

Research Article

French Parliamentary Oversight of the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda

David Stefanelly*

School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, Paris, France

Abstract

This article examines the French National Assembly's reaction to the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, before, during, and after the massacre, and how this dramatic event reveals the nature of the institutions of the Fifth Republic, "a presidentialized parliamentary regime," as well as their dysfunctions. The cooperation agreements signed between France and Rwanda in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s generated little parliamentary debate. French deputies did, however, question ministers both orally and in writing in the early 1990s, as France became militarily involved. But they encountered obstacles related to the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and presidential practices. The head of the executive branch has enjoyed autonomy of action in military and diplomatic matters since General de Gaulle. Seemingly powerless, they nevertheless acted in the face of the genocide of the Tutsi (April-July 1994). They addressed written and oral questions to the ministers. Most sessions in the National Assembly provide an opportunity for members of both the majority and the opposition to question ministers about the situation in Rwanda during the question period in Parliament. Following the genocide, parliamentarians exercised multifaceted oversight of France, utilizing the full range of powers granted to them by the Constitution. They submitted written and oral questions to the government on various post-genocide issues up until the fifteenth legislature. In 1998, members of parliament employed a new approach that renewed their oversight role: the fact-finding mission on Rwanda. Finally, the issue of the genocide against the Tutsi was addressed through hearings, a standard method for gathering information for the legislative branch. Political figures and experts can be heard by parliamentary committees that deem their testimony valuable. Ultimately, French members of parliament acted within the framework defined by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, without being able to influence the policies of the Élysée Palace before or after 1994. The limitations of their actions reflect the dysfunctions of the French presidential parliamentary system. This is the conclusion reached by the 1998 fact-finding mission and the Duclert report presented in 2021. This explains the new directions given to parliamentary oversight in the 21st century.

Keywords

Genocide, Rwanda, French National Assembly, Fifth Republic

*Corresponding author: david.stefanelly@neuf.fr (David Stefanelly)

Received: 31 October 2025; **Accepted:** 10 December 2025; **Published:** 19 January 2026



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2026. Published by Science Publishing Group. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

Between April and July 1994, between 800,000 and one million Tutsi were exterminated by Hutus in Rwanda. The Duclert report questions the role of the institutions of the Fifth Republic and the means by which the National Assembly can oversee the executive branch. Given the "reserved domain" of the President of the Republic, members of parliament were absent from the cooperation agreements signed by France with Rwanda between the 1960s and 1980s. They frequently questioned the executive branch in the early 1990s without being able to influence its policies. They were active but ultimately powerless during the genocide against the Tutsi. After 1994, they undertook a multifaceted approach and utilized the full range of oversight mechanisms granted by the Constitution. They questioned officials, conducted an information-gathering mission, and held hearings. They acted within the limits authorized by the Constitution without having the power to influence the policies of the Élysée Palace. These constitutional constraints illustrate the dysfunctions of the "presidentialized" parliamentary system, but also the establishment of a "republican monarchy" in line with the evolution of Western democracies.

The exterminated Tutsi represented approximately 15% of Rwanda's population [1]. Three-quarters of the Tutsi population perished. The genocide, long planned, began on the very day of the assassination of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, on April 6, 1994. It lasted approximately 100 days and was interrupted by the advance of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which seized control of the country in mid-July 1994. France and then the UN eventually intervened (Operation Turquoise and UNAMIR II), but too late. Tutsi continued to be persecuted and killed sporadically until 1996 and were victims of attacks in refugee camps in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). But the logic of genocide is part of a broader temporality.

Rwanda, a small, rural, and mountainous country in East Africa with a population of seven million, was then plunged into a civil war that, since 1990, had pitted the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), founded by Tutsi exiles in the late 1980s, against the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), responsible for the genocide. A former Belgian colony, the country had lived in a state of perpetual conflict since its independence in 1960. The Hutu, previously relegated to subordinate positions by the Belgian colonizers, seized power and sought revenge against the Tutsi, who had been favored by the colonial power. The Rwandan army, serving the Hutu regime, contributed to indoctrinating the population with hatred against the Tutsi and disseminating racist rhetoric against them [2].

