



**Congressional
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

Rwanda: In Brief

Updated February 23, 2021

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R44402

Summary

Rwanda has seen rapid development and security gains since the 1994 genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 people—mostly members of the ethnic Tutsi minority—were killed over a three-month period. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), then a rebel movement, ended the genocide by seizing power and has been the dominant force in Rwandan politics ever since. The RPF-led government has won donor plaudits for its efforts to improve health, boost agricultural output, encourage foreign investment, and promote women’s empowerment. Rwanda’s relatively effective response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has spotlighted its public health and state service-delivery capacities. Yet, analysts debate whether Rwanda’s authoritarian political system and periodic support for rebel groups in neighboring countries could jeopardize the country’s stability in the long run, or undermine the case for donor support.

President Paul Kagame, in office since 2000, won reelection to another seven-year term in 2017 with nearly 99% of the vote, after a new constitution effectively exempted him from term limits through 2034. His overwhelming margin of victory may reflect popular support for his efforts to stabilize and transform Rwandan society, although the government also imposes tight constraints on opposition activity and monitors citizen behavior. Public criticism of the RPF’s legitimacy and overarching policy platform is rare. Some exiled opposition figures, including senior RPF defectors, have formed armed groups in neighboring countries. Human rights advocates assert that the Rwandan government has targeted dissidents with violent attacks and intimidation at home and abroad. President Kagame and other top officials have generally denied specific allegations of targeted assassinations and human rights abuses, while asserting a duty to take all steps deemed necessary to ensure Rwanda’s stability and security.

Over the past decade, successive U.S. Administrations and Congresses have supported continued U.S. partnership with Rwanda on development and international peacekeeping (to which Rwanda is a robust contributor of troops and police), while criticizing the government’s human rights record and role in regional conflicts. Congress has continued to appropriate substantial bilateral development aid, while also enacting restrictions on certain military aid for any government in Africa’s Great Lakes region (which includes Rwanda) found to be aiding rebel groups in a neighboring country (most recently, under P.L. 116-260, Division K). Invoking a similar provision in prior appropriations measures and separate child soldiers legislation (Title IV of P.L. 110-457), the Obama Administration withheld certain security assistance for Rwanda in connection with its alleged support for rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi. Rwanda appears to have had less involvement in regional conflicts in recent years. U.N. sanctions investigators reported in late 2020, however, that Rwandan troops had conducted operations in eastern DRC during the year, which Rwanda denied.

After meeting with President Kagame in 2018, President Trump expressed appreciation for U.S.-Rwandan economic ties, Rwanda’s peacekeeping contributions, and Kagame’s pursuit of African Union institutional reforms. The Trump Administration nonetheless subsequently suspended Rwanda’s eligibility for duty-free treatment of eligible apparel sector goods under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended), citing Rwandan barriers to U.S. exports of used clothing. In line with its proposals to decrease foreign aid worldwide, the Trump Administration’s FY2021 budget proposal would have reduced U.S. bilateral aid to Rwanda by 34% compared to FY2020 estimated allocations. Congress generally did not enact the Trump Administration’s proposed topline cuts to foreign aid accounts; final FY2021 country-level allocations have yet to be published. The United States has allocated additional funds for global health and peacekeeping capacity-building activities in Rwanda, via programs budgeted on a global or regional (as opposed to country-specific) basis.

Contents

Introduction	1
Politics	4
Governance and Human Rights	6
Regional Security	7
The Economy and Development	8
U.S. Relations and Aid	9
Legislative Restrictions on Security Assistance	11
Issues for Congress and Outlook	12

Figures

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

Tables

Table 1. U.S. Aid to Rwanda	11
-----------------------------------	----

Contacts

Author Information.....	13
-------------------------	----

Introduction

Rwanda has achieved a rare degree of political stability, public safety, economic growth, and poverty alleviation in a sub-region plagued by armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. These gains are particularly remarkable in the wake of the 1994 genocide, in which extremist members of the ethnic Hutu majority orchestrated a three-month killing spree targeting the minority Tutsi community, along with politically moderate Hutus and members of the Indigenous Twa community (see text box, below). The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), founded as a rebel movement by Tutsi refugees in neighboring Uganda, seized power in mid-1994 and stopped the genocide. President Paul Kagame, leader of the RPF—now the country’s dominant political party—has since been widely portrayed as the architect of Rwanda’s development “miracle” and of its autocratic political model.¹

International perspectives on Rwanda tend to be polarized. President Kagame’s supporters assert that he is a visionary and that Rwanda represents an extraordinary post-conflict success story.² To supporters, Rwandan voters’ support for Kagame is easily explained: “he has kept them from killing each other ... [and] has also given them a sense of hope and pride.”³ Critics, for their part, have argued that restrictions on political and civil rights may ultimately undermine Rwanda’s hard-won stability, and mask ethnic, political, and social tensions.⁴ Given evident constraints on free expression, one academic argued ahead of Rwanda’s 2017 elections that “we simply don’t know ... what Rwandans want from their political leaders.”⁵ Some critics have questioned Rwanda’s development statistics (a key justification for donor aid), and some posit that the ruling party’s reportedly extensive involvement in the economy may be stifling independent private sector growth.⁶ Kagame has dismissed external criticism as inaccurate, irrelevant, neocolonialist, and/or morally vacuous, often citing the international community’s failure to halt the genocide.⁷

Rwanda and the United States have cultivated strong ties since the mid-1990s, underpinned by U.S. development aid and support for Rwanda’s robust participation in international peacekeeping (see “U.S. Relations and Aid”). Over the past decade, U.S. officials and some Members of Congress have nonetheless voiced concerns regarding Rwanda’s authoritarian political system and its periodic support for rebel groups in neighboring countries. Congress has held hearings examining these and related issues, most recently in 2017.⁸ While continuing to appropriate foreign assistance for Rwanda (**Table 1**), Congress has placed conditions on certain types of U.S. security assistance due to concerns over Rwanda’s role in regional conflicts (see

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

² Andy Kristian Agaba, “The case for Kagame’s third term in Rwanda,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 2017.

