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Post-Conflict Democratization: Rwanda's Illiberal Democracy

Submitted by: Alexander Berberich

Introduction

Rwanda, despite successful post-conflict economic growth, is an illiberal shell of a democracy as a result of unsuccessful post-conflict democratization and liberalization. The 2003 constitution calls for the “eradication of ethnic, regional and other divisions and promotion of national unity.”^{vii} Peaceful elections have been held, but they merely provide the illusion of democracy. Any significant political threat to the regime is labeled a “divisionist” and legally barred from competition with Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front, or RPF. The post-conflict path taken in Rwanda has resulted in the country’s slide towards authoritarianism. While some analysts argue that limitations on civil liberties, controlled political participation, and a closely monitored press are necessary in post-conflict environments to ensure stability in a post-conflict state, by maintaining Rwanda as an exclusionary pseudodemocracy, the Rwandan elite are running a serious risk of inviting further acute violence in the future.

The 1994 Genocide and the associated collapse of the social order in Rwanda left a major impact on the state and its people. However, just as before the Genocide, the international aid community is currently praising Rwanda as a rare Central African success. All the numbers look good. Before taking into account the current global financial crisis, the Rwandan GDP was expected to grow

some 5.5% in 2009, the 18th fastest in the world.^{viii} Aid money is flowing smoothly into Rwanda, NGOs in part contributing to the continuation of authoritarianism while working in a difficult political environment. Between 2005 and 2006, overseas developmental assistance (ODA) averaged “just over 14 percent of GDP,” while FDI accounted for .23% and average savings accounted for -1.4% of GDP.^{ix} A great deal of caution is necessary for the international donor community to avoid supporting and prolonging authoritarian rule. The international donor community must begin to make concrete demands of the Rwandan government to truly liberalize its political sphere, in the interest of continuing stability.

Rwanda offers a unique opportunity to apply post-conflict development theories. Fifteen years after genocide, the guilty and the innocent must continue to exist side-by-side in the same country and neighborhoods. Economically, it has rebounded fairly successfully. Politically, however, Rwanda is a far cry from a free, liberal democracy. A question that post-conflict specialists often face today is whether to focus on democracy in the form of elections, or on peace and stability. If liberalization takes a back seat to stability, how long can a ruling party continue to maintain a closed system before outsiders become radicalized, once again putting stability at risk? Is there a proper “sequence” for the building of a liberal democracy? Is there a trade-off

between democracy and stability? The case study of Rwanda involves the recovery from violence that reached an abhorrent extreme, and thus serves as a highly complex and very interesting test environment for the application of these current post-conflict theories and offers some answers for the questions they raise. This will also generate policy recommendations for the international community, NGOs, and policymakers in Kigali.

Post-Conflict Democratization and the Democratic Peace

From the mid-1990s onward, elections were viewed as a major step towards success by policy-makers in post-conflict environments. For practical and logistical reasons, elections gave the statebuilding process a point where success could be claimed and the exit strategy could be pursued. In academia, this belief was not as widely accepted, but did gain a following. Elections became a major benchmark and indicator of the relative success of a given statebuilding mission. The acceptance of elections as a key part of post-conflict reconstruction was in part a result of the welcome adoption of Democratic Peace Theory by former U.S. President Bill Clinton.^x

Democratic Peace Theory holds that developed, liberal, or “consolidated” democracies do not engage one another in violent conflict. Applied to post-conflict development, this theory implied that if democracy and elections were made a priority objective, international peace would logically follow. Policymakers largely subscribed to this belief during the planning and carrying out of statebuilding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.^{xi}

This focus on elections delivering peace vis-à-vis the democratic peace was misplaced. While it may be true that consolidated

democracies do not fight one another, the process of democratization is a rough and complex period, in which the risk of violence, both external and internal, actually increases significantly. Mansfield and Snyder noted that states going from full transition from complete authoritarianism to extensive mass democracy are “twice as likely to fight wars in the decade after democratization.”^{xii} Subsequent work by Paul Collier delivers empirical evidence affirming the connection between democratization and internal conflict. According to Collier, “democracy, at least in the form it has usually taken to date in the societies of the bottom billion, does not seem to enhance the prospects of internal peace. On the contrary, it seems to increase proneness to political violence.”^{xiii}

A substantial argument emerged in the 1990s that elections do not imply liberal democracy, and to believe otherwise is dangerous. As Fareed Zakaria wrote, “While it is easy to impose elections on a country, it is more difficult to push constitutional liberalism on a society. The process of genuine liberalization and democratization is gradual and long-term, in which an election is only one step.”^{xiv} Lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, both places where elections and violence exist side-by-side, lend credence to this viewpoint. The Democratic Peace Theory only applies to consolidated democracies, and therefore cannot be used to predict or understand the behavior of states undergoing the tumultuous process of post-conflict democratization.

