

Rwanda and RTLM Radio Media Effects

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Introduction

The Rwandan genocide has become a textbook case of the ways in which hate speech, especially the use of the spoken word on radio, can spark genocidal violence. A focus on radio is a consistent theme in most popular representations and in many academic analyses of the genocide. Moreover, the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found two radio journalists and a print journalist guilty of inciting genocide, the first international court to do so since the Nuremberg conviction of Julius Streicher. The received wisdom about media effects in Rwanda has had far-reaching implications, in particular about the potential dangers of private media during democratic transitions and about how media can foment extreme violence.

However, while there exist a number of powerful anecdotes and examples of how hate radio did spark violence in the Rwandan genocide, there has been little sustained social scientific analysis of radio media effects as part of an overall assessment of mobilization during the Rwandan genocide. Many of the standard methods and concepts of political communications empirical research—such as exposure, timing, frequency, reception, audience selectivity, and survey research—have found little to no application in the literature on Rwanda. This is the case despite the presence of often quite strong claims about media effects, found especially in film and popular writings. Such claims often assert or imply undifferentiated, direct, and massive media effects—effects that, if true, would be at odds with decades of political communications empirical research. Scholarship on Rwanda shows greater differentiation, but many observers suggest large-scale media effects.

In this paper, I report on an empirical study of radio media effects in mobilization for violence in the genocide.¹ The focus of the paper is the most infamous radio station in Rwanda operating before and during the genocide, Radio-Télévision Libre Mille Collines (RTLM), which was a semi-private station launched in 1993 (about a year before the genocide began). RTLM was founded and owned by political actors associated with hardliners within the then ruling regime and who are largely seen as responsible for organizing and implementing the genocide. RTLM has received the lion's share of commentary on radio media effects in Rwanda, and indeed RTLM was the focus of the ICTR investigation into hateful radio media.

In broad terms, the paper casts doubt on the conventional wisdom that RTLM broadcasts were directly responsible for the onset of violence throughout the country and for most mass mobilization during the genocide. While limited in important ways, as I

¹ Prepared for a workshop at the Committee on Conscience at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the paper is based on a condensed version of Scott Straus, "What Is the Relationship between Hate Radio and Violence? Rethinking Rwanda's 'Radio Machete,'" *Politics and Society* 35:4 (2007), pp. 609-637. I thank Allan Thompson, in particular, as well the other members of the workshop at the USHMM for incisive comments on an earlier version of this paper.

discuss below, existing data do not support the claims that RTLM radio was the principal vector by which the genocide spread and by which most ordinary Rwandans chose to participate in genocidal violence. That said, I find some evidence of conditional media effects. Radio in some instances coordinated elites, reinforced the connection between violence and authority, and catalyzed a small but significant number of individuals and incidents of violence. Situated in context—that is, seen alongside the primary dynamics of violence and mobilization that drove the genocide—I hypothesize that the effects had a marginal but real impact on the outcome.

The paper has implications beyond the Rwandan case. First, the paper emphasizes the importance of embedding any analysis of media effects alongside a broader discussion of the dynamics in which violence takes place. If the question is—do hateful media lead individuals to take part in genocidal violence—the analysis must examine the circumstances and processes in addition to media in which individuals make those decisions. Mobilization to commit mass violence is a complex social and political process, and focusing only on media effects risks unhelpfully isolating a single factor and simplifying how and why genocide takes place. Second, the paper emphasizes the importance of empirical analysis in evaluating media effects. While some anecdotes and hateful speech suggest powerful media effects in producing violence, it is the work of analysts to test as best as they are able whether the effects did occur and how widespread they were. Third, even if the topic is genocide, analysts should not neglect similar questions researched on other topics. In this case, the claims most often heard about media effects in Rwanda are way out in front of what decades of political communications research has concluded about media effects.