³ Stephen Kinzer, “Rwanda and the Dangers of Democracy,” *Boston Globe*, July 22, 2017.

⁴ See, e.g., Scott Strauss, “Twenty Years After the Rwandan Genocide,” Oxford University Press Blog, April 8, 2014.

⁵ Laura Seay, “Is Rwanda’s Authoritarian State Sustainable?” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2016.

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

⁷ See, e.g., *Financial Times*, “Interview: Kagame Insists ‘Rwandans Understand the Greater Goal,’” August 27, 2017; and *Yale News*, “Rwandan president addresses critics in Yale lecture,” September 21, 2016.

⁸ House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations (“HFAC Africa Subcommittee”), “Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted,” September 27, 2017. See also Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), “U.S. Policy in Central Africa: The Imperative of Good Governance,” February 10, 2016; HFAC Africa Subcommittee, “Africa’s Great Lakes Region: A Security, Political, and Humanitarian Challenge,” October 22, 2015; HFAC Africa Subcommittee, “Developments in Rwanda,” May 20, 2015.

“Legislative Restrictions on Security Assistance”). Legal exceptions and waiver authorities have effectively exempted U.S. aid focused on building Rwanda’s peacekeeping capabilities.

President Trump met with President Kagame in 2018 and expressed appreciation for U.S.-Rwandan economic ties, Rwanda’s contributions to peacekeeping, and Kagame’s pursuit of African Union (AU) institutional reforms. The two leaders spoke on the phone in April 2020 to discuss bilateral relations and U.S. support for Rwanda’s efforts to contain the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, according to a Rwandan statement.⁹ Though the Trump Administration provided emergency COVID-19 aid,¹⁰ the Administration also repeatedly proposed to cut U.S. bilateral health and development aid for Rwanda, in line with its global aid budget proposals. In 2018, President Trump also suspended Rwanda’s apparel sector trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended), citing Rwanda’s protectionist policies regarding used clothing imports.

Figure I. Rwanda at a Glance



Population: 12.7 million
Languages: Kinyarwanda, French, English, Kiswahili
Religions: Protestant 50%, Roman Catholic 44%, Muslim 2%, other/none/unspecified 5% (2012 est.)
Median age: 19.7 years
Life expectancy: 65.1 years
Infant mortality rate: 28 deaths/1,000 live births
Literacy: 73% (male 78%, female 70%) (2018 est.)
HIV/AIDS adult prevalence: 2.9% (2019 est.)

Comparative size: slightly smaller than Maryland
GDP growth, per capita: 2.0%, \$823
Key exports / partners: coffee, tea, hides, tin ore / UAE 38%, Kenya 15%, Switzerland 10%, DRC 10%, U.S. 5%, Singapore 5% (2017)
Key imports / partners: foodstuffs, machinery + equipment, steel, petroleum products, cement + construction material / China 20%, Uganda 11%, India 7%, Kenya 7%, Tanzania 5%, UAE 5% (2017)

Sources: CRS graphic; base map generated from Esri (2013). Data from CIA *World Factbook* and International Monetary Fund (IMF, October 2020); 2020 estimates unless noted.

⁹ Statement on Twitter by President Paul Kagame’s verified account, April 25, 2020, 11:42AM.

¹⁰ As of August 21 (latest publicly available), the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had allocated over \$3.8 million in global health and humanitarian assistance to support Rwanda’s response to COVID-19; USAID also donated 100 ventilators to Rwanda in July 2020. State Department, “Update: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19,” August 21, 2020.

The 1994 Genocide¹¹

In April 1994, extremist members of Rwanda's ethnic Hutu majority (then estimated at 85% of the population) orchestrated the mass murder of some 800,000 people—over 10% of the population—within a three-month period.¹² The masterminds of the genocide sought to exterminate the ethnic Tutsi population (roughly 14%); politically moderate Hutus and Indigenous Twa (1%) were also targeted. Hutu hardliners coordinated killings and widespread sexual violence, distributing arms and issuing commands via FM radio to grassroots militia groups throughout the country, whose members hunted down neighbors and even relatives at the local level.

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

Some Tutsi refugees in Uganda—including now-President Kagame—joined a rebellion led by Yoweri Museveni, who took power in Uganda in 1986 and remains president. Kagame and others then helped form the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel group seeking a greater Tutsi stake in Rwanda's government and a right of return for refugees. In 1990, the RPF launched an offensive in Rwanda, marking the start of a civil war that Hutu extremists leveraged to spread fear and hatred of Tutsis. Rwanda's Hutu-led government signed a peace accord with the RPF in 1993, but implementation lagged. When a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down over the capital, Kigali (**Fig. 1**), killing both leaders, Hutu hardliners took control, assassinating moderates in the transitional government and launching a plan to eradicate the Tutsi minority.¹³ The U.N. Security Council voted to draw down a U.N. peacekeeping mission, removing forces that could have protected civilians.¹⁴

The RPF seized control of Kigali in July 1994, ending the genocide. At that point, about 2 million mostly Hutu Rwandans—including some army officers, militia leaders, and extremist ideologues—fled to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, then Zaire). Some launched attacks into Rwanda, presaging an enduring regional security and humanitarian crisis. Rwanda deployed troops into DRC in 1996 to pursue those who had orchestrated the genocide, and also reportedly targeted civilians on a large scale—its first foray into what would become years of regional and civil warfare in eastern DRC.¹⁵

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

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

¹² See “U.N. Outreach Program on the Rwandan Genocide and the U.N.,” at <http://www.un.org>.

