



## Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies

Researcher: Skyler Wilkey  
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### Rwanda 1994

#### Executive Summary

The Rwandan Genocide was one of the most horrific atrocities in modern history. The conflict was primarily between the two main ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi. These two ethnic groups have had a tumultuous history, the modern chapter of which was opened by the colonization of Rwanda by Belgium after World War I.<sup>1</sup> The Belgians elevated the Tutsis as collaborators in colonial rule by making them higher-ranking members of society than the Hutus via identity cards and quality of life improvements. In 1962, with the independence of Rwanda from Belgium, the Hutus rose to power and began making Tutsis the scapegoats in every societal conflict that followed.<sup>2</sup> Facing government oppression, many of the Tutsis fled north into Uganda. Here, Rwandan Tutsis founded the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) led by Paul Kagame. The RPF invaded northern Rwanda in 1990 and quickly took control of the northern region. Years of fighting led to the start of negotiations between the RPF and the government, leading to the Arusha Accords. Tense negotiations on power sharing and military control ensued, but a peace agreement was reached in 1993.<sup>3</sup> However, conflict between civilians and Hutu extremists continued. Hutus trained and armed smaller militias, spread anti-Tutsi propaganda, and made lists of Tutsi and moderate Hutu leaders to assassinate.<sup>4</sup> On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying the Hutu president was downed, triggering the start of the genocide. The Hutu-dominated government authorized militia groups to start attacking Tutsis and moderate Hutus in large numbers. The (Tutsi) RPF tried to get the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda to launch a joint operation to stop the killings, but this was refused. This led to the RPF launching their own attacks against the government.<sup>5</sup> The fighting and the genocide lasted for three months when, on July 18, 1994, the government fled to Zaire and the RPF claimed victory in Kigali.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that 800,000 people were killed during the genocide.<sup>7</sup>

#### Assessing the Five Factors

##### 1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

**Yes.** At the time of the conflict, 85 percent of the country identified as Hutu, the ruling ethnic group; 14 percent identified as Tutsi; and 1 percent identified as Twa.<sup>8</sup> Most of the population spoke Kinyarwanda as their main language, and there were no strong religious factions dividing the country.<sup>9</sup> Despite the stark ethnic divide, the country met the Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) research study definition of a nation.

##### 2. Was the government perceived as legitimate by 85 percent of the population?

**Yes.** But barely so. The ethnic majority Hutus (85 percent) were in power and heavily influenced by an elite group of extremist Hutus with ties to the president. They were able to oppress poorer Hutus to legitimize power further. Spreading anti-Tutsi propaganda in 1993 also helped them legitimize their government.<sup>10</sup>

**3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85 percent of the country's overall population?**

**No.** The speed with which the RPF was able to overthrow the government and the fact that they had already taken control of the northern part of the country when the genocide started meant that a lot of citizens were not protected from the violence. Additionally, the government exposed many of its own citizens to the conflict by making them victims of the genocide or allowing them to participate in the conduct of the genocide.<sup>11</sup>

**4. Did the rebel movement have persistent access to external sanctuary in a neighboring country to a militarily significant degree?**

**Yes.** The RPF was funded and trained by the Ugandan government in Uganda before it invaded northern Rwanda. They continued to do so throughout the conflict and the subsequent genocide.<sup>12</sup> The United States increased its military aid to Uganda during this time to support the RPF indirectly as well.<sup>13</sup>

**5. Was there a government army or armed constabulary force in existence at the start of the conflict?**

**Yes.** The Rwandan Armed Forces were the primary force that fought against the RPF. They would force Hutus to kill their Tutsi neighbors or offer incentives, such as food, money, or land, in exchange for their participation.<sup>14</sup> They also trained several militia groups to commit acts of violence on dissident citizens.<sup>15</sup> The most prominent of these militias was the Interahamwe, which committed acts of violence during the first part of the conflict after their founding in 1992 and was the primary perpetrator in the genocide.<sup>16</sup>

<b>RWANDA 1994</b>	
<b>NATIONAL IDENTITY</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>POPULATION SECURITY</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>EXTERNAL SANCTUARY</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>EXISTING SECURITY FORCES</b>	<b>YES</b>

## Outcome

Government loss. The RPF was able to take the capital city, Kigali, by July 18, 1994. Originally, a government with both Hutu and Tutsi officials was installed, but that quickly collapsed, and the minority Tutsi government came to power. RPF leader Paul Kagame became the president and is still the president of Rwanda. About two million Hutus fled Rwanda after the genocide, including most of the perpetrators. This has led to border conflicts with Hutus in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as with a smaller Tutsi militia group in the Congo who will not lay down their arms.<sup>17</sup> In November 1994, the United Nations started the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, where victims were able to testify about their experiences and perpetrators were sought and prosecuted until 2014.<sup>18</sup> Based on the lack of population security and the existence of external sanctuary, the Five Factor model would have predicted the government's defeat.

## Endnotes

1. The territory was formerly a part of German East Africa, ceded to Belgium by the terms of the Versailles Treaty.
2. “Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened,” *BBC News* (website), May 17, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13431486>.
3. Emily Willard, ed., *Rwanda: The Failure of the Arusha Peace Accords*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 469, May 21, 2014, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB469/>.
4. “Divided by Ethnicity,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (website), September 2021, [www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/rwanda/case-study/background/divided-by-ethnicity](http://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/rwanda/case-study/background/divided-by-ethnicity).
5. Rina M. Alluri, “A History of Conflict: The Rwandan Civil War and Genocide,” *The Role of Tourism in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Rwanda* (Bern: Swisspeace, December 2009), 13–15, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11112.8>.
6. “Rwanda,” *BBC News*.
7. Nita Bhalla, “Factbox: Rwanda Remembers the 800,000 Killed on 25th Anniversary of Genocide,” Reuters (website), April 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-rwanda-genocide-anniversary-factbox-idUSKCN1RIOFV>.
8. “Divided by Ethnicity.”
9. “Rwanda,” in *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: continuously updated), accessed November 6, 2023, last updated November 14, 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/>.
10. Helen C. Epstein, “America’s Secret Role in the Rwandan Genocide,” *Guardian* (website), September 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/sep/12/americas-secret-role-in-the-rwandan-genocide>.
11. “Rwanda,” *BBC News*.
12. “Rwanda,” *BBC News*.
13. Epstein, “America’s Secret Role.”
14. “Rwanda,” *BBC News*.
15. Alluri, “History of Conflict.”
16. Resource Information Center, “Rwanda: Information on the Role of the Interhamwe [Also Interahamwe] Militia and the Use of Roadblocks during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide,” United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Refworld (website), August 14, 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3decf4b24.html>.
17. “Rwanda,” *BBC News*.
18. “ICTR Milestones: United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda,” United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (website), accessed April 4, 2023, <https://unictr.irmct.org/en/ict-r-milestones>.



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