Democracy v. Stability

Contemporary post-conflict development theorists largely acknowledge that democracy and elections are not equivalent and that the goals of democratization and those of peace

building and security enhancement may differ. Scholars such as Jack Snyder have firmly established that not “all good things go together” as once believed. Democratization and peacebuilding efforts can often have opposite, contrary, and even opposing goals and practices.^{xv} For example, in a post-conflict situation where violence was very recently a legitimate means to air social grievances, the premature holding of elections may result in disappointed political losers returning to armed struggle, a case of democratization interfering with peacebuilding. Conversely, peacebuilding efforts intended to assuage potential spoilers such as inclusion of rebel groups in the democratization process can lead to difficult problems with the holding of democratic, free, and successful elections.^{xvi}

Benjamin Reilly notes the “security dilemma” which arises during elections after a period of violent conflict, whereby “competing ethnic, religious, and political actors will often mobilize against the possibility of future threats, triggering a cascading tit-for-tat escalation and polarization from other segments of society. In many cases, rising levels of internal conflict have accompanied or been precipitated by transitions from authoritarian rule toward democracy. Despite their essential role, post-war elections have often fomented these tensions, becoming a lightning-rod for popular discontent and extremist sentiments.”^{xvii}

Therefore, a question of priority arises in post-conflict situations. Is it better to have democratic elections at the potential cost of peace, or should democracy be held off until a proper level of institutional support is in place? And what exactly does “democracy” mean in terms of concrete policy? If elections are not one-in-the-same with democracy and may actually be dangerous, then how can newly

democratizing states move towards liberal democracy in a safe manner?

Sequencing

One answer is provided by the theory of sequencing. First made popular by Fareed Zakaria, Edward Mansfield, and Jack Snyder, sequencing does away with the viewpoint that immediate development of democratic elections is always a good thing, and instead proposes that national elections with universal suffrage should wait until the rule of law and a well-functioning state is in place.^{xviii} The sequencing strategy views democracy as a long-term goal to be strived for, not as something possible in the short-term. Mansfield and Snyder write, “Without reasonably effective civic institutions, the outcome in culturally diverse societies is likely to resemble Iraq and Lebanon. Once a country starts on an illiberal trajectory, ideas are unleashed and institutions are established that tend to continue propelling it along that trajectory. A key danger is that premature democratization will push a country down this path.”^{xix}

Sequencing theorists believe that the contestation and conflict of democratic elections can serve as a spark that relights the flame of violence in post-conflict societies. As violence was very recently the primary choice to address social grievances, a post-conflict state runs the risk of devolving into further chaos. If the original violence was ethnic in nature, early democratization can have particularly damaging consequences due to the process of “outbidding,” which occurs where political parties become extremely polarized, often on ethnic grounds. As one political party increasingly makes use of extremist rhetoric to compete for votes, opposing parties respond in kind, pushing both parties away from the center while cancelling out the moderate voices of the

political center. Intense polarization and othering causes a dramatic re-escalation of social tensions, which can often result in the breakdown of the democratic process and a return to violence.^{xx}

Sequencing is a logical answer to the failures of applying the democratic peace to newly democratizing states. However, it too is partially flawed. Responding to the early work done by Zakaria, Mansfield, and Snyder, Thomas Carothers argues that sequencing theory rests on a “mistaken two part premise: that a significant number of autocrats can and will act as generators of rule-of-law development and state-building, and that democratizing countries are inherently ill suited for these tasks.”^{xxi} Carothers writes that the key failure of sequentialism is allowing authoritarianism to build democracy, a clearly problematic approach. Carothers views sequencing as an ideological practice of “kicking the can down the road” and delaying the development of free and fair elections indefinitely, as sequentialism provides no firm and clearly identifiable benchmarks for when a state is “ready” for democracy. Additionally, he is less pessimistic about the threat to stability which democracy brings.^{xxii}

Carothers also wrote that sequentialism would be used by “traditional realists” in order to excuse the maintenance of friendly relations with autocratic governments, by “traditional developmentalists” to re-ignite modernization theory’s view that development must precede democracy, and by “powerholders in some non-democratic countries” to justify and excuse a closed political system by claiming such a situation is in the long-term interest of democracy. Carothers believes sequencing to be rooted in skepticism about democracy’s potential for success, rather than in hope.^{xxiii} In

response to sequencing, Carothers proposes a strategy he entitles “gradualism.”

Gradualism

Gradualism insists upon holding elections, which are, for Carothers, the “core element” of democracy; in a manner that is “iterative and cumulative ways rather than all at once.”^{xxiv} Where sequentialism puts off democratic elections until a stable rule of law is in place, gradualism encourages the incremental movement towards full and open elections while simultaneously undergoing state-building procedures. Carothers acknowledges the seemingly minute difference between the two strategies, but reaffirms the split between the two is “fundamental.” Gradualism encourages the taking of “incremental but definite steps” toward a fully open political arena while at the same time engaging in “statebuilding and rule of law reforms.”^{xxv}

Gradualism differs with sequentialism in that it calls for simultaneous development of state institutions and opening of the political system, as opposed to delaying the latter until the former has met some development benchmark. It is overall a more optimistic viewpoint on the democratization process. While sequentialism theorists are prone to characterizing democratization as inherently very unstable and potentially chaotic, gradualism sees the process as less sensitive and explosive after the initial transition phase. Gradualism does, however, agree with sequentialism in that “democratization has no natural place in the first phase, since this phase is usually a conflictive, coercive process carried out by strongmen leaders intent on conquest or militarized defense.”^{xxvi} Thus, gradualism recognizes the need for some degree of delay after a major conflict before elements of

democracy can be introduced, but does not accept delay beyond a brief transitory period.

