



Rwanda — Va-PoReg Country Report

Kailitz, Steffen, et al., 2026: Varieties of Political Regimes (Va-PoReg). Country Report Rwanda, Dresden: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/JYEL7U>

[Also known as Ruanda]

07/01/1890 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany]: On this date, Rwanda became a part of German East Africa and specifically part of the military district of Tanganyika-Kivu on 07/01/1890. From 1899 to 1907 Rwanda was part of the military district of Ruanda-Urundi. During this time LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Rwanda.

05/01/1916 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Belgium, Electoral Democracy]: Belgian forces invaded Rwanda and Burundi during World War I. The Belgian occupation had a lasting effect in Rwanda. The territory captured was administered by a Belgian military occupation authority („Belgian Occupied East African Territories“).¹ The most lasting effect was how the colonial authorities racialized the differences between Hutu, Twa and Tutsi. This had a profound effect on Rwanda as it would be a constant source of internal conflict and violence. The Belgian occupation force expanded labor conscription; 20,000 men were drafted and act as porters for the Mahenge offensive, and of these only one-third returned home, most of them were Hutu.² The people categorized as Tutsi were then favored for the most prestigious work and with a greater amount of power and decision making through the aristocracy and the King.³ For 1916-1921, V-Dem’s JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. LIED lists elections as absent during this period. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem’s PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent.

07/20/1922 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Belgium, Electoral Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Belgium, Electoral Democracy as International Mandate]: The League of Nations officially awarded Ruanda-Urundi to Belgium as a B-Class Mandate on 07/20/1922.⁴ As a mandate, it was subject to international oversight through the League’s Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) in Geneva, Switzerland.⁵ Administratively, the mandate was divided into two parts, Ruanda and Urundi, each under the nominal leadership of a tribal chief. On 12/13/1946, the newly formed United Nations voted to end the mandate over Ruanda-Urundi and replace it with the new status of „Trust Territory“. To provide oversight, the PMC was superseded by the United Nations Trusteeship Council. The transition was accompanied by a promise that the Belgians would prepare the territory for independence.⁶ Rwanda became UN trust territory (Ruanda-Urundi). Rwanda constituted the northern half of the Belgian mandate of Ruanda-Urundi after World War I and of the Belgian administered trust territory of the same name after World War II. The Decree of 07/14/1952 by the Belgian authorities introduced an element of democracy to the Rwandan political system, implementing a complex electoral system for parliament. In 1954, an election was held. Between 1946 and 1959 Rwanda is according to our classification a borderline case between a direct and an indirect rule colony. As the 1954 elections did, however, not grant universal suffrage, but only to sub-chiefs and chiefs of local councils⁷, we continue to classify this case as a direct rule colony. According to LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections as well as universal suffrage were absent for the whole period. Resistance to the Tutsi monarchy by the more numerous Hutus intensified in the 1950s and culminated in November 1959 in a bloody

revolt that overthrew the monarchy and led to the emigration of thousands of Tutsis (Lansford 2021: 1392).⁸ The following months were marked by violence and the death of many Tutsis. The Tutsi king fled the country in 1960.⁹ Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as absent. For 1922-1959, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. In 1960, V-Dem's JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. Following a violent uprising on 10/18/1960 Rwanda gained some autonomy and Belgium saw itself forced to organize elections in 1960, under the leadership of Grégoire Kayibanda, the Party of the Movement for Hutu Emancipation (Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation du Peuple Hutu) also known as Parmehutu emerged as the spearhead of the revolution. Communal elections were held in 1960, resulting in a massive transfer of power to Hutu elements at the local level through an overwhelming victory of the Party of the Movement for Hutu Emancipation (Lansford 2021: 1392). The monarchy was not officially abolished until a constitutional referendum in 1961 (Limpitlaw 2016). However, since the monarch fled the country Rwanda was de facto already a republic in this period. Since the Hutu party was only elected for at the local level its government on the national level is considered as a non-electoral regime.