The genocide against the Tutsi was a mass massacre that appeared to be largely improvised in its methods. It was a "genocide in the village" [3]. It involved a large number of actors, from those within the state (government, local administrations, army, gendarmes) and political parties to the civil-

ian population (militias, neighbors, families). It was also characterized by extreme violence and cruelty inflicted on the victims before and during their execution.

France's actions, beginning with the signing of a "Friendship and Cooperation Agreement" with newly independent Rwanda on October 20, 1962, have become the subject of an intense "war of memory." On one side, former military personnel and close associates of President François Mitterrand seek to defend France's honor and its role in Rwanda. On the other, journalists, activists, and former military personnel denounce "Françafrique" (France's neocolonial influence in Africa) and attempt to shed light on the realities of French involvement. According to Florent Piton, "this war of memories, waged in editorials and the media, has also spilled onto the political stage."

In 2019, while declining to participate in the ceremonies commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the genocide in Kigali, French President Emmanuel Macron appointed a fifteen-member commission, chaired by Vincent Duclert and composed of historians, legal experts, and other prominent figures, to access French state archives relating to Rwanda and the genocide against the Tutsi. This constituted "significant privileges" [4] under the French Heritage Code, the 2008 law on access periods, and the classification procedure. The commission submitted an interim report to the French president in April 2020, detailing its methodology and resources [5]. She submitted her final report on March 26, 2021, concluding that there was "a series of serious and overwhelming responsibilities" [6] within the French state, but did not find complicity in genocide. She questioned the role of the institutions of the Fifth Republic: the executive branch (the Presidency of the Republic, the General Secretariat of the Élysée Palace, the Private Military Staff, the Africa Unit, the Prime Minister, and the ministries) and the legislative branch (the National Assembly and the Senate), whose "abuses" she denounced [7]. Her report was based on nearly 8,000 documents, including handwritten notes, diplomatic cables, analyses by advisors, and summaries of restricted defense councils, which have now been declassified and made available to researchers and the general public by a ministerial decree published in the Official Journal on April 7, 2021. According to historian Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, this work does not offer new perspectives, but its harsh tone toward the French authorities opens a breach in this French cover-up [8]. This report allows historians to access new sources which, when cross-referenced with parliamentary websites, press articles and the work of specialists, enable the study of a long-neglected subject: the attitude of French political leaders toward the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. We will examine more specifically how the French Parliament responded to the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda before, during, and after the massacre. To what extent did the actions of French deputies fall within the constraints of the

Constitution of the Fifth Republic, a "presidentialized parliamentary system" that prevented them from exercising an effective counterweight to the executive branch?

Analysis of the Duclerc report, consultation of previously inaccessible archives, combined with the work of members of parliament available on the National Assembly website, has allowed us to observe that French Members of Parliament were not inactive in the face of the dramatic events unfolding in Rwanda from the early 1990s, during the genocide and afterward. Members of both the majority and the opposition frequently questioned the executive branch, both orally and in writing, conducted hearings, and established an information commission. Despite this activity, they never succeeded in influencing the course of French policy in Rwanda. Their undeniable actions remained within the bounds of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and did not allow them to exert any real counterweight to the government.

2. Main Contents

2.1. Members of Parliament Absent from Cooperation Agreements in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s

Rwanda's independence on July 1, 1962, provided France with an opportunity to sign "limited-scope agreements" [7] under the impetus of successive Presidents of the Republic. The presidency of General de Gaulle (1958-1969) saw the signing of a document declaring the two countries united "by the bonds of constant friendship, respecting their respective sovereignty and independence" [9]. This led to the implementation of civilian cooperation, beginning on December 4 of the same year, in the economic, cultural, and broadcasting sectors.

Another stage occurred during Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's seven-year term (1974-1981) and manifested itself in the implementation of military cooperation between Rwanda and France. The relations established between the French president and his Rwandan counterpart, Juvénal Habyarimana, who had come to power following a coup d'état in July 1973, led to the formalization, on July 18, 1975, of a military assistance agreement limited to the training and instruction of the Rwandan gendarmerie. Article 1 reads as follows: "The Government of the French Republic shall make available to the government the French military personnel whose assistance is necessary for the organization and training of the Rwandan gendarmerie." Articles 2 and 3 define the terms of employment for French military personnel placed at the disposal of the Rwandan government. French military advisors must not

intervene in Rwanda's internal political and military affairs except in the context of external aggression. However, contrary to usual practice, the text was not published in the Official Journal and falls under the prerogatives of the Head of State. Parliament is therefore not involved.