The Dangers of “Elections = Democracy”

There is a general acknowledgement within the post-conflict literature that the process of democratization can cause further violence in post-conflict settings. For proponents of democratic sequencing, elections are to be held off until a stable order and rule of law exists. For sequentialists, elements of full national elections, such as minor regional electoral contests, ought to be introduced gradually into a democratizing state. For both camps, full-suffrage free and fair elections tend to be portrayed as the “be all end all” of democratization efforts. This has led to a belief amongst policymakers and the broader international community that elections are the climax of post-conflict operations, and in international peacebuilding efforts, elections have often marked the successful completion of an operation.

However, as Anna K. Jarstad points out, “the first post-war election is often riddled with violence and flawed election outcomes.”^{xxvii} For a multitude of reasons, including inadequate infrastructure, poor security services, and lack of democratic roots, the earliest elections in most post-conflict environments are a far cry from free and fair. Benjamin Reilly adds that, “...many transition elections are now saddled with unrealistic expectations to achieve goals that are inconsistent and incompatible. A more realistic and less ideological appraisal of elections is required – one which recognizes that elections can be potentially advantageous *or* injurious to post-war democratization – and that success is dependent on a careful consideration of timing, sequencing, mechanics, and administration issues.”^{xxviii}

A further problem arises when considering the implications for the international aid regime. Writing on the topic of the development community’s work in Rwanda before and leading almost immediately up to the 1994 Genocide, Peter Uvin explained the problem of developers hailing a state for sound economic policies and holding regular elections, while turning a blind eye to the actual political climate of the state.^{xxix} If merely holding elections is the pre-requisite for receiving development assistance from the international community, the development enterprise is indirectly assisting in the spread of pseudodemocracy. Autocratic leaders can easily put on an election for show in order to satisfy international donors. When domestic elites realize that elections are the only thing being asked of them by the aid community, they will gladly supply them. However, those entrenched elites will often not go so far as to ensure these elections are free and fair or abide by electoral results. The international community must be more willing to tie aid to concrete reforms and liberalization of domestic politics.

For these temporal and structural reasons, elections are surely a poor benchmark to determine the successful democratization of a post-conflict state that has only very recently escaped violence. A very serious danger to liberal democratization has arisen, bolstered by the international community’s willingness to view elections and democracy as tautological. What of the post-conflict state which, a decade or two after major violence has subsided, is now back on its proverbial feet, but the elite-in-power refuse to give up their autocratic control? Realizing that the international community has seemingly equated democracy with elections, elites of such post-conflict states are offered the choice of instituting a pseudodemocracy, and illiberal democracies are born.

Illiberal Democracy

Fareed Zakaria coined the term “illiberal democracy” in a 1997 piece that appeared in *Foreign Affairs*. In this piece, Zakaria separates democracy from constitutional liberalism, and explains the danger of the first without the latter.^{xxx} Simply put, democracy without liberalism is easily manipulated and controlled, ensures the public few if any basic rights, and features a tightly controlled political arena.

The elite of illiberal democracies have realized that holding regular elections is an important social norm in the modern state system, and carries with it a certain amount of prestige. However, without the various freedoms that are guaranteed by liberal constitutionalism, the democratic process is easily corrupted by the state. As scholar Larry Diamond writes, “First, more regimes than ever before are adopting the *form* of electoral democracy, with regular, competitive, multiparty elections. Second, many of these regimes—indeed, an unprecedented proportion of the world’s countries—have the form of electoral democracy but fail to meet the substantive test, or do so only ambiguously.”^{xxxix} Thus, illiberal democracies have all the window dressings that allow them to appear democratic in form, but a closer analysis will reveal their illiberal nature.

Separating democracy from liberalism has proven an extremely important step in the process of categorizing and analyzing democratizing states. Analysts that have abandoned the fallacy that democracy alone is the pinnacle of development are more capable of rational assessment of the true political conditions within a state. Work by Larry Diamond, who uses the term “hybrid democracy” to carry the same meaning as Zakaria’s “illiberal democracy,” has used

Zakaria’s ideas to shed light on the issue of classifying democratic regimes. He shows that “democracy” is not one static state of being, but instead, there is a scale of democracy, and regimes can land from “Liberal Democracy, in that they have a fairly liberal Freedom House score of 2.0 or lower on the seven-point scale averaging political rights and civil liberties” to “Politically Closed Authoritarian, which do not have any of the architecture of political competition and pluralism,” and anywhere in-between.^{xxxii} Such categorization has proven useful to post-conflict theorists in that they help theorists move beyond the ideological trappings that elections imply a democracy which can only be a positive development.

Post-Conflict Democratization Theory and Illiberal “Slipping”

In a post-conflict setting, the dangers of a regime slipping into the realm of illiberal democracy are particularly salient. Current post-conflict theory advocates the delay of major elections until the state in question is capable of supporting elections peacefully. However, there is the ever-looming threat of authoritarian elite becoming entrenched, embracing the illusion of democracy in order to placate the international community while enacting domestic reforms at an excruciatingly slow pace, all the while citing the work of sequencing scholars and claiming the slow speed of reform is in the good interest of democracy.^{xxxiii}

As Carothers writes, “Prescribing the deferral of democracy—and consequently the prolongation of authoritarian rule—as a cure for the ills of prolonged authoritarianism makes little sense.”^{xxxiv} Just as early elections can cause a democratization process to become abortive before it truly has a chance to succeed, putting democratic reforms on the back burner for too long can result in the development of a

democracy that has no roots in liberal constitutionalism. Instead, entrenched elites will utilize elections merely as a show for the benefit of its image to the international community and aid organizations.