01/28/1961 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Belgium, Liberal Democracy]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: From this date, onward, after the Gitarama meeting, Rwanda proclaimed itself an independent republic and was governed by a provisional republican government. Dominique Mbonyumutwa served as provisional President, and Grégoire Kayibanda, leader of Parmehutu, became Prime Minister and the dominant political actor. This Parmehutu-led provisional government exercised national executive authority until the legislative elections of 09/25/1961. According to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. In 1960, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. Universal suffrage was introduced in 1961 prior to the election.¹⁰

09/25/1961 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, the countries' first multiparty parliamentary elections were held under UN auspices, with Parmehutu gaining a victory on the national level.¹¹ Kayibanda assumed the presidency on 10/26/1961, marking the formal end of trusteeship on 07/01/1962. His rule was marked by increasing power centralization and the attempt to build a court that was more akin to a presidential monarchy (Reyntjens 2018). Subsequently, Tutsi émigrés sought to reinstate the monarchy, leading to their defeat in December 1963. This defeat sparked widespread reprisals against the remaining Tutsis, resulting in 10.000 to 15.000 fatalities and the displacement of 150.000 to 200.000 Tutsis to neighboring countries (Lansford 2021: 1392). Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The election was not competitive according to LIED. V-Dem's CEI scores no cleanliness. However, V-Dem's EF&FI classifies the election as somewhat free and fair. According to LIED no political liberties were present. V-Dem's PCLI categorizes them as not really present. In 1962, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations. For 1961, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

07/01/1962 End Electoral Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: Rwanda attained independence under the governance of Parmehutu, a single-party system established to advance the interests of the predominant Hutu ethnic group. Prior to independence, a popular uprising led by Hutus resulted in armed ethnic conflict, leading to the loss of tens of thousands of lives and the exile of over 100.000 Tutsis. Tutsis were excluded from representation in the government elected in September 1961, which promoted Hutu dominance and pursued a policy of violent repression against Tutsis (Weinstein 1977: 55-64, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 90-91).¹² In accordance with LIED, multiparty executive and legislative elections were conducted until 1964. From 1965 onward, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. For

that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For 1962, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. From 1963 to 1969, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1970-1972, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Per FH, in 1972, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free.

07/05/1973 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military (Personalist) Autocracy: General Juvénal Habyarimana overthrew Tutsi President Kayibanda and at first attempted to equalize the two ethnic groups. Later, his policy reflected extreme favoritism to his Hutu ethnic group (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 90-91).¹³ Habyarimana's regime was also corrupt. He and his associates enriched themselves through embezzlement and other forms of theft. The regime's corruption had a devastating impact on the Rwandan economy and led to widespread poverty and inequality. There were no elections during Habyarimana's rule. Habyarimana established a one-party state in which he was the only candidate for president. In 1975 he founded the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement, MRND). It was the only legal political party in Rwanda during his rule. All other political parties like the Parmehutu party, which had been dominated by Hutus from southern Rwanda, were banned.¹⁴ However, the MRND served more or less as a mere vehicle for Habyarimana to consolidate his power and to control the political regime.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the government remained almost entirely in military hands until 1978.¹⁶ A new constitution promulgated in December 1978 provided for a return to civilian rule. The new constitution created a presidential republic with no term limits for the President and made the National Revolutionary Movement for Development the sole legal party.¹⁷ In accordance with LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during the specified period. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. In this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For 1973, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. From 1974 to 1978, V-Dem's JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For Rwanda V-Dem's JCE and LCE were not in line with our observations on judicial and legislative constraints on the executive in this this period.

12/24/1978 End Military (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Personalist Autocracy: On this date, a constitutional referendum and presidential elections with Habyarimana as the sole candidate took place. Parliamentary elections followed in 1981, with two MRND candidates contesting each of the 64 seats. Habyarimana was re-elected again in 1983 and 1988, whilst parliamentary elections were held under the same system in 1983 and 1988.¹⁸ From this point on it seems extremely hard to classify the regime as a military autocracy. However, GWF, HTW, MCM, REIGN and BR all classify this regime still after this point as a military autocracy/regime. We would emphasize here that it is a borderline case between a personalist and a military autocracy in the phase until 1978, afterwards it is a borderline case between a personalist and a one-party autocracy. We classify the regime as a personalist autocracy because, firstly, the military no longer exercised control over Habyarimana. Secondly, the MRND was only founded by Habyarimana in 1975, thus at a time when he was already in power. This is a case of a regime party that was founded for the sole purpose of allowing the ruler to remain in power. Therefore, it could not exercise independent control or elect its leader.

Another point in favor of this view is that the MRND was banned after Habyarimana's death in 1994 and there was no legal successor to the party.¹⁹ Therefore, both the parliamentary and presidential elections served only to confirm the candidates. Following Habyarimana's demise in a plane crash, ethnic extremists instigated the Rwandan genocide on 04/06/1994.²⁰ Habyarimana was succeeded as president by Théodore Sindikubwabo. As the genocide began, Major General Paul Kagame of the Rebel forces of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), made up mostly of exiled Tutsi Rwandans who had served in Museveni's insurgent force or the Ugandan army, warned of resuming the civil war if killings persisted. The next day, the RPF repelled a government attack on the national parliament, launching their own offensive from the north to connect with isolated troops in Kigali. Kagame refused dialogue with the interim government, doubting its commitment to stopping the genocide.²¹ In accordance with LIED, only executive elections were held until 1980, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No legislative elections were present. From 1981 onward, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1979 to 1981, V-Dem's JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. From 1982 to 1989, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. From 1990 to 1992, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For 1993, V-Dem's JCE is classified as robust, indicating strong and regular judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. For the given period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI likewise indicates that political liberties were absent until 1990 and not really present from 1991 onwards.