Let me conclude this section by saying what the paper is not doing. First, the paper is not exonerating, legally or morally, journalists found guilty of incitement; radio broadcasts were at times racist and openly inflammatory, and those responsible deserve punishment. Rather, the point is to evaluate systematically and empirically, using the tools of social science, the conventional wisdom about radio media effects in Rwanda. Second, the paper is not claiming radio had no impact. As I discuss in the next section, the paper researches RTLM, not all radio media, and the paper focuses on the genocide period, not the media conditioning that may have occurred well before the genocide. More importantly, I conclude radio did have an impact. In some locations, in particular in and around the capital Kigali, broadcasts of names and places did spur attacks on such locations. We may not know whether the attacks would have happened if the broadcasts did not take place, but the evidence does strongly indicate a direct link. Moreover, I find some evidence that situated in context radio helped consolidate the power of hardliners at the national and local levels who wished to promote genocidal violence. However, these are more measured claims than those commonly found in the commentary on the Rwandan genocide; the analysis suggests radio played a role in how and why genocide occurred in Rwanda, but the role was not nearly as great or as dominant as is commonly claimed.

Some Caveats

Before moving to the central empirical analysis in the paper, I want in this section to present some additional caveats. First, as noted, the paper focuses on RTLM,

which is the station that receives the most amount of attention on media's impact on genocidal violence in Rwanda. However, it is important to note that RTLM was not the only station in Rwanda during or before the genocide. Radio Rwanda, the state-run station, operated throughout the country; the Rwandan rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, operated its own station, Radio Muhabura. And many international stations, including BBC and VOA, could be heard in Rwanda at the time of the genocide. The memo does not focus directly on media effects from these other stations, and indeed further research would do well to examine effects of other radio broadcasts, in particular those of Radio Rwanda. Nonetheless, because RTLM is so dominant in the commentary on the Rwandan genocide, that is the focus of the paper here.

Second, the paper is limited by available data. As I discuss below, there is not—to my knowledge—a complete list of RTLM transcripts (though it would be great if such a database existed). There is not exact clarity on RTLM's broadcast range. We do not have an experimental study comparing a Rwandan treatment group that heard virulent messages of hate or orders to kill to a control group that did not. We do not have a longitudinal study that examines how radio media messages may have socially conditioned Rwandans over time. Such limitations should invite caution in terms of what is claimed about radio media effects—whether one is claiming radio had a massive effect on mobilization for genocide or whether one is challenging such an interpretation.

The paper responds to the data limitations in several ways. Principally, the paper triangulates the data that are available and seeks to draw informed conclusions by combining findings from these sources. That is, there is no single source that can answer how much weight radio media had. Rather, by comparing results from multiple, albeit imperfect sources, the paper seeks to develop an improved understanding of radio media effects. Second, the paper analyzes the implications of the claims about radio media effects in Rwanda, by looking at both political communications research in other contexts and by embedding the discussion of media effects in a broader discussion of mobilization during the Rwandan genocide. In short, limitations in available data invite some caution in interpretation, and such constraint should be recognized. Nonetheless, enough data exist to examine and improve on existing accounts of RTLM radio media effects.

Third, and finally, given available data, the inquiry focuses on two researchable questions: do RTLM radio broadcasts account for the onset of genocidal violence in Rwanda, and are RTLM radio broadcasts responsible for prompting ordinary citizens to become genocide perpetrators? These questions tap into whether RTLM had direct large-scale effects in sparking the 1994 genocide. However, the questions orient the study to the period when the genocide was occurring, not to media effects that may have occurred before the genocide.

Common Claims about Media Effects in Rwanda—and a Critique

In the literature on the Rwandan genocide, one finds varied claims about the effects of hate radio. The majority viewpoint is that radio had direct and large-scale effects on behavior. For example, Roméo Dallaire, the celebrated former United Nations force commander in Rwanda, claims, “In Rwanda the radio was akin to the voice of God, and if the radio called for violence, many Rwandans would respond, believing they were

