

# Rwandan Presidential Election: Stability over Democracy?

By [Niamh Carroll](#)

Thursday 10 August 2017



Recently re-elected Rwandan President Paul Kagame, pictured in 2014 (Image: Wikipedia)

Rwanda could be lauded as a model post-war state which has managed to re-build itself after a terrible conflict. The Central African state has unquestionably made remarkable progress since the genocide of 1994 tore apart the nation. It can boast the highest proportion of female MPs anywhere in the world, economic progress which outstrips most of its African neighbours, and crucially, peace.

President Paul Kagame, who was first elected in 2000, can claim much of the credit for Rwanda's impressive stability. It is perhaps no surprise then, that Kagame was re-elected by a landslide majority in Presidential Elections last week. Yet, the President's 98.63% share of the vote, is a mark of the suppression of real opposition in the country. President Kagame's re-election raises the long-debated question, is an absence of real democracy an acceptable price to pay for stability?

Kagame, who is a former militia man who helped bring the 1994 genocide to an end, is genuinely popular. He portrays himself as a modern African leader who utilises social media to the full; using Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and even Instagram to demonstrate his popularity. Paul Kagame's Instagram is full of pictures and videos of thousands of enthusiastic supporters at mass rallies held in support of him. The numerous Rwandans who attend these rallies do so freely and are motivated by genuine affection and support for Kagame.

While such spectacles do indicate that a proportion of Rwandans are strong supporters of their president; Kagame's 99% majority is more a symptom of lack of choice rather than the feverish support showcased

on his Instagram. There are eight opposition parties in Rwanda, yet only the Green Party decided to field a candidate, with the other parties choosing to back Paul Kagame. The Green Party's candidate, Frank Habineza, and the third independent candidate, Philippe Mpayimana received little to no attention from Rwandan TV and radio stations, all of which support Mr Kagame's party, the RPF.

The lack of proper opposition indicates a slide towards a state devoid of proper democratic contestation. Another worrying sign for the country is Kagame's overseeing of a change in Rwanda's constitution which allows him to theoretically serve until 2034. While the amendment was approved by 98% of voters, it certainly was not a good move for democracy in Rwanda. A disregard (or at least a willingness to alter) their country's constitution has often been the mark of a leader lurching into dictatorship.

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, tweeted in criticism of Kagame following the election. "Under Kagame, 60 Rwanda journalists killed, "disappeared," jailed, or exiled," Roth claimed on Twitter, "One killed (the) day he criticised Kagame." Suggestion of such abuses completely diminish the legitimacy of Kagame's mandate, and have led many international observers, as well as some Rwandans on social media to denounce the President as a tyrant.

Despite the growing criticism of Kagame's refusal to allow opposition in his own country. The turnout in last week elections was over 90%, of which only a tiny proportion dissented against Kagame. Perhaps Rwandans feel that they value stable leadership above political debate in a country which still has the genocide of 1994 motivated by ethnicity burnt into their national psyche.

For the time being, the vast majority of Rwandans are prepared to support the soft-spoken Paul Kagame, who has overseen prosperity and peace in a country which saw some of the worst human suffering in recent times. Kagame's repression of opposition to his leadership, however, may prove to be a ticking time bomb. The problematic future of Rwanda's democracy was perhaps best represented in an editorial cartoon published on Twitter by *The Star, Kenya*; it depicts Paul Kagame surrounded by roses, presumably thrown by his admiring voters, he holds a mirror, in which the Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe is depicted, the cartoon is captioned "Every Mugabe started out as a Kagame...".



Most Read **Discussed**

1. [What is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance?](#)
2. [Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)
3. [Penalty for submitting work up to an hour late halved](#)
4. [UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)
5. [How to depose a Conservative leader](#)
6. [Led Astray - The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)

### Write for Nouse Politics

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

### More in Politics

[UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)

[How to depose a Conservative leader](#)

[Aufwiedersehen: Merkel plans her departure](#)

[US turnout surges in Midterms](#)

[Trans-Atlantic spats overshadow Centenary](#)

[Up to a million Muslims imprisoned by China](#)

- [About Nouse](#)
- [Who's Nouse](#)
- [Website Credits](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Student Discounts](#)
- [Print Editions](#)
- [Mini-Sites](#)
- [Nouse on Twitter](#)
- [Nouse on Facebook](#)
- [Nouse on Google+](#)

