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Chronology of Rwanda’s Closing Space

The following charts several key political developments between January 2016 and August 2017, including many threats to and violations of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly in Rwanda leading up to presidential elections on August 4, 2017. The list is not exhaustive. Human Rights Watch documented several other cases that are not included because the people concerned feared repercussions if their situation is publicized.

2016

January 1	President Paul Kagame announces his intention to run again.
January 29	John Williams Ntwali, one of Rwanda’s few investigative journalists, is arrested and accused of raping a minor. Judicial officials later changed the charge to indecent assault and eventually dropped the case for lack of evidence. Ntwali had been investigating several sensitive issues, including the death of Assinapol Rwigara, a businessman and father of would-be independent presidential candidate Diana Rwigara, whose candidacy was later rejected. Ntwali had been arrested several times before, and his website blocked by a government regulator, apparently because of his critical reporting.
February 3	Police confiscate the computers of <i>East African</i> newspaper journalists Ivan Mugisha and Moses Gahigi. They had been investigating cases of alleged tax evasion and corruption. The police briefly detained and questioned Mugisha.
February 8 – March 22	Local elections take place, at the level of the cell, district, and the city of Kigali – the capital. Several participants allege voter intimidation.
February 9	Ntwali is released.
February 29	The Rwandan government withdraws its declaration allowing

	<p>individuals to file complaints with the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on the grounds that the remedy was being exploited by convicted genocide fugitives. The court had been due to hear a complaint against Rwanda, brought by Victoire Ingabire, president of the Forces démocratiques unifiées (FDU)-Inkingi, an opposition party, serving a 15-years sentence after a flawed trial based partly on politically motivated charges.</p>
March 26	<p>Léonille Gasengayire, a FDU-Inkingi member, is arrested after visiting Ingabire in prison.</p>
March 26	<p>Illuminée Iragena, a nurse and FDU-Inkingi member, is reported missing. There has been no news of her since. People close to her fear she may have died in detention. Iragena is married to Martin Ntavuka, the FDU-Inkingi's former Kigali representative, who has been arrested at least twice since 2010 in connection with his political activities.</p>
March 29	<p>The police release Gasengayire, after beating and questioning her about a book she had attempted to bring to Ingabire in detention. She had also revealed that Iragena had been involved in trying to get the book to Ingabire.</p>
March 31	<p>A military court sentences Col. Tom Byabagamba, former head of the presidential guard, and retired Brig. Gen. Frank Rusagara, former secretary general of the Defense Ministry, to 21 and 20 years in prison respectively, including for inciting insurrection and tarnishing the government's image. The prosecution accused them of criticizing the government, alleging state involvement in assassinations of opponents, and complaining about foreign and economic policy. A prosecution witness said he was forced to testify against the two. Retired Sgt. François Kabayiza, found guilty of concealing evidence, is sentenced to five years. He said in court that military personnel had tortured him in detention.</p>
April 13	<p>An intelligence agent questions Epimack Kwokwo, former executive secretary of the Regional Human Rights League in the Great Lakes Region (Ligue des droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs, LDGL), a regional nongovernmental organization that works on human rights issues, for several hours about his legal status in Rwanda and his work for the organization.</p>

May 1	Bernard Ntaganda, an opposition leader, is arrested on suspicion that his party, the Social Party (PS)-Imberakuri, which has been unable to register, had wanted to organize a party meeting. He is charged with disobeying the enforcement of the law, organizing an illegal demonstration or public gathering, and illegal formation and leadership of a political organization, but is released the same day. Ntaganda had previously been arrested on June 24, 2010, and found guilty on February 11, 2011, of endangering national security, “divisionism” – inciting ethnic divisions – and attempting to organize demonstrations without official authorization. On appeal , the Supreme Court upheld the first two charges. He was released from prison in June 2014.
May 19	Caroline Buisman, Ingabire’s Dutch lawyer in her case at the African Court, is expelled from Rwanda. She had been in the country with a tourist visa because the immigration authorities had not granted her a regular visa. Over the years, Rwanda has expelled and refused entry to several international human rights lawyers, journalists, and researchers.
May 28	Immigration services order Kwokwo, LDGL’s former executive secretary and a Congolese national, to leave the country.
August 8	John Ndabarasa, a journalist at Sana Radio in Kigali, is reported missing. He is last seen in Kicukiro.
August 23	Gasengayire is rearrested and charged with inciting insurrection or disorder among the population, in relation to her opposition to the expropriation of local residents’ land and of promoting the FDU-Inkingi.
August 30	Police tell news media that they opened an investigation into Ndabarasa’s disappearance, after the Rwanda Media Commission, a media self-regulation body, informed them about the case.
September 18	Théophile Ntirutwa, Kigali representative of the FDU-Inkingi, is arrested, allegedly by military, in Nyarutarama, a Kigali suburb.
September 20	Ntirutwa is released, after being beaten and questioned about his membership in the FDU-Inkingi. Ntirutwa had previously complained several times to authorities about threats and harassment by local officials, including because of his opposition to the constitutional amendments.