being sanctioned to commit these actions.”² Another well-known author on Rwanda, Linda Melvern, writes that RTLM radio was “a propaganda weapon unlike any other.”³ She claims, “The influence of hate radio... must never be underestimated.”⁴ Similarly, Pulitzer-Prize winner Samantha Power claims, “Killers in Rwanda often carried a machete in one hand and a radio transistor in the other.”⁵ (The implication being radio delivered instructions, and then men attacked with machetes.) Such conceptualizations suggest a strong causal link between radio broadcasts and genocidal violence. So do expressions about RTLM such as “broadcasting genocide,” “radio genocide,”⁶ “death by radio,”⁷ the “radio dispatcher of murder,”⁸ “radio murder,”⁹ the “voice of genocide,”¹⁰ “a tool for mass murder,”¹¹ and “call to genocide.”¹² The most common sobriquet—“radio machete”¹³—directly equates RTLM with a violent weapon.

Some observers—a minority in the literature—hold more moderate views. For example, Rwandan analysts Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy and Charles Mironko argue that media had some effect, but that media alone cannot account for citizen mobilization during the genocide.¹⁴ After interviewing perpetrators in Rwanda, researcher Darryl Li concludes that RTLM communicated ideology and constituted “performances” that listeners subsequently reenacted. Radio routinized and legitimized violence,¹⁵ he argues; RTLM “may have been the key thing that helped transform the genocide from a state-led campaign into a nationwide project.”¹⁶ But Li distances himself from claims that radio had direct media effects capable of instantly causing violence. Richard Carver, a rare skeptic, faults most commentary on hate radio in Rwanda for failing to establish a causal relationship between radio propaganda and the violence.¹⁷ Similarly, Alan Kuperman

² Roméo Dallaire with Brent Beardsley, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (New York: Random House, 2004), 272.

³ Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 71.

⁴ Linda Melvern, “Radio Murder,” *Times Literary Supplement* (9 September 2005), 25.

⁵ Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide: Why the United States Let the Rwandan Genocide Happen,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 288, no. 2 (2001), 89.

⁶ Neil Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the Violation of Human Rights in Civil War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 42.

⁷ Francois Misse and Yves Jaumain, “Death by Radio,” *Index on Censorship* 4, no. 5 (1994): 72-74.

⁸ House Editorial, “Fanning Rwanda's Genocide,” *New York Times* (5 December 2003).

⁹ Melvern, “Radio Murder,” 25.

¹⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 205.

¹¹ Mary Kimani, “RTLM: The Medium that Became a Tool for Mass Murder,” in Thompson, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, 110-124.

¹² Alison Des Forges, “Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda, 1994,” in Thompson, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, 41-54.

¹³ The term is found through the ICTR Media Trial decision; see also International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, “Three Media Leaders Convicted of Genocide,” December 3, 2003, found at <http://69.94.11.53/ENGLISH/PRESSREL/2003/372.htm>.

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy, “Rwandan Private Print Media on the Eve of the Genocide,” in Allan Thompson, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, 86; Charles Mironko, “The Effect of RTLM's Rhetoric of Ethnic Hatred in Rural Rwanda,” in Thompson, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, 134.

¹⁵ Darryl Li, “Echoes of Violence: Considerations on Radio and Genocide in Rwanda,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 6, no. 1 (2004): 9-28.

¹⁶ Darryl Li, “Echoes of Violence,” *Dissent* 49, no. 1 (2002), 82.

¹⁷ Richard Carver, “Broadcasting and Political Transition: Rwanda and Beyond,” in Fardon and Furniss, *African Broadcast Cultures*, 188-197.

doubts that radio broadcasts were essential to the genocide outcome because military officials had separate communication networks and moderate Rwandans were not convinced by such broadcasts.¹⁸ Nonetheless, neither these moderate claims nor the stronger ones have been subjected to systematic empirical research, testing, and adjudication.

Although not always clearly specified, the literature indicates two prominent causal mechanisms. The first is that radio broadcasts implanted ideas in listeners that subsequently caused them to hate, dehumanize, and fear Tutsis. Radio is seen as the vector by which “the poison of racist propaganda is spread.” The second claim is that radio was a voice of authority and that, having issued orders to kill, Rwandans obeyed. The ICTR Media decision is a variation on these themes. The court found that RTLM broadcasts spread hatred and scorn, thereby (indirectly) paving the way for genocide. The court also found evidence of direct incitement, namely that RTLM named people and places and that those places and people were subsequently attacked.

