



Rwanda



Background Rwanda -- a small and centralized country dominated by rugged hills and fertile volcanic soil -- has exerted disproportionate influence over the African Great Lakes region for centuries. A Rwandan kingdom increasingly dominated the region from the mid-18th century onward, with the Tutsi monarchs gradually extending the power of the royal court into peripheral areas and expanding their borders through military conquest. While the current ethnic labels Hutu and Tutsi predate colonial rule, their flexibility and importance have varied significantly over time and often manifested more as a hierarchical class distinction than an ethnic or cultural distinction. The majority Hutu and minority Tutsi have long shared a common language and culture, and intermarriage was frequent.

The Rwandan royal court centered on the Tutsi king (mwami), who relied on an extensive network of political, cultural, and economic relationships. Social categories became more rigid during the reign of RWABUGIRI (1860-1895), who focused on aggressive expansion and solidifying Rwanda's bureaucratic structures. German colonial conquest began in the late 1890s, but the territory was ceded to Belgian forces in 1916 during World War I. Both European nations quickly realized the benefits of ruling through the already centralized Rwandan Tutsi kingdom. Colonial rule reinforced existing trends toward autocratic and exclusionary rule, leading to the elimination of traditional positions of authority for Hutus. Belgian administrators significantly increased requirements for communal labor and instituted harsh taxes, which fed the population's frustration. Changing political attitudes in Belgium contributed to colonial and Catholic officials shifting their support from Tutsi to Hutu leaders in the years leading up to independence.

Simmering resentment of minority rule exploded in 1959, three years before independence from Belgium, when Hutus overthrew the Tutsi king. Thousands of Tutsis were killed over the next several years, and some 150,000 were driven into exile in neighboring countries. Army Chief of Staff Juvenal HABYARIMANA seized power in a coup in 1973 and ruled Rwanda as a single-party state for two decades. HABYARIMANA increasingly discriminated against Tutsis, and extremist Hutu factions gained prominence after multiple parties were introduced in the early 1990s. The children of Tutsi exiles later formed a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and began a civil war in 1990. The civil war exacerbated ethnic tensions and culminated in the shooting down of HABYARIMANA's private jet in 1994. The event sparked a state-orchestrated genocide in which Rwandans killed more than 800,000 of their fellow citizens, including approximately three-quarters of the Tutsi population. The genocide ended later the same year when the predominantly Tutsi RPF, operating out of Uganda and northern Rwanda, defeated the national army and Hutu militias and established an RPF-led government of national unity. Rwanda held its first local elections in 1999 and its first post-genocide presidential and legislative elections in 2003, formalizing President Paul KAGAME's de facto role as head of government. KAGAME was formally elected in 2010, and again in 2017 after changing the constitution to allow him to run for a third term.

Capital	name: Kigali
Government type	presidential republic
Area	total : 26,338 sq km land: 24,668 sq km water: 1,670 sq km
Climate	temperate; two rainy seasons (February to April, November to January); mild in mountains with frost and snow possible
Natural resources	gold, cassiterite (tin ore), wolframite (tungsten ore), methane, hydropower, arable land
Population	total: 13,623,302 (2024 est.)
Population growth rate	1.62% (2024 est.)
Ethnic groups	Hutu, Tutsi, Twa
Religions	Christian 95.9% (Protestant 57.7% [includes Adventist 12.6%], Roman Catholic 38.2%), Muslim 2.1%, other 1% (includes traditional, Jehovah's Witness), none 1.1% (2019-20 est.)
Languages	Kinyarwanda (official, universal Bantu vernacular) 93.2%, French (official) <0.1%, English (official) <0.1%, Swahili/Kiswahili (official, used in commercial centers) <0.1%, more than one language, other 6.3%, unspecified 0.3% (2002 est.)
Executive branch	chief of state: President Paul KAGAME (since 22 April 2000) head of government: Prime Minister Justin NSENGIYUMVA (since 23 July 2025)
Legislative branch	legislature name: Parlement (Parliament)
Diplomatic representation in the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Mathilde MUKANTABANA (since 18 July 2013)
Diplomatic representation from the US	chief of mission: Ambassador Eric KNEEDLER (since 3 October 2023)
Economic overview	fast-growing Sub-Saharan economy; major public investments; trade and tourism hit hard by COVID-19; increasing poverty after 2 decades of declines; Ugandan competition for regional influence; major coffee exporter; contested GDP figures
Real GDP (purchasing power parity)	\$46.543 billion (2024 est.) \$42.743 billion (2023 est.) \$39.485 billion (2022 est.)
Real GDP per capita	\$3,300 (2024 est.) \$3,100 (2023 est.) \$2,900 (2022 est.)

Exports	\$3.509 billion (2023 est.) \$2.993 billion (2022 est.) \$2.11 billion (2021 est.)
Exports - partners	UAE 66%, China 10%, USA 3%, Kenya 3%, Thailand 2% (2023)
Exports - commodities	gold, rare earth ores, coffee, tea, tin ores (2023)
Imports	\$5.783 billion (2023 est.) \$4.978 billion (2022 est.) \$3.856 billion (2021 est.)
Imports - partners	China 19%, Kenya 14%, Uganda 13%, Tanzania 9%, UAE 7% (2023)
Imports - commodities	broadcasting equipment, fish, corn, packaged medicine, plastic products (2023)

Population Pyramid

