnicity because it believes ethnicity's continued salience in Rwandan society and politics lies at the root of the country's historic violence. Yet this belief is enabling its critics' narrative of Tutsi hegemony to stand against the regime's claims of non-discrimination and meritocracy. The narrative has deep historical resonance for Rwanda's Hutu population. Their sense of injustice is not only a barrier to interethnic reconciliation, but a potential threat to social stability. Rwanda's social revolution was itself a reaction to an unjust socio-political order based on minority rule.

In its third grand choice, the aspiration for security by modernizing the state and economy—peace through prosperity—is jeopardized by the hegemonic control it seeks to exert over all positions of power at all levels of the state. The ruling party exercises care to ensure loyalists are appointed to public offices at the national and local levels of government. Party and state appear synonymous once again. This has yielded results so far because the regime does not believe loyalty is a substitute for merit. Its loyalists are also competent, and the regime has made substantive progress modernizing the state and developing the economy. However, as the interviews with regime critics make clear, this control has also created grievances. It has resulted in disparities. Rwandans resent the seeming privileges of the Tutsi returnee class, whose loyalty is presumed, whereas for others it must be proven. Modernization's uneven progress—its tendency to create winners and losers as it advances—is a well-recognized driver of persistent ethnic identifications and of potential social conflict.[71] The ascendance of one social group, particularly if the group is minoritarian, is a powerful injustice frame. In Rwanda, this disparity has twice in the past, in 1959 and 1973, proved capable of mobilizing social unrest and precipitating regime change.

Overall, in its aspiration to build a robust security apparatus to underwrite the country's economic achievements and social stability—physical security before human security—the regime is ironically strengthening the very social force it seeks to tame. The regime wishes to eliminate ethnicity in Rwandan politics and society—to build a post-ethnic society—but, perversely, its own choices and actions are motivated by a belief in ethnicity's continuing power. Regime supporters rationalize the tight social control Rwanda's powerful security infrastructure exerts over Rwandans by invoking the spectre of ethnic extremism. The strength of the regime's

71. See Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985).

social control then is an expression and measure of its continuing ethnic distrust. It fears the majoritarian Hutu population. At the same time, as the counter-narratives of regime critics make clear, this distrust is mutual. They fear the regime amounts to Tutsi hegemony. The practice of tighter and tighter social control, driven by continuing ethnic distrust, belies then the aspiration for interethnic reconciliation.

Part of the explanation for the strategic tension between security and unity lies in understanding the regime's beliefs in relation to liberty and equality. The regime is not ideologically opposed to liberal ideals. However, it defiantly believes security must take precedence over both liberty and equality. In relation to liberty, the regime's prioritization is the reason why it carefully controls freedom of association and expression in Rwanda. It allows opposition parties and it tolerates political dissent but only insofar as they are not socially divisive and, more controversially, only insofar as they do not jeopardize the regime's position. The regime views its own continuity as non-negotiable because it sees itself as the sole guarantor of the country's security for the foreseeable future. It believes the genocide stands as proof no other actor—internal or external—can be relied on to save Rwanda should its ethnic demons rise again.

Similarly, in relation to equality, the regime controls, and limits access to opportunities such as jobs, scholarships, credit, and business licences, for example, to those persons it trusts and who share its vision for Rwanda's future. It demands competence 'and' loyalty. It pursues this practice even if the dual criteria of fitness and fealty risk creating disparities and imbalances between social groups. Yet, as the powerful counter-narratives demonstrate, the regime's behaviour is not understood by its critics as motivated by a concern for security. They do not agree the regime is the sole guarantor of Rwanda's future security and development. It is for this reason the regime's choices have instead generated grievance and discontent among its detractors. In its quest for security, the regime is undermining its aspiration for unity.

Conclusion

Characterizing Rwanda's remarkable rise following the genocide has been the subject of intense popular disagreement and ongoing theoretical debate. I developed the concept of securocratic state-building in response to this dissensus to capture, first, the regime's developmental but ideologically non-doctrinaire aspirations; and second its prioritization of security over liberty, and stability over peace. Its approach is better described as *securocratic*, rather than liberal or illiberal, given the importance of results over doctrine in the regime's strategy. Military and intelligence agents are preeminent in government to assure the security of the state. It is not that

the regime possesses no ideological beliefs. It is that its beliefs are adaptive to its overriding objectives of security and unity. For example, the belief that ethnicity should be eliminated altogether is giving way to the belief that it is only ethnic favouritism that realistically can and should be prohibited. The regime's approach is also better described as 'state-building' rather than peacebuilding or nation-building, given the reality of political exclusion and perception of ethnic bias in the strategy's implementation. Rwanda is still more a developmentally ambitious ethnocratic state in which a non-violent coexistence is enforced than it is a unified nation built on a shared understanding of social and political order.