There are at least four general concerns with these claims, some of which I have already indicated. The most important is that very few have been subjected to systematic empirical evaluation. The most common empirical method is content analysis of radio broadcasts, usually non-systematic content analysis. However, there are significant absences with regard to timing (whether broadcasts correlate to violence), audience selectivity (who responded to the broadcasts), density and consistency of hate messages, exposure (how many people were exposed to broadcasts), and reception (how people heard and understood messages).

A second concern is that strong claims found in the literature on Rwanda are at odds with mainstream political communication research. The Rwanda claims closely resemble a “hypodermic needle” model of media effects, whereby media purportedly injects ideas into the body politic and thereby has a direct impact. That view—and similar elementary models of propaganda stimulus and behavioral response—have been largely discredited after more than four decades of empirical research. Most contemporary political communication scholarship is on voting behavior and electoral outcomes. There is thus a very large gap between the effects claimed in mainstream political communication research and the effects commonly attributed to the Rwanda case.

A third concern in some of the literature on Rwanda is the assumption of a simplistic model of agency. With the exception of some researchers, notably Darryl Li and Charles Mironko—both of whom did interviews with listeners and perpetrators—most discussions of Rwandan media effects attribute little or no agency to listeners. The Rwandan public is often characterized as hearing a drumbeat of racist messages and directly internalizing them or as hearing orders to kill and heeding the command.

A fourth concern is that most discussions of media effects are not situated in a broader discussion of the dynamics of violence or of an assessment of rival explanations. None of these latter assumptions—minimal agency; an obedient, pliant, and hateful public; or uncomplicated dynamics of violence—should be dismissed out of hand. But to have validity, the claims require empirical substantiation.

¹⁸ Alan Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2001), 91.

Empirical Testing

In this section, I report the results of some empirical tests of the main claims found in the literature, which I operationalize into the two main researchable questions identified above.

Exposure

A central issue for assessing media effects is exposure: in this case, how many Rwandans had access to RTLM broadcasts? One way to answer the question is by looking at radio ownership rates. United Nations statistics indicate that less than 10% of the Rwandan population in 1994 owned radio transmitters, which is comparatively low for Africa. But the data are weak, and individuals could have listened collectively. A better measure is broadcast range: did RTLM reach areas where the genocide took place? The genocide itself was national. By contrast, while the data to evaluate RTLM's range are inconclusive, most indicators suggest the broadcast range was not national. Several studies claim RTLM had little reach in rural areas, even if Rwanda's population was 90-95% rural in the early 1990s. The ICTR decision does not address the question of broadcast range, but during the trial the prosecution produced a Rwandan radio technician who testified that RTLM had two transmitters. He claimed RTLM had a 100-watt transmitter that could reach the whole of the capital Kigali and a few areas south and east of Kigali, as well as a less powerful transmitter on Mount Muhe in western Rwanda that could reach some areas in that part of the country. If true, then RTLM would not have reached large segments of the country, including northern, northeastern, southern, and southwest areas, where genocide occurred.

Another way to consider broadcast range is through an analysis of topography and elevation. The assumption would be that hilly and mountainous areas have comparatively limited exposure to radio broadcasts. Here again, the evidence from Rwanda points to non-national range. Rwanda's nickname is the "land of a thousand hills," which reflects the country's mountainous and hilly terrain and large numbers of changes in elevation. Rwanda's topography thus makes the country a poor exemplar for mass effects from FM broadcast media. In short, the available evidence suggests a significant exposure gap between broadcast range and where the genocide occurred.

Timing

Another way to test media effects is through an analysis of timing, here operationalized as whether broadcast range corresponds to regional temporal patterns of violence. Even though the genocide occurred nationally, the violence started at different times in different regions. In some regions, violence started immediately after President Juvénal Habyarimana's assassination on April 6, 1994. In other regions, the violence took two weeks or longer to materialize. Moreover, in one commune (Giti) under government control, genocidal violence did not occur. The temporal variation is small, but nonetheless it represents different levels of local willingness to commit genocide and of resistance to it.

