

# General Kagame Will ‘Win’ Rwanda’s Election

An Interview with David Himbara

By [David Himbara](#) and [Ann Garrison](#)

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*Rwandans will go to the polls to elect a president on August 4, but asking whether General Paul Kagame will win is like asking whether bears shit in the woods. I nevertheless asked David Himbara, author of Kagame’s “Economic Mirage” and “Kagame’s Killing Fields,” just to get this conversation started.*

Ann Garrison: David Himbara, who’s going to win next week’s election?

David Himbara: General Paul Kagame will win. There is no doubt about that.

AG: And what makes you so sure?

DH: Kagame is running against himself. Credible opposition figures are in prison, in exile, or blocked from competing against him—if they haven’t been assassinated.

AG: President Kagame “won” by 93% last time. What percentage do you imagine he’ll claim this time?

DH: 99.9%.

AG: That’s a hysterically high number, very close to the Ethiopian ruling party’s 100% in 2015.

DH: Well, the numbers keep going higher. Kagame won the referendum changing the constitution by 98%. Parliament voted for the change of the constitution by 99%. The Senate voted for it by 100%. So Kagame will probably win by 99.9%. His people will give the remaining tenth of a percent to the other two candidates to share.

AG: Could you explain the constitutional referendum?

DH: Kagame engineered the constitutional amendment that removed presidential term limits so that he could cling to power beyond two 7-year terms. The amended constitution allows Kagame to rule until 2034. Rwandan parliamentarians who engaged in nationwide discussions in preparation for the referendum claimed that they found only ten people opposed to removing term limits. Voters allegedly approved the referendum by over 98%.

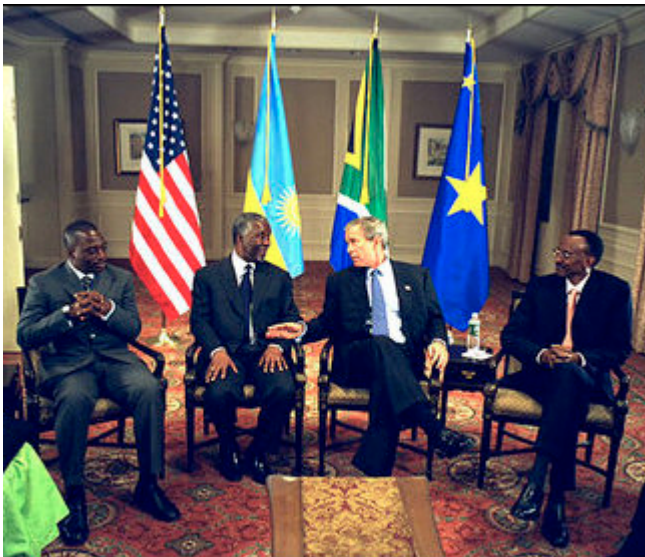
AG: During the 2010 election year, two candidates went to prison and another went into exile after the vice president of his party was found by a riverbank with his head cut off. Journalists were shot or threatened, and Kagame’s assassins were at work in at least three more African countries. What happened this year?

DH: There was no violence this time for the simple reason that the regime has had nothing to fear. There are no genuine opposition leaders except Diane Rwigara, and she wasn't allowed to run. Bernard Ntaganda went to prison for trying to run in the 2010 election. He's free now, but Rwandan law prohibits anyone who has served time in prison from running for president. Victoire Ingabire of course remains in prison. And there is no independent media. The New Times of Rwanda exists to glorify General Kagame. He has tightened his totalitarian grip.

AG: Who manages the voting process itself?

DH: The National Electoral Commission, which is not independent of the regime.

AG: In your book "Kagame's Killing Fields," you wrote, "From the presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, each administration has invested significantly in the Rwandan military. Whether it was a Republican or Democratic presidency, the United States consistently poured millions of dollars into Rwanda's military machine."



Kagame (right) with Congolese President Joseph Kabila (left) at a peace summit with Thabo Mbeki, and George W. Bush in September 2002.  
(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

You also quoted Chris Smith, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations:

"Kagame has been considered a hero on the international stage, and has long been immune to public criticism... There are credible reports that the RPF government has commissioned assassins to kill dissidents... By largely avoiding criticism of Rwandan human rights issues, the Bush and Obama administrations raised appropriations to Rwanda from \$39 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$188 million in fiscal year 2014."

None of this is likely to change because of this year's election farce, but what happened last week when you went to Washington to speak to someone at the US State Department?

DH: The State Department was chaotic. The United States government is currently preoccupied with domestic issues, and Rwanda is not even on the radar. The administration hasn't yet staffed many offices in the State Department that are concerned with Africa. For example, there is no Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. And in the lower ranks, some of them have left and some are new. So I think it will take a while for the United States to recover its interest in Africa and in Rwanda. In the meantime, the money will continue to flow because the tap's already turned on. And that goes for the British government as well. It is currently consumed by its divorce from the European Union. Of course these two countries, the US and the UK, are General Kagame's main backers.

AG: One of their excuses for funding Kagame's killing fields is his claim that, under his leadership, Rwanda has risen from the ashes of genocide to become a development miracle. But you write that "only 303,550 Rwandans are employed in the formal economy, while 5.6 million are in subsistence agriculture or eking out a living in urban and rural informal sectors. Put in another way, 93 percent of Rwandan adults aged sixteen to sixty-five work outside the formal economy." How does Kagame sustain this development-miracle myth with numbers like that?

DH: Kagame is a genius at lying, and he gets plenty of help from Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Howard Buffett, and his other powerful friends in the West. American universities also help perpetuate this big lie by inviting Kagame to speak about his so-called development miracle.

AG: In "Kagame's Killing Fields," you also wrote, "By 1997, Kagame had become the predominant occupying power in DRC [the Democratic Republic of the Congo], a vast country ninety times larger than Rwanda." How would you describe Rwanda's presence in DRC now?

DH: The current situation in DRC is ideal for Kagame, because the international community is not paying particular attention to the region and the country is caught up in his own struggle to remain in power past two terms. You can be sure that right now Kagame is arming militias to loot and destabilize DRC. The latest US State Department's human rights report on Rwanda says that almost all 400 disarmed M23 rebels held in Rwanda have vanished. Where are they? No doubt in DRC plundering resources and wreaking havoc.

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