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

¹⁴ See Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide,” *The Atlantic*, September 2001.

¹⁵ See U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), *Report of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003*, August 2010.

¹⁶ One fugitive sought by the ICTR, Félicien Kabuga, was apprehended in France in 2020 and transferred to the custody of the Residual Mechanism for trial. Six others remained at large as of late 2020.

¹⁷ See, e.g., U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Massachusetts, “Rwandan Man Convicted for Immigration Fraud and

Politics

The State Department characterizes Rwanda as “a constitutional republic dominated by a strong presidency.”¹⁸ President Kagame has been in office since 2000 and is widely viewed as the country’s preeminent decision-maker.¹⁹ A former military intelligence chief (in neighboring Uganda), rebel commander, Defense Minister, and Vice President, Kagame first ascended to the presidency via an internal RPF election (during a post-genocide transitional regime), and was reelected with over 90% of the vote in direct elections held in 2003, 2010, and 2017. An RPF-led coalition holds a majority in parliament; nearly all remaining seats are held by parties or independents that refrain from direct criticism of the RPF or Kagame.

President Kagame would have been subject to term limits in 2017, but voters approved a new constitution via referendum in 2015—with 98% reportedly in favor—that exempted the sitting president. Kagame went on to win reelection with 99% of the vote. Under the new constitution, the presidential term is to be shortened to five years after his current seven-year term expires; he could then run for two more consecutive terms, potentially remaining in office until 2034. President Kagame has denied intending to do so, asserting that he is preparing Rwanda for an unspecified future leadership transition.²⁰

The State Department has reported concerns with Rwanda’s elections processes, including apparent procedural irregularities, a lack of transparency in vote tabulation, media restrictions, and legal challenges, threats, and criminal prosecutions targeting opposition candidates and parties.²¹ During a 2017 congressional hearing on Rwanda, a State Department official affirmed that “we are unable to assess [the 2017 presidential] election as free and fair.”²² Several once-prominent opposition parties have been either banned or seemingly coopted by the RPF.²³ Political opponents and journalists have been prosecuted for threatening state security or sowing ethnic “divisionism,” among other charges. Some have disappeared or died under murky circumstances either in Rwanda or abroad.²⁴ Human Rights Watch reported in 2020 that “[s]tate interference and intimidation have forced many civil society actors and journalists to stop working on sensitive political or human rights issues.”²⁵

Government concern about dissent and potential national security threats arising from the diaspora appears to underlie what some observers view as a pattern of violent attacks and surveillance targeting Rwandans outside the country.²⁶ Some exiled opposition figures, including

Perjury in Connection with the 1994 Genocide,” April 5, 2019.

¹⁸ State Department, “Rwanda,” *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, published March 11, 2020.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Associated Press, “25 years after genocide, Rwanda’s Kagame is praised, feared,” April 9, 2019.

²⁰ *Jeune Afrique*, “Kagame: Ce sera sans doute mon dernier mandat,” May 22, 2017.

²¹ See State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for 2003, 2008, 2010, and 2013; and State Department press statement, “Presidential Election in Rwanda,” August 5, 2017.

²² Then Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto, testimony before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, “Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted,” September 27, 2017.

²³ Lars Waldorf, “The Apotheosis of a Warlord: Paul Kagame,” in Anders Themnér (ed.), *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics*, Zed Books/Nordic Africa Institute: 2017.

²⁴ State Department, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, op. cit. See also Michela Wrong, “Rwanda: The Dove’s music united a nation torn by genocide. Why did he die in a cell?” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2021.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Rwanda: Events of 2019,” *World Report 2020*. See also U.N. Human Rights Commission, “Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association at the conclusion of his visit to the Republic of Rwanda,” January 27, 2014.

²⁶ See, e.g., Freedom House, *Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach: The global scale and scope of transnational repression*,

senior defectors from the RPF and state security apparatus, have formed armed groups, notably in neighboring DRC. These include the Rwandan National Congress (RNC), founded by former army chief of staff Kayumba Nyamwasa, and a wider coalition to which the RNC belongs, the “P5.”²⁷ Nyamwasa has been the target of suspected assassination attempts in South Africa; another RNC leader, former top intelligence figure Patrick Karegeya, was killed in 2013 in South Africa, prompting the U.S. State Department to express concern at “what appear to be politically motivated murders of prominent Rwandan exiles.”²⁸ Upon Karegeya’s death, President Kagame stated that “We didn’t do it,” but added, “No one will betray Rwanda and get away with it.”²⁹