The presidency of François Mitterrand (1981-1995) strengthened this military cooperation. Changes were made to the 1975 agreement. Article 3 was amended to allow French personnel to "serve in Rwandan uniform, with their existing rank or, where applicable, its equivalent within the Rwandan armed forces." A second change authorized the participation of French aid workers "in any preparation or execution of a military operation, or in maintaining or restoring order or legality" according to Vincent Duclerc. The close "President-to-President" relationship between François Mitterrand and Juvénal Habyarimana was the primary factor in this and precluded any interference from the legislative branch. As under his predecessors, French Members of Parliament are not conducting any parliamentary work on these cooperation agreements with Rwanda. However, the French military intervention in the early 1990s did prompt action from the national representatives.

2.2. Members of Parliament Questioning the Executive Branch in the Early 1990s

The early 1990s were marked by the Rwandan Patriotic Front's attack from neighboring Uganda, which led to France's military intervention in October 1990 alongside the Rwandan government as part of Operation *Norôit*. Officially intended to protect French nationals, this operation was launched despite the recurring violence perpetrated against the Tutsi. Faced with this succession of Rwandan crises, parliamentarians were "in action" [9].

Sixteen members of parliament submitted written questions, a practice permitted since the beginning of the 20th century, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the situation in Rwanda and the French military presence there¹. On November 25, 1991, for example, the socialist Philippe Bassinet wrote to Roland Dumas, Minister of Foreign Affairs since May 1988, asking him whether "the intervention of French troops since October 1, 1990" and whether "French aid in general is accompanied by conditions of democratic openness." On March 9, 1992, a ministerial response was sent to him, presenting an encouraging assessment of the French presence because, "since October 1, 1990, France has spared no effort to encourage the Rwandan authorities to pursue a policy of dialogue and to persevere along the path of democratic opening and respect for human rights" [10] and because the first results, such as the establishment of a multi-party system, were

¹ Jean Proveux (Indre-et-Loire), Claude Miqueu (Hautes-Pyrénées), Jacques Floch (Loire-Atlantique), Pierre Brana (Gironde), and Philippe Bassinet (Hauts-de-Seine) are members of the Socialist Party and the parliamentary majority. Daniel Colliard (Seine-Maritime), Théo Vial-Massat (Loire), Jean-Pierre Brard (Seine-Saint-Denis), and André Duromea (Seine-Maritime) sit with the Communist Party

group. The others belong to the right-wing opposition, such as the Union of the Centre like Jean-Paul Fuchs (Haut-Rhin), the Union for French Democracy like Yann Piat (Var), Gilles de Robien (Somme) or the Rally for the Republic like Étienne Pinte (Yvelines), Léonard Gérard (Meurthe-et-Moselle), Christian Estrosi (Alpes-Maritimes), Alain Cousin (Manche).

emerging. The minister's explanations sent to the members of parliament who questioned him were generally "identical and sometimes soothing" [7].

Members of Parliament committed to the issue, such as the Socialist Alain Vivien (Seine-et-Marne), can send letters to ministers. Some compile dossiers to accompany their letters. This is the approach chosen by Socialist MPs André Borel (Vaucluse), Jean-Michel Belorgey (Allier), chairman of the National Assembly's Committee on Cultural, Family, and Social Affairs, and Jean Auroux (Loire), group leader, as well as RPR MP Roland Nungesser (Val-de-Marne) and UDF MP Georges Colombier (Isère). On November 27, 1991, Jean-Michel Belorgey wrote to Roland Dumas. He relies on the written appeal sent by the Banyarwanda association on January 26, 1991, which asks him to "do everything in [his] power to avoid the massacre of thousands of [their] innocent compatriots" and fears "that, by the prolonged presence of French legionnaires in Kigali, the name of France risks being associated with the atrocities committed by the increasingly repressive regime of President Juvénal Habyarimana" [11]. He also relays the letter, dated February 1, 1991, addressed to him by the Rwandan Community of France. This letter criticizes the French military presence in Kigali, which it considers "objective support for the regime in power, while the latter continues to blatantly violate human rights," denounces "the racism and hate speech against the Tutsi ethnic group" published in the pro-government bi-monthly *Kangura*, and calls on the French government to "take urgent action in the form of a written question, inviting it to clarify its position" [11]. Several notes and articles supplement the dossier. Roland Dumas's response in February 1992 is similar to the one addressed to Philippe Bassinet [12] and "evades the substantive questions raised by MP Belorgey", according to the Duclert Commission report.