An Untouched Temporal Issue

Sequentialism and gradualism raise a second important issue: how quickly must pressure be applied to post-conflict states in order to assure the growth of liberal democracy? Without offering any major concrete solutions of his own, Carothers does highlight a major flaw of the early sequentialism works in that they offer few universally applicable benchmarks for the beginning of full-suffrage elections in newly democratizing states.^{xxxv} Post-conflict democratization becomes a balancing act, wherein the threat of excessively early elections must be cast against the problem of delaying elections indefinitely and potentially excusing autocratic rule, which does little to promote democratic development and may reignite acute violence in the long run by preventing the airing of legitimate opposition grievances.

Rwanda provides a unique environment upon which to apply the questions that linger unanswered in the post-conflict community. As the state suffered near-total collapse during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, it certainly qualifies as a post-conflict setting. As the violence was of an ethnic nature, it can be expected that the post-conflict government would want to delay democratic reforms in the interest of state stability. Fifteen years after the Genocide, Rwanda certainly falls into the category of post-conflict states that have delayed true liberal democratic reforms and have witnessed “slipping” into the realm of democratic authoritarianism. Therefore, applying the questions presented by current

post-conflict literature to Rwanda will uncover answers about the dilemmas that have arisen in that body of work. Splitting the Rwandan Recovery into four periods will allow for a more straightforward analysis and application of post-conflict development questions of sequencing, order, and priority.

Post-Colonial Rwanda: 1960 – 1994

In 1959-1960, a Hutu “revolution,” assisted by the Belgian colonizers, replaced the originally favored Tutsi monarchy with an independent republic dominated by southern Hutu. In 1973, Juvenal Habyarimana took power in a coup d'état and diverted power to the northern Hutu. Hundreds of thousands of Tutsi fled the country as refugees. During this era, the electoral politics of Rwanda became firmly established as an exercise of ethnic demography. The colonial interpretation of Rwandan politics as firmly Hutu/Tutsi in nature had taken hold.^{xxxvi}

By 1990, the Tutsi population in exile had created a sizable rebel force, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In late 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda with initial military success. However, the Habyarimana regime received considerable international support, and the RPF shifted into guerilla-style combat, which it waged effectively. When locally arbitrated peace negotiation attempts failed, the United States, France, and the Organization of African Unity moved in to mediate an agreement between the Rwandan government and the RPF guerilla movement.

The Arusha talks lasted from July 1992 through August 1993. The final document called for a cease-fire on both sides, inclusionary power sharing in a transitional government, the creation of nationally unified armed forces, and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).^{xxxvii} The implementation of the

Arusha Accords was anathema to the Rwandan Hutu elite and particularly to the *Akazu*, a group of powerful Hutu extremists. The elections called for in the Accords were clearly a threat to the entrenched order in Rwanda. The fear that the Accords would cause a dramatic change in the domestic political balance of power was one of many factors in the *Akazu's* decision to turn to Genocide in order to protect Hutu extremist domination of Rwanda.^{xxxviii} Such a fear of elections would continue to play a major role in Rwandan politics even after the Genocide was brought to an end.

Rwanda: Early Post-Conflict Transition 1994-2001

The post-conflict timeline in Rwanda begins immediately after the RPF disposed of the Hutu government responsible for carrying out the Genocide. The transitional government called for by the Arusha Accords was set up, with the RPF and its allies appointing the leadership. Elections were to be delayed until 2003^{xxxix}. The Tutsi-led RPF banned former President Juvenal Habyarimana's party, the *Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie et le Développement*, or MRNDD, and placed Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu, into the office of the president, while Paul Kagame, who served as the head of the RPF's military force, served in the role of Defense Minister.^{xl} Mr. Kagame was believed to have a great deal of influence during Mr. Bizimungu's tenure, and Kagame assumed power after Bizimungu was forced to resign following accusations of tax fraud.^{xli}

Thus, in Rwanda, a transitional government was set up and full-suffrage elections were postponed for nine years. Decision-makers in post-conflict Kigali clearly chose stability rather than immediate democracy. Given the insights that post-conflict

scholarship now provides on the dangers of immediate democratization efforts after a major conflict, especially when that conflict was ethnic in nature^{xliii}, this was an understandable choice.

If the Rwandan leadership had been pressured to make immediate moves towards democracy, the rise of political polarization on ethnic grounds would likely have been disastrous for the country and may have re-ignited acute violence. A transitional period with elections scheduled a decent time in the future was clearly the safest method to help ensure peaceable democratization in Rwanda's medium-to-long term. During the transitional period, the RPF, who largely controlled the transitional government, applied this theory to an extreme.

The RPF Strategy: Sequentialism to an Extreme

In a 1995 interview, RPF leader and current President of Rwanda Paul Kagame outlined his views on the risk that early democratization would re-spark the ethnic violence that had torn Rwanda apart. His viewpoint is very similar to the post-conflict democratization experts who have written on the violent consequences of too-early democratization^{xliii}.