07/04/1994 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date the Tutsi RPF led by Major General Kagame took Kigali. On 07/19/1994 President Theodore Sindikubwabo fled the country when the invading Rwandese Patriotic Front rebels defeated the security forces and ended the genocide. Augustin Bizimungu was installed as president. Yet, Paul Kagame was regarded as Rwanda's de facto leader during his tenure as Vice President and Minister of Defense under Bizimungu from 1994 to 2000.²² A Tutsi-led ruling group was established, which became more inclusive over time (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 91).²³ In accordance with LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held until 2000. Thereafter, only legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. No executive elections were present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 1, between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For 1994, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. From 1995 to 1999, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 2000 to 2002, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. In this timeframe, LIED still identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as pointing out that political liberties are absent until 1999 and are not really present afterwards.

08/25/2003 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Autocracy: Rwanda held its first direct presidential elections on 08/25/2003, following the Rwandan Civil War and marking the first multi-party presidential elections in the country's history. Paul Kagame, representing the RPF, won the election with 95% of the vote

and was elected for a seven-year term. However, outside observers widely criticized the elections as fraudulent. According to scholar Timothy Longman, the elections did not serve as a transition to democracy but rather as a means for the RPF to consolidate their rule through forced mobilizations, which left the Rwandan population disillusioned.²⁴ Prior to the presidential elections, the constitutional court ruled that the MDR and the PDC were illegal parties because of their role in the events of 1994 (Lansford 2021: 1394). Parliamentary elections were held between 09/29/2003 and 10/02/2003. They were the first parliamentary elections since 1988 and the second multi-party national elections in the country's history. They were held following the approval of a new constitution in a referendum in August 2003.²⁵ During the 2008 legislative elections, the FPR once more established an electoral coalition, which secured 42 seats in the direct elections. Additionally, the Social Democratic Party obtained seven seats, and the Liberal Party secured four. Despite the boycott by the primary opposition groups, international observers deemed the elections to be free and fair (Lansford 2021: 1394). In the 2017 presidential election, Kagame secured a significant victory, obtaining 98.8 percent of the vote according to official records. Frank Habineza of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR) and independent candidate Philippe Mpayimana shared the remaining percentage. However, the electoral process faced several challenges, including political intimidation, unfair registration procedures, and accusations of fraud during the voting process itself.²⁶ Kagame was re-elected on 07/15/2024 to a fourth term.²⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED affirms that no competitive elections were held since 2003. From 2003 to 2007 no clean elections were stated. Since 2008 V-Dem's CEI scores not real cleanliness. Moreover, V-Dem's EF&FI indicates that elections were not really free and fair until 2007. Between 2007 and 2012 the overall conditions can be classified per EF&FI as ambiguous. Since 2013, not really free and fair elections are indicated. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score of 11 or 12 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. In addition to that, political liberties are absent for the entire time (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI classifies them as constantly not really present. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 2003 to 2016 and in 2020, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. For 2017-2019 and from 2021 onward, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

Electoral Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Eriksen 2005, Stolz 1999)

Notes

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruanda-Urundi>

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruanda-Urundi>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwanda>

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mandate-League-of-Nations>

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruanda-Urundi>

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruanda-Urundi>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954_Rwandan_parliamentary_election

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Rwanda

⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Rwanda-genocide-of-1994#ref1111304>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1961_Rwandan_parliamentary_election

¹² <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2861.html>

- ¹³ <http://tinyurl.com/3upnvxt>; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2861.html>
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Revolutionary_Movement_for_Development
- ¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Revolutionary-Movement-for-Development>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juv%C3%A9nal_Habyarimana
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1978_Rwandan_constitutional_referendum
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Revolutionary_Movement_for_Development
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Revolutionary_Movement_for_Development
- ²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pasteur_Bizimungu; https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Rwanda_2015?lang=en
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_genocide
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Kagame
- ²³ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2861.html>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13431486>
- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Rwandan_presidential_election
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2003_Rwandan_parliamentary_election
- ²⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2021>
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Rwandan_general_election

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