François Mitterrand can invoke Article 15 of the Constitution, according to which the President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces and decides on the deployment of French forces in military operations. He enjoys autonomy of action in military and diplomatic matters, in accordance with the practice established by General de Gaulle under the Fifth Republic and the "autocratic drift" [13] of the republican monarch legitimized by universal suffrage. Although they question the government in accordance with the powers conferred upon them by the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, French deputies do not have the means to influence the policy carried out at the highest level of the State. Their powerlessness is evident during the genocide.

2.3. Powerless but Active Members of Parliament in the Face of the Genocide Against the Tutsi (April-July 1994)

In the face of the genocide against the Tutsi, the Duclert report notes that "discreet parliamentarians do not seem to grasp the gravity of what is happening in Rwanda". Few written questions were addressed to the cohabitation government

between April and July 1994. Only two members of parliament were active. On April 28, 1994, Hubert Falco (Var), a member of the UDF and the center, expressed concern about "human rights violations perpetrated in the fifteen countries [including Rwanda] cited in a recent Amnesty International document" and "asked what measures and actions the government could take to improve respect for human rights in these states" [14]. At the end of May, Gilles de Robien questioned Alain Juppé, Minister of Foreign Affairs since March 1993, about "the daily tragedy experienced by the Rwandan people," about "a horrifying reality that translates (...) into hundreds of thousands of deaths and refugees and into fighting of unprecedented violence," about "the shame" that taints a powerless international community, and about the initiatives of France, which "has fortunately distanced itself from this collective abdication." The ministerial response condemned the ongoing genocide, explained the deployment of soldiers as part of Operation Turquoise despite divisions within the majority on this issue [15], called for the intervention of the international community, and advocated for the implementation of a diplomatic process [16].

Although it represents only one topic among many, the fate of Rwanda is addressed during certain parliamentary sessions through oral questions posed to the Balladur government. Originating under the July Monarchy, this practice was enshrined in the 1958 Constitution and governed by the rules of procedure of the assemblies. Article 48 of the Constitution stipulates that "at least one session per week (...) is reserved as a priority for questions from members of Parliament and answers from the Government." Since 1974, parliamentarians have been able to ask topical questions that are not published in advance, while answers must not exceed four to six minutes in both the National Assembly and the Senate, thus hindering substantive debate. During the first sitting on April 28, 1994, Marc Le Fur (Côtes-d'Armor), a member of the RPR, the party that had held a majority in the National Assembly since the March 1993 legislative elections, spoke on the security of orphanages in Rwanda during the oral question period without debate. The Speaker of the National Assembly read aloud question number 319 posed by the deputy on this subject. The deputy then took the floor to explain his request and address more generally the events unfolding in Rwanda, the role of the international community, and the role of France. Alain Juppé responded to Marc Le Fur and reassured him about the fate of the Nyundo orphanage and the children residing there. He was less optimistic about the situation in the country, which was gripped by extreme violence, but he did not yet use the term genocide. He encouraged international intervention to compel the warring parties to reach an agreement and expressed support for France's involvement in humanitarian aid [17].