In August 2020, Rwandan authorities announced they had arrested Paul Rusesabagina, an exiled critic famous for his role in protecting Tutsis in Kigali during the genocide. Rusesabagina, who has Belgian citizenship and is a U.S. legal permanent resident, received the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2005, and his experience was dramatized in the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda*. He faces trial on terrorism-related and other charges stemming from his leadership of an exiled opposition coalition, the Rwandan Movement for Democratic Change (MRCD, after its French acronym), whose armed wing claimed responsibility for attacks in Rwanda in 2018.³⁰ In pre-trial court hearings, Rusesabagina acknowledged that the MRCD had an armed wing but denied having command of it, saying, “I was in charge of diplomacy.”³¹ In a 2018 video that has circulated online, Rusesabagina called for “any means possible to bring about change in Rwanda as all political means have been tried and failed.”³²

International human rights organizations have raised concerns over the opaque way in which Rusesabagina was apprehended and initially held, and whether he will receive a fair trial.³³ Rwandan officials have suggested that they lured Rusesabagina to Rwanda via a sting operation; Rusesabagina stated from pre-trial detention that he boarded a plane he believed was headed to Burundi.³⁴ Members of Rusesabagina’s family and other supporters assert that he was “kidnapped” by Rwandan agents, and that he has been denied appropriate legal representation and medical care while in Rwandan custody.³⁵

The Democratic Green Party, a relatively independent opposition movement, competed for the first time in legislative elections in 2018, and won two seats.³⁶ The same year, two prominent

February 2021; HRW, “Rwanda: Repression Across Borders,” January 28, 2014.

²⁷ See *Midterm Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, U.N. doc. S/2018/1133, December 18, 2018, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ See HRW, “Rwandans Charged With Murder of Exiled Critic,” September 13, 2019; State Department daily press briefing, January 16, 2014.

²⁹ Reuters, “U.S. rebukes Rwandan leader amid scrutiny over opponent's murder,” January 17, 2014.

³⁰ U.N. and other sources have referred to the MRCD’s armed wing as the National Liberation Front (FLN after its French acronym). See HRW, “Rwanda: Rusesabagina Was Forcibly Disappeared,” September 10, 2020; *Implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region*, U.N. doc. S/2019/783, October 1, 2019; and Reuters, “Rwandan police dismiss claim of rebel incursions on southern border,” July 18, 2018.

³¹ CNN, “Paul Rusesabagina of 'Hotel Rwanda' appears in court again seeking bail after arrest on terrorism charges,” September 26, 2020.

³² HRW, “Rusesabagina Was Forcibly Disappeared.”

³³ See, e.g., HRW, “Rusesabagina Was Forcibly Disappeared.”

³⁴ *New York Times*, “Rwanda Hints It Tricked ‘Hotel Rwanda’ Dissident Into Coming Home,” September 6, 2020, and “How the Hero of ‘Hotel Rwanda’ Fell Into a Vengeful Strongman’s Trap,” September 18, 2020.

³⁵ Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation, “Paul Rusesabagina's Health Declines,” December 28, 2020; Reuters, “‘Hotel Rwanda’ hero says he was kidnapped and blindfolded before arrest,” November 27, 2020.

³⁶ The Green Party was not able to compete in the 2013 legislative elections because it had not yet been granted legal

opposition figures (not affiliated with the Green Party) were released from jail, although these developments did not appear to produce a significant shift in the contours of Rwandan politics. The first, Diane Rwigara, a critic of President Kagame and daughter of a well-known businessman and Tutsi genocide survivor, had been jailed on charges of forgery and inciting insurrection shortly after seeking to run for president in 2017 as an independent candidate. She was acquitted following international advocacy on her behalf, including from some Members of Congress.³⁷ The second was Victoire Ingabire, who had sought to run against Kagame in 2010 and was serving a prison sentence for genocide denial and seeking to form an armed group. She received a conditional presidential pardon.³⁸ So did several other members of Ingabire's FDU-Inkingi party ("United Democratic Forces-Pillar"), which remains illegal.³⁹ Several other FDU-Inkingi supporters remain in prison; others have been killed in disputed circumstances.⁴⁰

Governance and Human Rights

Rwanda exhibits high levels of "government effectiveness" compared to other African and low-income countries, according to the World Bank.⁴¹ The state's ability to ensure public safety, prevent corruption, and provide near-universal basic health services particularly distinguish Rwanda among other countries in the region.⁴² State-led programs to improve agricultural productivity, private sector growth, and gender equality have also received international plaudits and donor support. At the same time, Rwanda scores poorly on indexes of political freedom and civil liberties. Freedom House ranks Rwanda "Not Free," and the World Bank rates the country below average for Africa and low-income countries on "voice and accountability"—an indicator of "perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media."⁴³

The State Department's 2019 (latest) human rights report on Rwanda cited "unlawful or arbitrary killings," "forced disappearances," torture, and "arbitrary detention" by state security forces, along with "political prisoners" and serious constraints on privacy, free expression, freedom of assembly and association, and political participation. The report stated that "the government continued to monitor homes, movements, telephone calls, email, and personal and institutional communications" adding that "informants continued to work within international and local [non-governmental organizations], religious organizations, media, and other social institutions." Notwithstanding official initiatives and advocacy in support of women's rights, the report

authorization. The party's presidential candidate, Frank Habineza, won less than 1% of the vote in the 2017 presidential contest. Its deputy leader was killed in unclear circumstances prior to the 2010 presidential election, soon after the party's founding. See HRW, "Allow Independent Autopsy of Opposition Politician," July 21, 2010.

³⁷ See CNN, "US Congressional Support Builds for Rwandan Opposition Leader," December 4, 2018.