If you try to organise elections, to authorise parties to grow like mushrooms and allow competition, you will be making an even bigger problem for yourself than the one you already have: dividing people who are already divided. What does the multi-party system mean in our African societies? That I will use every tactic to distinguish myself from my neighbour with the aim of winning more votes than he wins...you will never have a united country. We will never have democracy:

people will pounce on each other. One party would emerge to defend those who perpetrated the genocide, then another would arise saying that members of the former should be tried... You would have a great war. We must analyze the problems that are in store for us and those that we are going to solve.^{xliv}

Clearly, Kagame's view of post-conflict development for Rwanda, which became very much the viewpoint of the RPF, is a version of extreme sequentialism. Explicitly, the RPF engaged in purposefully delaying the development of multi-party elections in order to ensure a peaceful transition period. Implicitly, however, the RPF manipulated this strategy in order to take advantage of the time afforded it to conduct grassroots campaigning operations so that it may continue its dominance of Rwandan politics when the transition period finally came to a close.^{xlv} Thus, an unintended consequence of sequentialism is discovered. Delaying the full opening of the political process until certain preconditions are met allows a party in power to take advantage of its superior placement in the political sphere to gather strength in a potentially unfair manner compared to lesser groups that may become legitimate opposition parties after the transition period has come to a close.

Democratization Efforts prior to Constitutional Reform

As the end of the transitional government's accepted tenure drew to a close, the transitional government began instituting some democratic measures. In early March of 2001, local elections were held. These elections were considered by observers to be sloppily organized and of "Byzantine complexity," which allowed "RPF placemen to exercise full control over the process."^{xlvi} As political parties

were still banned from open operations in the Rwandan political sphere, all contestants in the election had to run without party support. However, as the RPF had unscrupulously taken advantage of the transitional, "party-free" period to campaign, they also implicitly supported candidates in these elections. A Human Rights Watch report on these early democratic elections considered this election "flawed from the beginning,"^{xlvii} due to the unfair advantages taken by RPF party organizers, the purposeful delaying of international observers, and the lack of a secret ballot.

The Constitutional Reform of 2001-2003

Despite this less than free and fair election, the Rwandan government began the process of drawing up a new, permanent constitution. The Constitutional Commission, which was provided for by the Arusha Agreement, was set up in late 2000 on the basis of law number 23, issued in late December of 1999. The National Assembly of Transition (NAT) appointed the Commission's president, Tito Rutaremara, in late November of 2000. The other members of the Commission had been appointed in July of 2000 by the NAT, resulting in the political composition of the Commission mirroring that of the NAT.^{xlviii} The Commission's objective was to provide proposals and eventually a draft of a permanent constitution to lawmakers in Kigali based upon consultations with the Rwandan public. The draft Constitution was then to be made into law through a national referendum, which was held on May 25, 2003 with an affirmative outcome.^{xlix}

However, doubts have been cast on the true effectiveness of the Commission in this regard. As the RPF-dominated Transitional Government was responsible for the education of the masses, they were able to easily

manipulate the Rwandan public into repeating to the Commission exactly what the RPF wanted to be emplaced in a new Constitution, a clear manipulation of the process.¹

The Rwandan Constitution of 2003 establishes a unique set of rules for a system of government. Kagame and the RPF can certainly be praised for including direct universal suffrage and secret ballot elections. The “Burundi effect,” a name given to the ethnicity-based voting which took place in Burundi, caused Tutsi elite in the RPF to fear universal suffrage, as they were unsure of the party’s ability to attract rural Hutu votes. The fearful Tutsi elite added considerable pressure on the rest of the RPF to limit the electorate in order to assure its continued position in a place of power, but ultimately the decision was made in favor of full-suffrage voting.^{li} Praise is also due the language that “ensures that women are granted at least thirty per cent of posts in decision making organs,”^{liii} which has been sustained by a quota-based election system.

However, as the constitutional reform process was all but dominated by the interests of the RPF, those interests are clearly and strongly reflected in the final product. The Rwandan Constitution of 2003 includes extremely strict guidelines for the activities of political parties as well as for individual politicians. While the Constitution explicitly allows a “multi-party system of government,”^{liiii} it also allows the national legislature to call any political party into question on various grounds of offenses^{liv} and send the matter to the judiciary, which can decide the fate of the party. Party organization at the local level is prohibited, which prevents opposition movements from spreading nationwide.

Critiquing the Constitutional Reform Process and Product

The constitutional reform process, which was heavily guided by the hand of the RPF, resulted in a document that was “tailor-made to legitimize the regime.”^{lv} Just as the RPF took advantage of the transition period to conduct grassroots campaign operations, it took advantage of its position of power during the reform process to ensure the creation of a document that would be most capable of securing RPF rule in a potentially hostile electoral climate. Article 9 includes language that calls for “eradication of ethnic, regional and other divisions and promotion of national unity,” which can and has been used as a method of neutralizing the RPF’s political opposition.^{lvi} The governing of political parties is exceptionally strict, and the divisionism language can be utilized by the RPF to deny the right to organize to any party that may pose a political threat. Here, we see another failing of waiting to begin major democratic reforms for too long. When the time for those reforms comes, the incumbent party-in-power can manipulate the process in order to serve their long-term goals, hijacking the process of democratization for its own ends.

The Presidential Election of 2003

Along with the new Constitution, 2003 saw presidential and parliamentary elections held as well. The process and result of these elections helped to confirm Rwanda’s drift towards RPF-led authoritarianism.^{lvii} The elections themselves were marred by political arrests, disappearances, and voter intimidation. International observers sent by the European Union witnessed cases of irregularities and fraud at 374 out of 10,000 voting stations visited. However, those international reporters found it was not fraudulent election day practices which secured an RPF victory, but rather it was the RPF using “its hold of the state’s administrative and military power to

exert various forms of influence on potential voters” which did so, a process that “started long before the electoral campaign.”^{lviii} While the elections themselves were fairly clean, their results were the product of a campaign of voter intimidation carried out by the RPF.