Since RTLTM's exact range is unknown, I compare four hypothetical broadcast models against a dataset of onset variation. The dataset includes onset estimates for about two-thirds of Rwanda's 145 communes that existed in 1994.¹⁹ The four hypothetical models of RTLTM's broadcast range are as follows: 1) national coverage, 2) urban coverage (including the capital Kigali and environs), 3) coverage as stipulated in the ICTR testimony (Kigali and environs and Mount Muhe and environs); and 4) coverage in Kigali plus flatter and lower-elevation regions.

All told, no hypothetical model clearly supports the conventional wisdom, and some models flatly contradict it. Under Model 1, the prediction would be that violence happened simultaneously countrywide. But Figure One (a map of onset dates, see appendix) shows that simultaneous onset was not the case. Under Model 2, the prediction would be that Kigali as well as proximate areas in Kigali Rural, Byumba, and Gitarama Prefectures would be early onset areas. However, that hypothetical broadcast range includes areas of early onset (around Kigali and southeast of Kigali), mid onset (parts of Byumba Prefecture), and late onset (parts of Gitarama Prefecture). Under Model 3, the hypothetical broadcast range includes primarily areas where genocide started earliest. However, the map also shows many uncovered areas where violence started earliest. Finally, under Model 4, the prediction would be that flatter and lower elevations areas would be areas of early onset. However, the opposite is true. The prefectures with the highest elevations (Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, and Kibuye) had early and mid onset. By contrast, the prefectures with the lowest elevations (areas south of Kigali, Gitarama, Butare, and Gikongoro) run the onset spectrum. There are similar results for changes in elevation. All 11 prefectures in Rwanda have at least 1500 meter spread in elevation.²⁰ However, the prefectures with the greatest height variance (Gisenyi, Ruhengeri, and Kibuye) are areas where violence started earliest.

A related timing issue is whether violence tended to happen when broadcasts tended to air. In some cases, the answer to the question is "yes." There are examples where RTLTM broadcast specific names and places, which were followed by attacks on those individuals and locations. However, the cases comprise a tiny fraction of the total violence and appear to be limited to the capital and its environs. The ICTR Media Trial decision, for example, lists about 10 instances. The ICTR may not have discovered or reported all such incidents, but even if the number was increased 20-fold to 200, the percentage of attacks would be small compared to the total numbers of attacks and murders during the genocide, which left at least 500,000 dead countrywide.

With regard to general trends of broadcasts and violence, the existing data show a limited temporal relationship at best. Most violence during the genocide happened in April (see Figure Two). For simplicity, I categorize the genocide into two periods: a "high genocide" period (between April 6th and May 7th) and a "low genocide" period (between May 8th and early July).

¹⁹ For greater details on onset dates in the dataset and their sources, see Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), Appendix Table 2.1, 249-255.

²⁰ The noted ranges are (from lowest to highest averages, measured in 500m increments): 500-2000m (Kibungo); 1000-2500m (Butare, Gikongoro, Gitarama, Cyangugu, and Byumba); 1000-3000 (Kibuye); 1000-4500 (Gisenyi and Ruhengeri). The analysis is based on elevations reported in International Travel Maps, "Rwanda-Burundi," Map # 669, 1998.

When then did most inflammatory broadcasts take place? The ICTR decision lists relatively few specific broadcasts from the high genocide period, and those that are listed focus on the Kigali area. The broadcasts provide evidence of direct media effects, especially where attacks followed the broadcasting of a name or location. At the same time, the broadcasts amount to a handful of examples from the high genocide period, and they focus on the capital Kigali. The ICTR decision cites many other broadcasts in the decision, but they date from May 13th onwards. The later broadcasts are indeed consistently inflammatory. Other sources show similar patterns. As Mary Kimani concludes, RTLM broadcasts appear to become more extreme during the later stages of the genocide, as the government lost ground to the rebels.²¹ However, by mid-May most killing of Tutsi civilians had already taken place. Citing mid-May or later broadcasts is weak evidence to support the hypothesis that broadcasts drove the violence.