Most sessions at the National Assembly provide an opportunity for members of both the majority and the opposition to question ministers about the situation in Rwanda during the

questions posed by each parliamentary group to the government². On April 13, 1994, Jean-Claude Lenoir, observing that "Rwanda is ablaze and the dead number in the thousands" despite the intervention of French paratroopers, and deploring "this new African tragedy," addressed the ministers to applause from the benches of the UDF and Centre groups: "What does the government intend to do to awaken the conscience of the major powers, particularly those of the United Nations Security Council?" The Minister of Cooperation, Michel Rousin, responded, justifying France's actions in Rwanda and within the international community while offering an ethnic interpretation of the ongoing conflict [18]. His remarks elicited enthusiastic approval from the benches of the parliamentary majority.

On May 18, 1994, following a question posed by Charles Millon, Alain Juppé again sought to explain the action taken by France and described, for the first time in the chamber, the massacres perpetrated in Rwanda as "genocide" while wishing for a resumption of the "Arusha process" [19].

On June 22, 1994, Prime Minister Édouard Balladur took advantage of a question from Pierre-André Wiltzer regarding Operation Turquoise to detail the four principles governing the French intervention in Rwanda. The end of his speech addressed the criticism this military operation might provoke among some members of parliament but elicited demonstrations of support from the parliamentary majority [20]. In the context of cohabitation, Édouard Balladur, who had been at the head of the government since March 29, 1993, intended to assert himself in military and diplomatic matters, which in practice were reserved for the President of the Republic, and to obtain a sharing of authority. He relied on Article 20 of the Constitution, which stipulates that "the government determines and conducts the policy of the Nation" and "has at its disposal the Administration and the armed forces," and Article 35, according to which "the Government informs Parliament of its decision to deploy armed forces abroad, no later than three days after the start of the intervention." A week later, on June 29, Jacques Brunhes, a communist member of the parliamentary opposition, described Operation Turquoise as a "serious act," deploring the lack of parliamentary debate and the fact that Parliament was being "excluded from a pluralistic debate, in keeping with republican tradition, on a major current issue." He denounced this situation all the more strongly as he expressed reservations about the French intervention and hoped that "France would urgently take initiatives to ensure that increased humanitarian action by the OAU and the UN replaces that of France as quickly as possible." He observed a "crisis within the parliamentary institution" and the deterioration of its image in the public eye. Supported by the communist group and some socialists, he requested "a statement to the Assembly on this subject, followed by a debate." The

Minister Delegate for European Affairs, Alain Lamassoure, responded to him. He recalled the clarification made by the Prime Minister on June 22nd and the government's desire to "better involve the Assembly in monitoring this operation" [21] before reiterating the four principles that guided it. Once again, the parliamentary majority expressed its assent at the end of his speech. Despite the questions they raised, French MPs had no influence on the decisions made by the executive branch or on the tragic events in Rwanda. After the genocide, however, their activity became more significant.

2.4. Attempts at Multifaceted Control of Members of Parliament After July 1994

After July 1994, Parliament addressed the issue of the genocide committed against the Tutsi and its consequences in various ways. It used the range of powers granted to it by the Constitution to attempt to conduct parliamentary oversight.

2.4.1. Questions

Numerous parliamentary questions are put to the government during the successive legislative sessions up to 2022. Two members of parliament, Philippe Bonnet Carrère (Tarn), a member of the RPR party and part of the parliamentary majority, and Michel Fromet, who sat in the opposition, submitted written questions to the government. In early August 1994, Bonnet Carrère expressed concern about accusations leveled against France by NGOs regarding the military intervention in Rwanda. He described these "recent statements" as "hurtful," "especially in light of the efforts made to address humanitarian concerns" [22]. A month later, Fromet took the opportunity to echo the same criticisms, seeking to understand the purpose of French military assistance that he alleged had enabled the training of militias responsible for massacres. The Minister of Defence responded in November to reiterate the terms of the military assistance agreement signed in 1975 and to refute the accusations [23].