The results of the elections were lopsided. RPF leader Paul Kagame won the presidential contest with 95% of the vote, and the RPF took 74% of the legislature. Other minor parties had supported Kagame’s presidential run, and therefore represent allies in an RPF-dominated alliance.^{lix} Thus, the 2003 democratic elections resulted in a legitimization of the RPF rule that had dominated Rwandan political life since the end of the Genocide in 1994.

Rwanda 2003-Present: An Economic Success Slipping Towards Authoritarianism

Considering Rwanda’s status as a post-Genocide state, the country has seen remarkable economic growth. Before the shockwaves of the global financial crisis began to impact Rwanda, the International Monetary Fund forecast it to witness 8.5% growth in 2008.^{lx} According to a report from the United Nations Development Project, poverty rates remain high at 56.9%, but that figure is a marked decrease from the pre-conflict figure of 70%. That same report credits Rwanda with the decline of infant mortality rates, an increase in primary school enrolment, and “significant progress in the area of peace and reconciliation, restoration of law and order, and democratization.”^{lxi}

With such remarkable economic success, one would hope for an equal or greater success in the field of liberal democratization. Unfortunately, just the opposite has unfolded. The RPF has pursued a course of action that has systematically eliminated all credible opposition, all while still working within the

legal confines of the 2003 Constitution and maintaining the façade of multi-party democracy. A 2003 report done by the African Capacity-Building foundation has found that “although the political discourse of the Rwandan authorities emphasizes reconciliation, national unity, and the respect for the rights for all, the government has been in the grip of a hazardous authoritarian drift.”^{lxii} Since the passing of the 2003 constitution and the beginning of democratic elections, the RPF has maintained an increasingly tight hold on the political arena. Elections have not made the RPF more receptive to the demands of its electorate, but have instead required the RPF to tighten its grip in order to keep its hold on political power in the face of a potentially hostile electorate, as the Rwandan countryside is majority Hutu.^{lxiii}

The Constitution that was designed by the RPF and for the RPF has served its function perfectly by providing legal methods that castrate and neutralize any significant opposition. A favorite tactic of the RPF to achieve this goal is through accusing the opposition of divisionism. The language allowing the calling into question of political parties is particularly devastating to the process of liberal democratization when combined with Article 9’s call for the “eradication of ethnic, regional and other divisions and promotion of national unity.”^{lxiv} Part of the RPF democratic training literature included the official RPF doctrine on political parties, which includes that “the parties must avoid sowing the seeds of divisionism among Rwandans.”^{lxv}

Thus, the RPF can easily do away with any potentially threatening opposition movements by claiming they are acting out of step with the government line towards a unified Rwanda and are therefore divisionist, seeking explicitly or implicitly to send Rwanda back into violent chaos. Pasteur Bizimungu, the

President of Rwanda during the 1994-2000 period, launched his own opposition political party, the Party for Democracy and Regeneration (PDR) in 2001. The Rwandan government almost immediately banned the PDR on the grounds that it was “divisionist,” and Bizimungu was placed under house arrest, and later sentenced to a 15-year prison term.^{lxvi} In the period of 1995-2003 alone, more than 40 Rwandan political leaders have been forced into exile abroad. Former President Bizimungu remained imprisoned until 2007.^{lxvii} As of mid-2000, about 80% of the “most important office-holders were RPF/RPA.”^{lxviii} According to a 2003 report from the International Crisis Group, in 2003, “11 out of 12 prefects are affiliated with the RPF, the chief prosecutor, head of the Court of Cassation and head of the Constitutional Court are all RPF members, 8 out of 9 Rwandan banks are managed by RPF members, and all the institutes of higher education are run by RPF members.”^{lxix}

Under the guise of “national unity and security,”^{lxx} the Rwandan government effectively prevents the formation of any legitimate and substantial political opposition from arising. Politicians, both inside the RPF and those members of other parties, are “expected to remain in the same political straightjacket.”^{lxxi} While the 2003 Constitution calls for multi-party democracy, the RPF is able to circumvent this requirement by accusing opposition parties and politicians of “divisionism.” By doing so, the RPF is taking advantage of the unique nature of post-Genocide Rwanda. The excuse that any political opposition would snowball into a re-ignition of ethnic conflict is an illegitimate one for taking legal action and shutting down all opposition movements that may become politically threatening to the RPF in the future.

The Subsequent Threat to Security

As Kristine Höglund wrote on the topic of violence in war-to-democracy transitions, “political violence is often a response to too little democracy.”^{lxxii} By preventing opposing ideas from coalescing around legitimate and included political parties that are then allowed to participate in the process of governing, and by forcing opposition leaders into exile, the Rwandan government is dramatically increasing its security risk. The International Crisis Group found that the “excluded opponents generally try and find allies and fight against the government from the outside, thus increasing the security threat.”^{lxxiii} The efforts of the RPF to monopolize its power and neutralize any opposition groups have the negative consequence of contributing numbers to an ever-growing group of radicalized Rwandan opposition-in-exile.