³⁸ Human rights groups raised due process concerns with Ingabire's trial without directly challenging the veracity of the charges. See Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Rwanda: Eight-Year Sentence for Opposition Leader," October 30, 2012.

³⁹ Associated Press, "Rwanda's President to Newly Freed Prisoners: Be Careful," September 20, 2018.

⁴⁰ See, for example, CNN, "Aide to Leading Rwandan Opposition Politician Found Dead," March 11, 2019.

⁴¹ World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/Home/Reports>; latest data as of 2019. The "government effectiveness" indicator reflects "Perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies."

⁴² World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, op. cit.; World Health Organization (WHO) and Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, *Primary Health Care Systems (PRIMASYS): Case study from Rwanda*, 2017; and WHO, "Rwanda: the beacon of Universal Health Coverage in Africa," December 13, 2019.

⁴³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*; World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, op. cit.

indicated that the government “took insufficient action to prevent or prosecute” criminal violence against women and girls, and noted enduring challenges to women’s economic empowerment.⁴⁴

The RPF’s sweeping development initiatives “not only aim to alter Rwanda’s governance and economic structures, they also seek to change social identities, cultural norms and individual behavior.”⁴⁵ For example, in the name of national reconciliation and preventing the return of mass violence, the government has sought to eradicate public discussion or acknowledgment of ethnic identity or differences, including via the criminalization of ethnic “divisionism” and other legal constraints on speech. Researchers have described pervasive state surveillance and involvement in citizens’ daily lives, part of an apparent effort to promote rapid implementation of development initiatives, mobilize support for the RPF, suppress criminal activity, and monitor potential opposition activity, ethnic tensions, and security threats.⁴⁶

Rwandan laws nominally provide for freedom of religion, but also require faith-based organizations to obtain legal status from the government prior to operating. In 2018, the government shuttered thousands of churches and mosques, citing safety violations or other regulatory concerns, and proposed stricter registration requirements for religious groups. One expert asserted that these moves targeted non-denominational places of worship (i.e., not affiliated with Roman Catholicism or established Protestant denominations) because they “are harder to control because they don’t report to a central hierarchy.”⁴⁷ About a quarter of the affected places of worship had reportedly been allowed to reopen as of December 2019.⁴⁸

Regional Security

Rwanda is a top peacekeeping troop contributor in Africa, and U.N. officials and donors value its military professionalism and commitment to civilian protection.⁴⁹ President Kagame has sought to bolster the financial sustainability of African-led stabilization operations, as part of a package of AU institutional reforms he began spearheading in 2016.⁵⁰ Rwanda also has a history of unilateral military intervention in DRC, and reportedly has periodically provided support to rebel groups active in DRC and Burundi. Its motivations may reflect national security concerns (e.g., a desire to counter DRC-based armed groups led by individuals implicated in the 1994 genocide), ethnic solidarity (with the Tutsi minority in Burundi and communities of Rwandan descent in DRC), and/or economic interests (e.g., involvement in resource smuggling in DRC).⁵¹

⁴⁴ For context, see, e.g., Oxford Human Rights Hub, *The Promise and the Reality: Women’s Rights in Rwanda*, Working Paper No. 5, January 2015.

⁴⁵ Waldorf “Apotheosis of a Warlord.”

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Filip Reyntjens, *Political Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, Cambridge University Press: 2015; Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf, eds., *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence*, University of Wisconsin Press: 2011.

⁴⁷ Timothy Longman, interviewed in *World Politics Review*, “Church and Mosque Closures in Rwanda Show the Increasing Power of the State,” April 12, 2018.

⁴⁸ State Department, “Rwanda,” *2019 Report on International Religious Freedom*, June 10, 2020.

⁴⁹ Citing their country’s experience in 1994, Rwandan officials have sought, via commitments known as the “Kigali Principles,” to muster multilateral support for robust implementation of peacekeeper civilian protection mandates.

⁵⁰ See African Union, “Overview of Institutional Reforms,” at <https://au.int/en/aureforms/overview>. A key aspect of this initiative is to increase African countries’ contributions to an AU Peace Fund that would finance 25% of AU stabilization operations, possibly in exchange for UN assessed peacekeeping contributions to fund the remainder.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality*, Zed Books: 2007; Gérard Prunier, *Africa’s World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*, Oxford University Press: 2008; René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, University of Pennsylvania Press: 2009; Jason

In 2012-2013, Rwanda faced international criticism and donor aid cuts—including on the part of the United States and European countries—after U.N. sanctions investigators reported that it was supporting a DRC-based insurgent group known as the M23.⁵² The M23 was the latest in a series of Rwandan-backed rebel groups active in eastern DRC since Rwanda first deployed its military to the area in 1996. In late 2013, the M23 conceded defeat after an apparent decrease in Rwandan assistance.⁵³ In 2015-2016, reports suggested Rwandan recruitment and training of Burundian refugees for a rebellion in Burundi, prompting new criticism.⁵⁴

Rwanda appears to have had less involvement in regional conflicts since that time, and DRC's President Felix Tshisekedi has sought a rapprochement with Rwanda since taking office in 2019. U.N. sanctions investigators reported in late 2020 that Rwandan troops had conducted operations in eastern DRC during the year, including some joint operations with Congolese troops, which Rwanda denied.⁵⁵ The investigators termed these operations a violation of the U.N. sanctions regime for DRC, which prohibits provision of arms or military assistance without prior notification. Relations among Rwanda, DRC, Uganda, and Burundi remain volatile, with militia violence and illicit resource extraction acting as flashpoints.⁵⁶