Until the end of the tenth legislature in 1997, thirty-two members of parliament submitted written questions to the government on the various challenges of the post-genocide period. On February 6, 1995, Michel Fromet expressed concern about Rwandans obtaining visas to join family members or friends who had taken refuge in France [24]. In April 1995, Jacques Pélissard (Jura), a member of the RPR party, "drew the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the extremely worrying human rights situation in Rwanda" [25]. On July 10, 1995, the Socialist Serge Janquin (Pas-de-Calais) raised concerns about the possible collusion between the French army and the Rwandan armed forces responsible for the genocide against the Tutsi. Based on investigations broadcast on British television, he fears "unacceptable support from

2 Jean-Claude Lenoir (Orne), elected without a label, and Éric Deligné (Loiret), a member of the RPR, did so on April 13, 1994, the socialist Julien Dray (Essonne) on May 4, the president of the UDF group Charles Millon (Ain) and the non-affiliated Jacques Le Nay (Morbihan) on May 18, the socialist Michel Fromet (Loir-et-

Cher) on June 1, Pierre-André Wiltzer (Essonne), a member of the UDF, and Henri de Richemont (Charente), who sits in the RPR group, on June 22 and the communist Jacques Brunhes (Hauts-de-Seine) on June 29.

[France] for the forces responsible for the genocide” or “uncontrolled initiatives by some French military personnel,” “which would be almost as serious.” He therefore calls for “a thorough investigation to shed light on this highly sensitive matter.” In early August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the Human Rights Watch report, on which Serge Janquin relies, claiming it contains “inaccurate information” [26] and denied the accusations of arms deliveries and training activities for Rwandan Hutu refugees in Zaire.

Other colleagues, members of both the parliamentary majority and minority, expressed their concern between May and October 1995 regarding the incarceration of minors and individuals arrested in Rwanda and held in detention without trial due to the decay of the Rwandan judicial system. The Socialist Paul Quilès (Tarn) questioned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “on the problem of respect for human rights and international standards of justice in Rwanda,” while regretting that “many people are currently imprisoned and are being kept in the dark about the reasons for their arrest” [27]. Between the autumn of 1995 and mid-1996, many expressed in their questions their desire for the establishment of an effective International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda with sufficient financial resources. For example, in early 1996, Jean Urbaniak (Pas-de-Calais), who belongs to the République et Liberté group, intended to raise awareness among the government “about adapting French legislation to the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 955 establishing an International Tribunal for Rwanda” in order to properly align the definitions of war crime and genocide, thus allowing the prosecution of “the presumed guilty” [28] without difficulty.

Twelve members of parliament included Rwanda in their questions to the cohabitation government during the eleventh legislature (1997-2002). In mid-September 1997, the communist André Aschieri (Seine-Saint-Denis) sought to ascertain France's commitment to prosecuting the perpetrators of the genocide within the framework of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the adoption of a bill adapting French legislation on May 15, 1996. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reassured the parliamentarian about the implementation of “close cooperation with the tribunal” [29], which included aid for the country's reconstruction. In December, Socialist MP Kofi Yamgnane (Finistère) expressed concern about accusations made by Paul Kagame, then Vice-President and Minister of Defense of Rwanda, in the November 22, 1997 edition of *Le Figaro*, regarding the close ties allegedly maintained between French diplomacy and the Hutu and France's “prior involvement” in the genocide. Faced with the MP's requests for “clarification” [30], the Ministry reiterated the official position: support for the Arusha Accords and the deployment of UNAMIR peacekeepers, as well as the sending of French soldiers as part of Operation Turquoise. It reaffirmed its support for the International Criminal Tribunal for

Rwanda. On December 14, 1998, two Socialists, Bernard Derosier (Nord) and Martine Lignières-Cassou (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), both members of the majority, questioned the government about human rights abuses in Rwanda. The first demands an explanation of France's attitude. The second wishes that a letter be sent to the Rwandan president on this subject [31]. At the very end of the legislative session, mid-March 2002, André Aschieri (Alpes-Maritimes), a member of the Radical, Citizen and Green group, expressed concern about the fate of the 120,000 Rwandans imprisoned, awaiting indictment and trial, and who are subjected to “often degrading situations” and “inhuman treatment” [32].