While much of the Rwandan Diaspora after the 1994 Genocide was believed to be comprised largely of Hutu *genocidaires* and moderate Hutus who feared Tutsi vengeance, more recent developments within Rwandan exile groups suggest a more diverse composition. Particularly telling is the creation of Tutsi-led exile groups in the United States and France who hold a “platform to fight against the RPF’s drift towards authoritarianism.”^{lxxiv} The existence of Tutsi-led exile groups which hold such a platform certainly contribute more heavily to the argument that Rwanda has suffered such a drift than exile movements of purely Hutu composition. Many of these exile groups are of a bi-ethnic character, and therefore pose a problem to the RPF’s strategy of accusing opposition movements of divisionism on ethnic grounds.^{lxxv}

There are still remnants of the extremist Hutu *genocidaires* organized and operating on the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s side of the border between Rwanda and that country,

and their presence has a destabilizing effect on peace in the region. However, there are also moderate Hutu and opposition Tutsi exile groups in the Great Lakes region that have categorically recognized the genocide and wish to bring about political reform in Rwanda^{lxxvi}. The longer the RPF-controlled Rwandan government prevents these groups from becoming part of the legitimate political process inside Rwanda, the greater the chance of these groups radicalizing, giving up on peaceable methods and turning to arms to achieve their objectives of political reform. The post-conflict literature recognizes the potential problems of inclusion regarding spoilers, but as Kristine Höglund writes, “inclusion in the political process based on commitments to peaceful means can be an important tool to prevent and manage violence.”^{lxxvii} Should the RPF wish to work towards reducing Rwanda’s security risk, it must begin the process of including political groups which are willing to re-enter Rwandan society on a peaceful basis.

A Muzzled Press

The organizers of the Rwandan Genocide were infamous for the use of hate media to polarize ethnic tensions, spread the message of genocide, and coordinate *genocidaire* squads. Radio stations, notably the *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, or RTLM, were particularly effective in a country where literacy rates were staggeringly low, limiting the impact of written press.^{lxxviii} The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has recognized the function of media in making the Genocide possible on such a massive scale, and has prosecuted three former RTLM figures.^{lxxix}

Given this record of abuse, it may seem understandable that post-conflict Rwanda would be hesitant to allow much in the way of press freedoms. The excuse used by the Rwandan

government runs along those exact lines – the fear of creating another “monster”^{lxxx} means a clampdown on all media which shows a hint of independence from the official government line. The press law passed in 2001 decrees that “Any attempt, via the media, to incite a part of the Rwandan population to genocide, is liable to the death sentence.”^{lxxxii} Just as the law that prohibits “divisionism,” this law is but another method of allowing the removal of opposition voices through legal means.

During the transitional phase, some independent press organizations had appeared which took the RPF and the Rwandan government to task on major issues. However, the state began a crusade of intimidation tactics that quickly put an end to this development. Owners and journalists connected to independent press outlets found themselves victim of state-sponsored harassment, intimidation, forced exile, and arbitrary detainment.^{lxxxii} A more recent technique is the government’s insistence on a pre-requisite amount of start-up capital to allow the licensing of a new television station, radio station, or newspaper. These required amounts are high to the point of being prohibitive for the creation of any new media outlets.^{lxxxiii}

The result of these laws is a highly obedient and non-confrontational national press. The media organizations that do exist have now learned to practice self-censorship” out of fear of being harassed, intimidated, attacked, or shut down by the state. According to an annual report written by the international press freedoms watchdog Reporters Sans Frontiers, one human rights worker “noted that it is more appropriate to refer to ‘government media’ than to ‘public media’.”^{lxxxiv} During the 2003 elections, the media was barred from covering elections at the provincial level and from

hosting televised debates between candidates, limiting their impact on the outcome.^{lxxxv}

A Final Application of Post-Conflict Literature

The RPF-dominated government of Rwanda has, since the end of the Genocide, acted in ways to ensure the continuation of its monopoly of power. Through the tactic of labeling all opposition voices both inside and outside of the political arena as “divisionist,” the Rwandan government has effectively managed to stifle any credible threat to its hold on the political process. Elections are a thinly veiled practice of legitimizing the RPF’s rule, done as a show of modernism and development for the enjoyment of the international community. Contemporary Rwanda can be included as one of Larry Diamond’s “Politically Closed Authoritarian” states without too much trouble for the classifier.^{lxxxvi} Applying the post-conflict arguments to Rwanda allows us to understand those arguments more fully.

In the trade-off between democracy and stability, the Rwandan government clearly chose a focus on the latter during the transitional phase. Given the extraordinary and ethnic character of the violence witnessed in Rwanda, this was an understandable choice. In a nation that had just recently seen ethnic tensions polarized and exploited to a genocidal extent, the inherent conflict which democracy brings would have been too great a risk for transitional Rwanda. In a post-conflict society, elections must be held off until a point at which they would not re-ignite major acute violence.

This segues into the second major question in post-conflict democratization. To reiterate, if elections must be held off, when can they begin? An answer backed by Zakaria, Mansfield, and Snyder is that of “sequentialism,” wherein elections must be delayed until pre-conditions such as a stable

rule-of-law is in place.^{lxxxvii} A competing view, popularized by Thomas Carothers, is that of “gradualism,” where universal suffrage national elections should be delayed, but elements of democracy must be gradually instituted in a post-conflict society from the very beginnings of peace.^{lxxxviii}

The case study of Rwanda strongly supports further application of Carothers’ theory of gradualism. The transitional Rwandan government used the basic ideas of sequentialism as a dodge and an excuse for its illiberal activities, insisting that it was working towards democratic reform while simultaneously abusing its power to ensure that when multi-party democracy became the policy of Rwanda, it would be nothing more than a façade designed to appeal to the demands of the international community while having no real impact on domestic Rwandan politics.