The Economy and Development

Donor aid, political stability, low corruption, and pro-investor policies fueled high economic growth over the past decade, averaging over 7% annually.⁵⁷ Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita progressively grew during the same period, though at \$823 as of 2020, it remains low by global standards. As of October 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected GDP growth would slow to 2% in 2020 amid the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Most African countries were projected to experience a recession.) Despite remaining one of the world's poorest countries, Rwanda ranks higher than many other Sub-Saharan African countries on the 2020 U.N. Human Development Index (at 160 out of 189 countries assessed). The economy and workforce are overwhelmingly oriented toward agriculture, much of it for subsistence. The country is nonetheless reliant on food imports, in part due to having the highest population density in continental Africa (and thus, limited available land per household).

The government is seeking to transform the economy into one that is services-oriented and middle-income, launching programs to expand internet access, improve education, and increase domestic energy production. Another stated goal is to turn Rwanda into a regional trade, logistics, and conference hub. The government has invested in the construction of new business class hotels and a convention center in Kigali, a planned new airport, and an expansion of the national airline RwandAir—which is pursuing U.S. federal approval for direct flights between Kigali and the

Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, PublicAffairs: 2011.

⁵² Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson before the HFAC Africa subcommittee, hearing on "The Devastating Crisis in Eastern Congo," December 11, 2012; BBC, "UK stops £21m aid payment to Rwanda," November 30, 2012; and *The Guardian*, "EU partially freezes aid to Rwanda," September 27, 2012.

⁵³ Jason Stearns, "As the M23 nears defeat, more questions than answers," *Congo Siasa*, October 30, 2013.

⁵⁴ Refugees International, "Asylum Betrayed: Recruitment of Burundian Refugees in Rwanda," December 14, 2015; *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, May 23, 2016, U.N. doc. S/2016/466.

⁵⁵ *Midterm report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, U.N. doc. S/2020/1283, December 23, 2020. The U.N. sanctions committee for DRC, which represents U.N. Security Council member states, is responsible for making sanctions designations, and operates by consensus.

⁵⁶ See International Crisis Group, "Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes," January 2020.

⁵⁷ IMF World Economic Outlook database, October 2020.

United States. Leading sectors for potential investment include energy, agriculture, trade and hospitality, and financial services.⁵⁸ Much investment has been concentrated in Kigali, which has received international plaudits for its clean and safe streets.⁵⁹

Rwanda ranked 38 out of 190 countries on the World Bank’s 2020 *Doing Business* index, the only low-income country and one of two African countries (the other being Mauritius) in the top 50. Rwanda’s ranking generally reflects its efforts to reduce bureaucratic red-tape, protect property rights, improve access to credit, expand the supply of reliable electricity, and ensure contract enforcement. The State Department reports, however, that “it can be difficult to operate a profitable or sustainable business due to a variety of hurdles and constraints,” including Rwanda’s “landlocked geography and resulting high freight transport costs, a small domestic market, limited access to affordable financing, payment delays with government contracts, and inconsistent enforcement of laws and regulations,” as well as a lack of government consultation with private firms on “the abrupt implementation of government policies and regulations.”⁶⁰

The State Department also reports that “the government, ruling party, and military continue to play a dominant role in Rwanda’s private sector,” a possible reference to the influence of entities such as Crystal Ventures, the RPF’s holding company, and Horizon, controlled by the Ministry of Defense.⁶¹ The State Department’s 2020 investment climate statement noted some investor complaints of “unfair treatment compared to SOEs [state-owned enterprises], ruling party-aligned or politically connected business competitors in securing public incentives and contracts.”

Human development gains since the 1994 genocide have been dramatic. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), compared to 1990, life expectancy has increased from 48 to 68 years; the under-five mortality rate has fallen from 152 to 35 deaths per 1,000 live births; and maternal mortality has decreased from 1,300 to 248 deaths per 100,000 live births.⁶² As of 2015, about 39% of Rwandans reportedly lived below the poverty line, compared to 78% in 1994.⁶³ Through a donor-backed national community-based health insurance system, Rwanda provides near-universal health coverage for basic primary care, with the cost fully or partially subsidized based on income level.⁶⁴ Some researchers have questioned the reliability of Rwanda’s poverty statistics and whether they may be subject to political interference or intimidation among local survey respondents.⁶⁵ The World Bank rejected such criticism in a 2019 publication.⁶⁶

U.S. Relations and Aid

In 1998, President Bill Clinton delivered a speech in Kigali in which he expressed remorse for not having intervened more forcefully to curtail mass killings in 1994, and pledged that the United

⁵⁸ “Rwanda – Market Overview,” at <http://www.export.gov>, July 11, 2019.

⁵⁹ Police reportedly systematically detain and sometimes abuse individuals engaged in begging or informal commerce; see *Mail & Guardian*, “The Kigali Paradox: How did Rwanda’s capital become Africa’s cleanest city?” March 6, 2019.

⁶⁰ State Department, “Rwanda,” *2020 Investment Climate Statements*, September 9, 2020.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; and *The Economist*, “Party of business: The Rwandan Patriotic Front’s business empire,” March 4, 2017.

⁶² WHO, *World Health Statistics 2020*.

⁶³ CIA *World Factbook*; Partners in Health, “Rwanda’s Rebirth: A blueprint for health systems strengthening,” February 2013.