During the twelfth legislature (2002-2007), the number of written questions submitted by members of parliament to the government regarding Rwanda remained high. A total of 39 questions were recorded, submitted by 34 members of parliament from both the UMP majority and the left-wing opposition, including independents. Many expressed concern about France's conduct during the genocide against the Tutsi. Others raised concerns about the treatment of Rwandan refugees who had fled their country to settle in neighboring territories, where they faced precarious living conditions. The socialist Jacques Floch (Loire-Atlantique) therefore asks the Ministry of Foreign Affairs “to kindly inform him of the measures that France, the donor country, intends to take to, on the one hand, encourage the Rwandan government to do everything possible to ensure that measures aimed at reducing human rights violations are taken and, on the other hand, to seek solutions to the problems of the refugees of the Great Lakes” [33].

During the thirteenth legislature (2007-2012), only six members of parliament questioned the government primarily on the legal proceedings initiated in France against perpetrators of the genocide and on the responsibilities of France and its army in the 1994 genocide³. Yanick Paternotte took advantage of the question period to “find out (...) how France intends, in the future, to prosecute perpetrators of the genocide on its territory.” Rwandans and, more generally, perpetrators of war crimes or crimes against humanity,” in a context where he had just organized the arrest of Eugène Rwamucyo in his stronghold, Sannois. The Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, reassured him, stating that “the fight against impunity is a priority of [the government's] policy,” in accordance with the commitments made by the President of the Republic during his visit to Kigali on February 24, 2010. He also mentioned “the creation of an international law unit” [34].

Six members of parliament again questioned the executive branch on issues related to Rwanda during the fourteenth legislature (2012-2017). Their questions focused almost exclusively on France's stance regarding the genocide against the Tutsi during the twentieth anniversary commemorations. On April 16, 2014, Marie Récalde (Gironde), a Socialist member

3 These are the members of the UMP parliamentary majority Yanick Paternotte (Val-d'Oise) in June 2010 and Jacques Myard (Yvelines) in September 2010, those of the socialist opposition Olivier Dussopt (Ardèche) in April 2011, Pascal Terrasse

(Ardèche) in early May 2011 and Michel Destot (Isère) in July 2011 and the former communist Patrick Braouezec (Seine-Saint-Denis) on May 3, 2011.

of the parliamentary majority and also president of the France-Rwanda friendship group, expressed alarm about the future of Franco-Rwandan relations following statements by President Kagame that "directly target the 2,500 French soldiers deployed as part of Operation Turquoise" and which she deemed "unacceptable." Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius responded by emphasizing the need to "pay tribute to the memory of the victims" before referring to the conclusions of the 1998 parliamentary inquiry: "While France may not have fully appreciated the political drift of the Rwandan regime, it was the most active country in preventing the tragedy of 1994." He acknowledged the unacceptable nature of the remarks made by the Rwandan president while expressing his hope that co-operation between the two countries would continue: "This does not mean that the future is closed." [35] A year later, the environmentalist Noël Mamère (Gironde) adopted a more critical stance towards the successive governments. He deplored the exclusion of parliamentarians and doubted the government's willingness "to pursue the truth." Laurent Fabius, tasked with responding to him, sought to reassure the speaker: "Mr. Mamère, the answer is yes! Of course we are prepared to tell the whole truth!" He again relied on the conclusions of the 1998 report and gave a brief summary of the ongoing legal proceedings, which demonstrated the French authorities' determination to prosecute the perpetrators of the genocide: "Here again, I would like to reiterate the truth of the figures: one conviction last year, two referrals to the Assize Court this year, and more than twenty cases under investigation, which will therefore be tried." He finally recalls the initiatives of French diplomacy "which proposes that the five permanent members of the Security Council voluntarily renounce their right of veto in the event of mass atrocities" [36].

Rwanda intervened in questions to the government posed by eight members of parliament during the following legislative term (2017-2022). In June 2018, independent members Bruno Bilde (Pas-de-Calais) and José Evrard (Pas-de-Calais), and the left-wing parliamentarian Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Bouches-du-Rhône) wanted to express their incomprehension at the presidential support given to the candidacy of Louise Mushikiwabo, Rwandan Minister of Foreign Affairs and close to Paul Kagame, for the position of Secretary General of the Francophonie, "who has not ceased to insult France and its army" and is "responsible, directly or indirectly, for the mass killings that took place in neighboring Congo Kinshasa and Rwanda from April 6, 1994 onwards" [37]. Jean-Luc Mélenchon observes that this candidacy "is completely out of step with the values of the OIF (International Organisation of the Francophonie) given the political situation in Rwanda" [38], particularly the lack of respect for the opposition. Conversely, Hubert Julien-Laferrrière (Rhône), a member of La République en Marche and the new parliamentary majority, takes the opportunity of his question to the Minister of the Armed Forces, Florence Parly, to welcome Louise Mushikiwabo's candidacy and the rapprochement between France and Rwanda through Paul Kagame's recent state visit to the Élysée