Content Analysis

Another way to consider media effects is to examine the content of entire RTLM transcripts systematically. The ICTR produced transcripts of 34 distinct broadcasts, which were translated from Kinyarwanda to French and English. The transcripts include nine that aired before the genocide, four that aired during the high genocide period, ten that aired during the low genocide period, and eleven that are undated. In total, the transcripts amount to 973 pages and an estimated 2070 minutes of airtime. To conduct the quantitative content analysis, I selected five indicators of inflammatory broadcasts: 1) calls to be “vigilant”; 2) calls to “fight” or “kill”; 3) calls to “defend” the nation or themselves; 4) mention of the word “exterminate”; and 5) mention of the word “*inyenzi*” (or cockroach—the derogatory term for Tutsi rebels and Tutsi civilians). The results are fairly consistent with the pattern seen so far. During the high genocide period, there are some hateful and inciting messages, but they are not overwhelmingly frequent. During the low genocide period, the inflammatory broadcasts are more frequent and virulent, but again citing broadcasts from mid-May onwards is weak evidence to show that radio broadcasts sowed violence.

Reception

It is possible that RTLM aired more virulent broadcasts during key periods in the genocide, but that the broadcasts were not recorded, have since disappeared, or are otherwise inaccessible. Thus, another way to triangulate evidence is through interviews: do those who took part in the genocide say that radio influenced them to commit violence? To answer the question, I draw on results from a survey of 210 sentenced and self-confessed perpetrators, who were sampled randomly in 15 prisons nationwide in 2002. The results are consistent with the thread of analysis so far: radio broadcasts had an influence—it catalyzed some hard-line individuals—but most respondents claim radio was not the primary reason that they joined attacks. Most commonly, individuals say they chose to participate in the genocide after face-to-face solicitation, usually from an authority, elite figure, or a group of violent men.

²¹ Kimani, “RTLM: The Medium,” 122.

The general pattern of mobilization at the local level reported by respondents is that elites and young toughs formed a core of violence. They then traversed their communities, recruiting a large number of Hutu men to participate in manhunts of Tutsis or to participate in other forms of “self-defense,” such as manning roadblocks. The recruiting most often was done house-to-house, at markets or rural commercial centers, at rural bars, or at meetings called by local authorities. Radio, in short, was not the principal reason why men entered violence; rather, mobilization was locally organized and face-to-face. Those results are consistent with other extended, interview-based studies of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda.

In the survey, respondents claimed that they participated in the violence for various reasons. The stated motivations included intra-ethnic coercion and intimidation, obedience, wartime fear, a desire for revenge, anger, a desire to loot or gain land, and interpersonal rivalries, among other factors. Asked to name the most important reason why they participated, not one respondent said radio broadcasts (though many claimed that they participated because “the authorities” instructed them to). Asked to name the most important reason why the genocide happened, not one respondent cited radio broadcasts. Close-ended questions in the survey reveal much the same. The most direct question about radio media effects put to respondents was: “Did the radio lead you to take part in the attacks?” About 85% of respondents said “no;” 15% said “yes” (N=176). About 52% of respondents said they owned a radio (N=157).

Another set of tests concerns incitement, which is operationalized here as whether respondents say radio led them to participate in the violence. The analyses indicate that when regressed on incitement, radio ownership and RTLTM listening are both statistically significant. Age is too: younger respondents were more likely to say that radio incited them. In a multivariate context with all three variables, both age and RTLTM listening remain statistically significant. Radio incitement is also statistically significant when regressed on degree of participation: among the perpetrators in the sample, those who say radio incited them were more likely to commit more violence and to be leaders of the killing than those who said radio did not incite them. In a multivariate context, with incitement, RTLTM listening, radio ownership, and a variable for combined motivation (ranging from claims of intimidation, to material incentives, to wartime anger), only incitement and motivation remain statistically significant with degree of participation as the dependent variable.