At the same time, using the technique of eliciting and juxtaposing the rationales and counter-rationales given for the regime's grand strategic choices, I cast light on a fundamental tension in the securocratic state-building model. There exists a strategic tension between the regime's pre-occupation with security and its aspiration for unity. A contradiction exists, for example, between the regime's ambition to build a post-ethnic society and the ethnic logic implicit in its rationales for eschewing competitive politics and for maintaining tight social control. It cites the risk of ethnic extremism for both choices. Similarly, the regime's wish to control and limit access to important opportunities for advancement to individuals who are both competent 'and' loyal to its vision again contradicts the commitment to a post-ethnic Rwanda. The practice is leading once more to an ethnic imbalance—or at the very least to the perception of one. These contradictions, among others, place a question mark over the sustainability of the Rwanda model.

In considering the implications of these findings, comparisons will inevitably be drawn between Rwanda's approach and that of the other oft-cited illiberal peacebuilders on the continent such as Angola and Sudan. It is with Ethiopia, however, that perhaps the strongest comparison can be made and that a glimpse of Rwanda's future may be had.

Ethiopia's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), like Rwanda's Tutsi-centric RPF, came to power through military victory. It too had a narrow social base. Tigrayans make up some 6 percent of the population. It too entered a coalition with other parties to address its legitimacy deficit, while retaining dominance, and it too sought to emulate the developmental state to transform Ethiopia's economy. It also had visionary leadership and under Meles Zenawi, like Rwanda under Kagame, the country achieved remarkable growth rates. Like Rwanda, Ethiopia became much-loved by western donors, received much foreign aid, and enjoyed considerable diplomatic support. It was also ideologically adaptive having moved from Marxist–Leninism to Revolutionary Democracy, just as Rwanda

experimented with liberal and illiberal principles.[72] It also sought to unify an ethnically divided nation and chose an ethno-federal system with some level of decentralization to do so.

Over time, however, the regime's commitment to political freedom and ethnic equality also weakened and, like the RPF, it became increasingly repressive as discontent with its pro-Tigrayan bias widened.[73] Following losses in its 2005 legislative elections, the regime responded with coercion and its intelligence agency, INSA, engaged in pervasive surveillance to preserve the party's control over the country.[74] After Zenawi's death in 2012, the regime skilfully managed the succession and it seemed as if the TPLF could endure indefinitely.

The regime, however, over-reached. Its attempt to expand the capital, Addis Ababa, and to expropriate land in 2016 triggered civil unrest that fed on longstanding discontent to spread quickly across the entire country. The protests and violence culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018 and the appointment of an ethnic Oromian, Abiy Ahmed, from a faction within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition. On Abiy's watch the country began to fragment ethnically and, at the time of writing, a civil war between Abiy's federal government and the TPLF is ongoing. The war has drawn in neighbouring Eritrea. Ethiopia appears to be in the midst of a protracted and violent regime transition whose outcome is not yet certain.

The lesson from Ethiopia for Rwanda's RPF then is that it should not trust its remarkable developmental achievements and its high capacity for social control, key features of securocratic state-building, to protect it indefinitely. The RPF-dominated regime too may over-reach one day and then also fracture from within. If a popular uprising were also to ensue as it did in Ethiopia, and the RPF were also to engage in its brutal suppression, Rwanda's external supporters may also find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having either to denounce the regime they once supported and intervene to stop the bloodshed or—once again—stand by and do nothing. Rwanda's securocratic state-building model may not prove then to be the much-acclaimed and much-needed alternative to liberal peacebuilding in deeply divided and fragile post-conflict societies.

For those watching Rwanda to see if the model could be emulated, the litmus test for the country's chosen path is regime succession. The regime does not believe an alternative to itself, an actor capable of assuring

72. Tefera Negash Gebregziabher, 'Ideology and power in TPLF's Ethiopia: A historic reversal in the making?', *African Affairs* 118, 472 (2019), pp. 463–84.
73. Human Rights Watch, 'Development Without Freedom', *Report* (New York, 2010)
74. J. Abbink, 'Discomfiture of democracy? The 2005 election crisis in Ethiopia and its aftermath', *African Affairs* 105, 419 (2006), pp. 173–99; Human Rights Watch, *They Know Everything We Do* (New York, 2014).

Rwanda's future security and development, exists at present. Its choices then reflect the belief in the necessity of its continuity. It is worth noting, however, every regime transition in Rwanda since 1896 has occurred outside the accepted institutional channels. Rwanda's ongoing 'peace' or exit from violence should not be considered consolidated until its next regime change follows whatever institutionally established process is in place at the time.

Supplementary material

Supplementary data are available online at *African Affairs*.