Late September	A European Parliament delegation that visits Rwanda is denied access to visit Ingabire in detention.
October 8	The authorities arrest Joseph Nkusi, a Rwandan blogger deported from Norway, and question him about his political activities and his blog, which contains severe criticism of the Rwandan government, including unfounded theories about the genocide.
October 15	Robert Mugabe, editor of online media <i>Great Lakes Voice</i> , publishes an article alleging multiple kidnapping attempts in Kigali.
December 28	Mugabe says he was called in for questioning by the police and accused of treason and disobeying the law.
December 31	Shyaka Kanuma, a journalist and owner of <i>Rwanda Focus</i> , a Rwandan newspaper, is arrested, accused of tax evasion and fraud. Ten days earlier, he had sent several messages on WhatsApp announcing his intention to become an activist and saying he had been questioned by the head of the intelligence services. It is unclear whether his social media activities and his arrest and charges are linked.

2017

January 12, 18, and 19	Boniface Twarigimana, the vice-president of the FDU-Inkingi, is questioned by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Rwandan police about his alleged role in publishing information on extrajudicial killings. Human Rights Watch later reports on these killings and others in July.
January 31	Philippe Mpayimana arrives in Kigali from France and announces his intention to run as an independent presidential candidate. A pro-government online news outlet accuses him of minimizing the genocide, which Mpayimana denies.
February 14	Violette Uwamahoro, a Rwandan-British woman married to a member of the Rwanda National Congress (RNC), an opposition group in exile, visiting Rwanda to attend her father's funeral, is reported missing in Kigali.
March 1	Rwanda's withdrawal of its declaration allowing Rwandan individuals and non-governmental organizations access to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights comes into force.

March 3	The police announce that Uwamahoro is in government detention.
March 3 - 6	Two family members and an acquaintance of Uwamahoro are forcibly disappeared. One, a policeman, later resurfaces in court and testifies against Uwamahoro. The two others are released several weeks later.
March 6	Ndabarasa resurfaces in Kigali, more than six months after his disappearance in August 2016. He tells media that he had fled the country, but decided voluntarily to come back. The story raises suspicions.
March 13	The trial against Nkusi starts at the High Court in Kigali, which later declares itself incompetent to deal with the case.
March 13	Uwamahoro and a co-defendant are charged with revealing state secrets and offenses against the established government or the president. She is accused of inciting her co-accused to join the RNC and an armed movement outside of Rwanda.
March 19	The DGPR confirms Frank Habineza as the party's presidential candidate. The party had been able to register in August 2013 , a week before the deadline for the September parliamentary elections that year.
March 23	The High Court chamber of Rusizi acquits and releases Gasengayire, after seven months in pretrial detention. During the trial, several witnesses say they were threatened.
March 28	Uwamahoro is released on bail because of insufficient evidence to warrant her ongoing detention.
April 12	Uwamahoro returns to the United Kingdom.
May 1	The <i>Official Gazette</i> is published, which contains National Electoral Commission regulations (from April 4) on social media use by candidates during the campaign. The regulations state that any campaign wanting to post campaign messages on social media networks must first submit the material to the commission for approval 48 hours in advance. The regulations draw criticism from government officials and the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority.
May 3	Diana Rwigara announces her intention to run in the presidential election. Seventy-two hours later, nude photos of her are published on social media in an apparent attempt to humiliate and intimidate her. Rwigara said in international media that the

	photos were photoshopped.
June 1	The National Electoral Commission announces it will adjust its social media regulations based on public feedback.
June 14	Deadline for the applications from presidential candidates.
July 7	Rwigara, Gilbert Mwenedata, and Fred Sekikubo Barafinda are disqualified by the National Electoral Commission from participating in the elections.
July 14	Start of the electoral campaign.
August 3	Voting by the diaspora, in Rwandan embassies.
August 4	Presidential elections in Rwanda, with a 98.15 percent voter turnout. Kagame is re-elected with 98.79 percent of the vote. Mpayimana wins 0.73 percent and Habineza 0.48 percent of the vote.
August 18	Kagame is sworn in.