What do the regression results mean? For the minority of perpetrators in the survey who owned a radio and who listened to RTLTM, there is a correlation with holding negative and racist views of Tutsis (results not discussed here). In addition, there is evidence that those perpetrators who claimed radio incited them committed more violence than perpetrators who did not. The causal arrows remain unclear. Those who listened to RTLTM may have been attracted to the station because of their racist views and, similarly, those who say they were incited by radio may have already been most predisposed to committing the most violence. But, at a minimum, the regression results provide plausible evidence that RTLTM reinforced racist attitudes and on the margins catalyzed the most violent perpetrators. Radio, in short, was not the primary determinant of participation, but radio may have reinforced violence-supportive beliefs among a minority of perpetrators and radio may have helped mobilize or empower a few key local leaders of violence.

In qualitative results of interviews with perpetrators who said that radio was not responsible for their taking part in the genocide, respondents said broadcasts were intended for the authorities. In that sense, radio broadcasts served as a coordinating device and as a tool that strengthened the hand of elites who advocated violence. But the broadcasts were not the reason why the respondents participated. Among those who said radio did incite them (a minority), they said broadcasts communicated the intent and instructions of authorities; reinforced messages that authorities communicated in person; and framed the political crisis: broadcasts categorized Tutsis as “the enemy” or as “*inyenzi*.” In these accounts—again a minority in the survey of 210 perpetrators—radio is not the only or even the primary cause of onset or mobilization. Rather, radio broadcasts had more marginal and conditional effects. Radio communicated who had power, what “authorities” supposedly wanted, and how to think about the crisis.

Conclusion

The evidence presented above consistently contradicts the conventional wisdom. There appears to be a substantial gap between RTLM’s broadcast range and where genocidal violence took place; there is little positive and much negative evidence that broadcast range corresponds to where violence started earliest in different regions; the bulk of violence appears to have occurred before the most inflammatory broadcasts aired; most perpetrators in a survey say face-to-face mobilization, not radio, led them to join attacks; and, when asked, no respondent identified radio as the primary determinant of the genocide. Each piece of evidence has limits. RTLM’s range is not conclusively known; a full transcript record of RTLM broadcasts does not exist; convicted perpetrators may not tell the truth. But together, the evidence amounts to a persuasive refutation of the commonly-held beliefs that radio had widespread, direct effects and that hate radio was the primary driver of the genocide and participation in it.

That said, the evidence suggests radio had some marginal and conditional effects. Radio instigated a limited number of acts of violence, reinforced racist views, catalyzed some key actors, coordinated elites, signaled power and belligerence, and bolstered local messages of violence. Based on these findings, it is plausible to hypothesize that in context radio empowered those advocating violence and framed political action, which had the overall effects of helping the hardliners assert dominance. Radio media effects were not direct, undifferentiated, or massive; rather, they were marginal yet important in consolidating an extremist position.

If radio was not the primary catalyst, how then did the Rwandan genocide happen and happen so quickly? Answering that question is not the focus here. Nonetheless, field research conducted in Rwanda yielded three primary factors: an intense civil war following a presidential assassination, a state with strong local mobilizational capacity, and a pronounced history of ethnic categorization.²²

The unfolding of the genocide was not mechanical. In early April, immediately after the president’s assassination and the renewed onset of civil war, hardliners within the military and ruling political party engineered control of the central state. They set out to eliminate their immediate political rivals and proceeded to advocate violence against the Tutsi minority. They did so through military channels, through fanning out to the

²² For greater details, please see Straus, *The Order of Genocide*.

countryside, and, on occasion, through calls on the radio for vigilance and citizen participation in the war. Once the violence started, it had momentum. In rural areas, the crisis triggered different responses. In areas with strong support for the deceased president and ruling party, coalitions of local hardliners quickly formed and initiated violence against Tutsi civilians. In other areas, moderates sought to prevent violence from starting. Over time, however, in all areas not yet lost to rebels, hardliners succeeded in undermining moderates, eventually consolidating control. Once they did, those hardliners—usually local authorities and violent young men—would mobilize a large number of ordinary Hutu citizens to commit violence. Communities in turn switched from a period of heightened anxiety and confusion due to the president's assassination and resumption of civil war to a period of participatory and exterminatory violence.