In effect, sequentialism gave the RPF-dominated transitional government a window of opportunity to abuse its position of power in order to campaign, canvass, and recruit members, all while other parties were prohibited to do so. Additionally, when the transitional phase drew to a close and the constitution-building period began, the RPF manipulated the process to ensure the document would be “tailor-made”^{lxxxix} to its interests and continued monopoly of power.

If gradualism had been the dominant belief of post-conflict theorists and of the international community, there is a chance the policies of the transitional Rwandan government would have reflected that belief. If certain elements of democracy combined with gradual liberalization and statebuilding had been the norm for post-Genocide Rwanda, perhaps contemporary Rwanda wouldn’t suffer from a closed, authoritarian political system, while still

being able to manage the threat to internal stability which full-scale democracy can bring.

Another issue raised by contemporary scholars of post-conflict societies is the danger of a generally perceived notion in the international community that elections are identical to democracy.^{xc} The case of Rwanda clearly illustrates the pitfalls of such misguided thinking. Multi-party democracy is embedded in the 2003 Constitution of Rwanda and elections are regularly scheduled and conducted, leading the international community at large to assume Rwanda features a democratic character.

The truth is that Rwandan elections are a façade, and the political process is heavily manipulated by the RPF to maintain its hold on power in the face of increasing opposition. The international community looks at Rwanda's successful economic growth and democratic-on-paper structure and green lights development aid projects, loans, and grants, effectively promoting the continuation of illiberal democracy in Rwanda. As Peter Uvin pointed out, a similar scenario existed during the years immediately prior to the outbreak of genocide. Thus, the view that democracy and elections are one-in-the-same is a mistaken and potentially fatally dangerous assumption.

Rwanda serves as a potent reminder to the community of post-conflict theorists and scholars that the temporal issue of democratization is far from unimportant. Post-conflict democratization is clearly a balancing act between stability and democratic reforms. The danger of pursuing democratic elections too quickly after violent conflicts has been a hotly covered issue as of late, perhaps gaining such traction due to the faltering statebuilding efforts of United States foreign policy in Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, as the case of Rwanda clearly demonstrates, the other side of this balance must not be ignored. Should democratic reform be placed on the proverbial back burner for too long, post-conflict states run a serious risk of slipping into the realm of illiberal democracies. The theoretical argument that early democratization is a danger to stability is a positive contribution to post-conflict theory, but more care needs to be taken to ensure that autocratic leaders of post-conflict states are not allowed to utilize that argument as an excuse to delay the development of liberal democratic reforms indefinitely.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

One of the most important contributions of the post-conflict literature has been that excessively early democratic reforms are potentially disastrous to the peace, stability, and security of a state that is just emerging from violent conflict, and thus elections should not be viewed as the primary indicator of progress in the process of reconstruction. As there is conflict inherent in any democratic elections, such elections should be held off until a society is more readily equipped to deal with that conflict in a way that is healthy and non-violent.

However, as the early critics of this thinking have pointed out,^{xcii} the existence of a body of theory that calls for the delay of democratic elections is a potentially dangerous intellectual product. As the case study of Rwanda indicates, that theory can be taken to an extreme, used by authoritarian leaders to excuse their continuance of illiberal policies. While this is far from the intentions of the authors of recent post-conflict theory, it is certainly an accidental by-product that must be better guarded against in the future.

There is clearly a great deal more work to be done in this highly relevant and relatively

new field of scholarly work. More attention must be called to the temporal and administrative questions of democratization in post-conflict societies, and additional thorough analysis will help to better identify the right balance between the delay of universal suffrage national elections and the risk of slipping into the realm of pseudodemocracy.

For Rwanda, it is time for the international community to place additional pressure on the government to liberalize the political process. The ruling party is manipulating and taking advantage of the country's past in order to stifle opposition parties and muzzle the Rwandan free press. While such tactics may be in the short-term interest of the RPF, they create a very real danger for the country in the long-term. By undermining the growth of legitimate domestic opposition groups, the Rwandan government is running the risk of radicalizing the opposition.^{xcii} As violence is still relatively recent in Rwanda's history, it is not unthinkable that such a radicalized opposition, after having been driven underground, would turn to violent means in order to bring about the political change they desire.

Policymakers in Kigali need to understand the risk of continuing along such illiberal trends in a post-conflict state. A violent society has an increased risk of returning to violence.^{xciii} While opening up the political sphere may seem like an unattractive and difficult option for such a dramatically entrenched party, it will help reduce the risk that is currently building in Rwanda. Successful economic developmental statistics such as those associated with Rwanda may cast a light of doubt on such a grim prediction, but observers must remember that Rwanda was in the good favor of development specialists immediately prior to the 1994 genocide as well.^{xciv}

A presidential election is scheduled for 2010, as per the Constitution, which calls for them once every seven years.^{xcv} President Kagame may run for a second term in these elections, but, barring any alteration of the constitution or Putin-style "sidestepping," his second term must be his last. The results of this election will serve as an excellent barometer as to the status of Rwanda. Should we see a repeat of the 2003 elections, wherein Kagame won a staggering 95% of the vote and the work of international monitors was made exceedingly difficult, it will be clear that little political progress has been made, and Rwanda will still be categorized as "Politically Closed Authoritarian."^{xcvi}