⁶⁴ See University of Rwanda, Management Sciences for Health, and the Rockefeller Foundation, *Technical Brief: The Development of Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda: Experiences and Lessons*, March 2016.

⁶⁵ *Review of African Political Economy blog*, “A Straightforward Case of Fake Statistics,” April 18, 2019.

⁶⁶ World Bank factsheet, “Q&A on Rwanda Poverty Statistics,” April 22, 2019.

States would do better in the future.⁶⁷ Those remarks arguably set the tone for a relationship defined, in part, by a sense of guilt among U.S. policymakers about the genocide, and admiration for the RPF's role in stopping it. U.S. support for Rwanda and President Kagame's leadership has continued across Administrations and partisan lines, anchored by U.S. aid in support of Rwanda's development efforts and peacekeeper deployments (see **Table 1**).

Over the past decade, U.S. officials have nonetheless publicly criticized Rwanda's involvement in regional conflicts and expressed concern with its internal political and human rights conditions. Recently, Paul Rusesabagina's case (see "Politics") has drawn bipartisan congressional scrutiny and calls for his release.⁶⁸ The Biden Administration has "continued to urge the Rwandan Government to provide humane treatment, respect for the rule of law, and to provide a fair and transparent legal process, including access to legal counsel of his choosing for Mr. Rusesabagina," and "to be fully transparent about the circumstances of his arrival in Rwanda."⁶⁹

During the first year of the Trump Administration, then-Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Donald Yamamoto testified to Congress that U.S.-Rwandan relations were "close but complex," praising Rwanda's "remarkable gains" in health and development and its contributions to "regional peace and security," while asserting that "Rwanda's record in the areas of human rights and democracy, while improved in some areas, remains a concern."⁷⁰ He called on the government "to take steps toward a democratic transition of power."⁷¹ During his Senate confirmation hearing, also in 2017, U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda Peter Vrooman identified four top goals: continuing the United States' "development partnership" with Rwanda, promoting U.S. business and economic ties, supporting Rwanda's continued peacekeeping role, and advancing "democratic ideals."⁷² These statements echoed concerns voiced by the Obama Administration.⁷³

Trade issues, including Rwanda's eligibility for trade benefits under AGOA, have also been a recent focus of U.S.-Rwanda relations. Ambassador Yamamoto indicated during his 2017 testimony that U.S. officials had raised human rights concerns with Rwandan counterparts in "the context of AGOA eligibility."⁷⁴ After meeting with President Kagame at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2018, President Trump praised U.S.-Rwanda relations, including bilateral trade, and stated that "the job they've done is absolutely terrific."⁷⁵ President Trump nonetheless subsequently suspended duty-free treatment of Rwandan apparel exports to the United States under AGOA, citing Rwandan protectionism, after initiating an out-of-cycle review

⁶⁷ President William J. Clinton, "Remarks to the People of Rwanda," March 25, 1998. Clinton's remarks presaged various subsequent U.S. policy initiatives to prevent and respond to "mass atrocities" abroad.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., letter from Senators James E. Risch et al. to President Kagame, December 18, 2020.

⁶⁹ State Department press briefing, February 17, 2021.

⁷⁰ Statement before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, hearing, "Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted," September 27, 2017.

⁷¹ Then Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto, testimony before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, "Rwanda: Democracy Thwarted," September 27, 2017.

⁷² Ambassador-designate Peter Vrooman, testimony before SFRC, December 19, 2017.

⁷³ See, e.g., State Department, "Reaction to Rwandan President's Decision To Run for Third Term," January 2, 2016; White House, "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Ned Price on Rwandan Constitutional Referendum," December 19, 2015; White House, "Readout of the President's Call with President Kagame," December 18, 2012; White House, "Statement on the National Elections in Rwanda," August 13, 2010.)

⁷⁴ Pursuant to P.L. 106-200, as amended, AGOA eligibility is contingent on a country having "established" or "making continual progress toward establishing ... the rule of law, political pluralism, and the right to due process," among other criteria. Yamamoto testimony before the HFAC Africa Subcommittee, 2017.

⁷⁵ The White House, "Remarks by President Trump and President Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda After Expanded Bilateral Meeting," January 26, 2018.

of Rwanda's eligibility.⁷⁶ U.S. imports from Rwanda fell from \$68 million in 2018 to \$46 million in 2019, and U.S. exports fell from \$24 million to \$17 million.⁷⁷

U.S. bilateral aid to Rwanda aims to promote health, economic growth, food security, and military professionalism. The State Department has drawn on additional regionally- and centrally-managed funds to support Rwanda's peacekeeping capabilities and military professionalization. Rwanda notably received increased military aid as a focus country of the Obama Administration's Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP, see **Table 1**). U.S. humanitarian assistance also supports aid for Congolese and Burundian refugees living in Rwanda.

Table 1. U.S. Aid to Rwanda

\$ millions, allocations by year of appropriation

	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020 (est.)	FY2021 (req.)
DA	65.0	54.7	49.8	46.0	46.0	46.0	40.0	12.2 (ESDF)
GHP-State	79.0	69.8	64.4	53.0	74.4	61.9	77.7	65.0
GHP-USAID	43.5	44.0	44.0	43.2	40.2	40.5	41.5	28.0
IMET	-	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.6
Subtotal, Bilateral Aid	187.5	169.2	158.7	142.8	161.3	148.9	159.7	105.8
Selected additional peacekeeping aid ^a	1.4 GPOI	2.8 GPOI	2.3 GPOI	1.2 GPOI	2.6 GPOI	1.6 GPOI	TBD	N/A
	-	27.4 APRRP	30.0 APRRP	6.7 APRRP	-	-	-	-

Source: State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, FY2016-FY2021; State Department 653(a) estimated allocations (FY2020); State Department congressional notifications and responses to CRS queries.