To the extent radio mattered, it had a second-order impact. In the capital, RTLM's broadcasting of names and locations, as well as its generally hostile tone, inspired attacks and were a factor in the hardliners' ability to assert dominance. But radio was not the only reason that Hutu hardliners advocating genocide won the upper hand. Most importantly, the hardliners controlled the balance of power among Hutus in the country; they controlled key military units and militia. Moreover, the civil war and advance of rebels undermined moderates and moderate calls for peace. By broadcasting a belligerent and jingoistic tone and catalyzing acts of violence, RTLM signaled that hardliners had power and reinforced hardliners' messages. Locally, mobilization ultimately was interpersonal and face-to-face. But in reinforcing the hardliners' positions, signaling who had power, and setting a tone of war and belligerence, radio narrowed the choices individuals believed they had.

The conceptions of media effects hypothesized here—of empowering hardliners, reinforcing beliefs, and framing public choice—point to real impacts. Hate radio constituted one dimension by which hardliners achieved dominance and persuaded individuals to join attacks against Tutsi civilians. But the conceptualized effects are more nuanced and conditional than the conventional wisdom would have. They emphasize the importance of context, and they are embedded alongside discussion of the broader dynamics of mobilization and violence. Moreover, the claims avoid what the article has shown to be the empirically untenable notion that radio media had widespread effects and were a primary determinant of violence. The claims are also consistent with cumulative findings in the political communications field, which stress agenda setting, elite persuasion, and marginal media impacts. Hate radio mattered in Rwanda, but the dynamics of genocide are considerably more complex than the popular image of “radio machete” suggests.

FIGURE ONE: GENOCIDE ONSET BY REGION

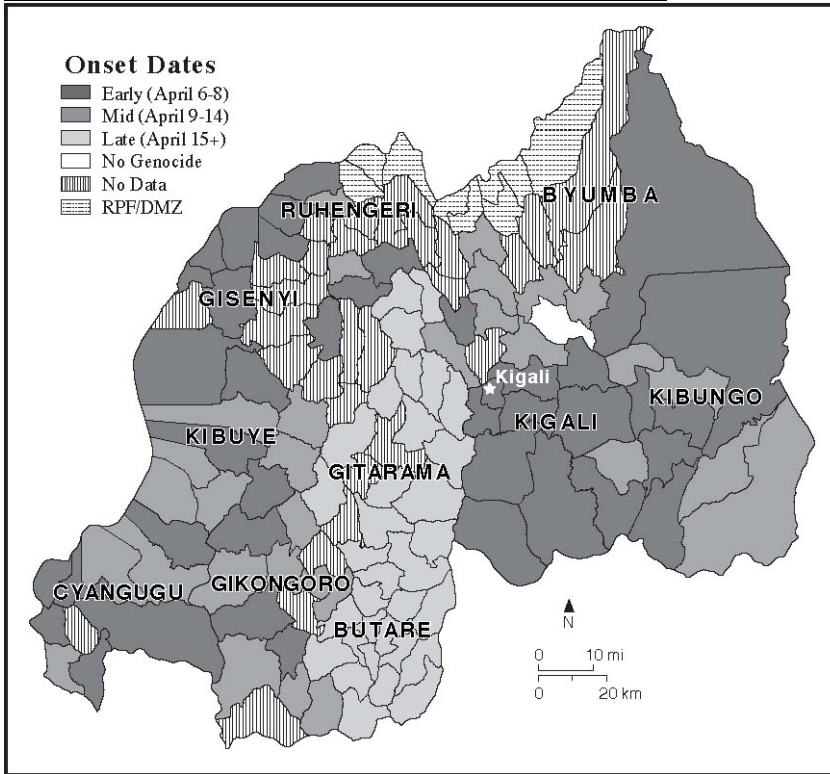


FIGURE TWO: TIMING OF VIOLENCE IN KIBUYE PREFECTURE