Notes: Does not include emergency humanitarian assistance or other regionally- and centrally-managed funds. Country-level aid allocations for FY2021 are not yet available. Totals may not sum due to rounding. APRRP=Africa Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership; DA=Development Assistance; GHP=Global Health Programs; GPOI=Global Peace Operations Initiative; IMET=International Military Education and Training; TBD=to be determined; N/A=not applicable. ESDF refers to a proposed new Economic Support and Development Fund account, which Congress did not establish.

- a. Funds have been drawn from the State Department-administered Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) account and the joint State- and Defense Department-administered Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF). Country-specific GPOI allocations are not specified in annual State Department budget requests or foreign aid appropriations measures.

Legislative Restrictions on Security Assistance

Congress has restricted certain types of U.S. military aid to Rwanda if it is found to be supporting rebel movements in neighboring countries, via provisions in annual foreign aid appropriations measures. Citing such provisions, as well as the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457), the Obama Administration at times suspended Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET) for Rwanda, citing Rwandan support for rebels in DRC, and later Burundi, as detailed below (see text box). Military

⁷⁶ Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "President Donald J. Trump Upholds AGOA Trade Preference Eligibility Criteria with Rwanda," July 30, 2018.

⁷⁷ U.S. International Trade Commission data, consulted February 2021.

aid in support of Rwanda’s peacekeeping capabilities was exempted from such restrictions via a combination of legislative provisions (e.g., §1208(f) of P.L. 113-4, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which exempts peacekeeping aid from child soldiers-related restrictions) and executive branch waivers.

Legislative Restrictions on Military Aid to Rwanda Since the M23 Crisis

FY2012-FY2013: The Obama Administration invoked the FY2012 appropriations act (P.L. 112-74, §7043(a) of Division I), and subsequent continuing resolutions, to suspend FMF for Rwanda, citing its support for the M23 rebellion in DRC. The provision stated that FMF could be made available for Rwanda or Uganda “unless” the Secretary of State had “credible information” that either government was supporting armed groups in DRC. The Administration had earlier proposed \$200,000 in bilateral FMF for Rwanda for each of these years.

FY2014: The Obama Administration continued to withhold FMF, consistent with the FY2014 appropriations act, which restricted such funds unless Rwanda was “taking steps to cease” support to certain armed groups in DRC (P.L. 113-76, §7042(l) of Division K). The Administration also designated Rwanda under CSPA, due to the M23’s reported use of child soldiers, and applied resulting prohibitions on other types of military aid, including IMET.

FY2015: The FY2015 appropriations act prohibited FMF for Rwanda unless the Secretary of State certified to Congress that the government was “implementing a policy to cease” support to armed groups in DRC (P.L. 113-235, §7042(l) of Division J). The Obama Administration did request or report providing FMF for Rwanda. The State Department again designated Rwanda under CSPA, but President Obama waived the aid prohibitions under the act, citing the end of the M23 insurgency—thus allowing IMET, for example, to resume.⁷⁸

FY2016: The State Department did not designate Rwanda under CSPA, and the appropriations act (P.L. 114-113) did not restrict security assistance for Rwanda. The Obama Administration did not request or report providing FMF funds for Rwanda. IMET programming continued.

FY2017: The Obama Administration designated Rwanda under CSPA in connection with its reported support for Burundian rebel groups’ recruitment of child soldiers. President Obama waived CSPA restrictions on IMET and several other types of security aid, however, and did not request or report providing FMF funding for Rwanda.⁷⁹ The relevant appropriations act restricted certain IMET programming for any country in Africa’s Great Lakes region unless the Secretary of State certified that it was “not facilitating or otherwise participating in destabilizing activities in a neighboring country” (P.L. 115-31, §7042(a) of Division J).

FY2018-FY2021 to date: Appropriations measures have continued to restrict certain IMET programming for any country in Africa’s Great Lakes region until the Secretary of State determines and reports that it is “not facilitating or otherwise participating in destabilizing activities in a neighboring country, including aiding and abetting armed groups” (most recently, P.L. 116-260, §7042(a) of Division K). Rwanda has not been re-designated under CSPA. The Trump Administration did not request or report providing any FMF funds for Rwanda.

Issues for Congress and Outlook

Congress has shaped U.S. policy and assistance to Rwanda through its authorization and appropriation of U.S. assistance, oversight activities, and Member engagement. The application of legislative restrictions on U.S. security assistance in the mid-2010s—along with other donor criticism and aid suspensions—appeared to contribute to a decrease in Rwandan support for the M23 in DRC and may conceivably have dissuaded Rwanda from intervening more heavily in Burundi. Members may examine these events as they consider future executive branch budget requests and/or legislative proposals regarding U.S. aid to Rwanda. With regard to Rwanda’s internal conditions, questions remain around how the United States can best support the country’s continued stability and growth, including whether and to what extent aid can or should be conditioned on respect for political pluralism or individual liberties.

⁷⁸ Presidential Determination with Respect to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, September 30, 2014.

⁷⁹ Presidential Determination with Respect to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008, September 28, 2016.

Author Information

Alexis Arieff
Specialist in African Affairs

Disclaimer

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