Palace, "the first since 2011." He also inquires about the continuation of the "process of opening the archives" desired by the two presidents during this meeting. Florence Parly's response is in agreement [39].

Meanwhile, on June 19, 2018, in response to severe criticism of France's role in the Rwandan genocide by Paul Kagame and journalist Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, Clémentine Autain, a member of parliament from the La France Insoumise party (Seine-Saint-Denis), called for "these extremely serious accusations not to go unanswered" and for "the responsibilities to be investigated" [40] by declassifying all the archives of the Élysée Palace. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs confirmed the remarks made a few days earlier by her colleague, the Minister of the Armed Forces. Fabien Di Filippo, a member of the right-wing opposition party The Republicans, called in mid-February 2020 for recognition of the French soldiers who participated in Operation Noroît, but his request was met with a ministerial refusal. Meanwhile, Jean-Louis Touraine (Rhône), a member of parliament from the LREM majority, proposed making April 7th a "national day of tribute to the victims of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi" [41] in his question posed on April 21, 2020, and received the government's approval. Questions put to the government are not the only means of control for members of parliament after 1994.

2.4.2. The Fact-finding Mission

In 1998, the National Assembly also used a technique revived in 1990, which renewed its oversight function: the fact-finding mission on Rwanda. "Clearly, two events spurred the members of parliament: the work of the Belgian Senate on the 1994 events in Rwanda, which in 1997 led to individual indictments of Belgian officials, and a series of articles, including those by journalist Patrick de Saint-Exupéry published in *Le Figaro* in early 1998, which forcefully raised questions he had already posed during Operation Turquoise in 1994." [42].

The mission was composed of twenty members chosen proportionally from the political groups represented in the National Assembly during the eleventh legislature, who belonged to the National Defense and Armed Forces Committee or the Foreign Affairs Committee. Its chairman, the Socialist Paul Quilès, did not have investigative powers comparable to those of commissions of inquiry [43] but emphasized the "duty to the truth" [44]. The two rapporteurs, Pierre Brana and Bernard Cazeneuve, were both members of the majority Socialist Party. The 88 hearings took place between March 24 and July 9, 1998, and involved academics, politicians, political advisors, senior civil servants, ambassadors, representatives of associations, witnesses, and military personnel. Some of these hearings were held behind closed doors, primarily when military personnel were questioned. Pierre Brana traveled to Uganda, Burundi, the ICTR in Arusha, and, accompanied by Bernard Cazeneuve, to Rwanda and the United States to gather information. Nearly 2,000 documents, including 1,500 classified ones, particularly diplomatic cables, were made available [45].

For the first time under the Fifth Republic, members of parliament examined matters that fall under the exclusive purview of the President of the Republic. From Charles de Gaulle to François Mitterrand, the head of state could unilaterally decide to intervene in Africa.

An 1800 page report [46] was submitted on December 15th and concluded in its "analysis of responsibilities" that France had made "errors of judgment" due to "overly committed military cooperation," "an underestimation of the authoritarian, ethnic, and racist nature of the Rwandan regime," and "institutional dysfunctions." However, France was not complicit in the genocide because of its "lack of ties with the militias." The mission pointed to the "responsibility of the international community," particularly a "powerless" UN, the "obstruction of the United States," and the trauma experienced by Belgium. Finally, it makes six recommendations: "increase the transparency and coherence of international crisis management mechanisms," "improve parliamentary control over military operations conducted outside national territory," "deepen the reform of cooperation with African countries," "contribute effectively to African security," "improve the effectiveness of UN peace-keeping and peace enforcement interventions," and "establish an international criminal jurisdiction."

The mission's work was met with mixed reactions. While members of parliament from the Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party (PCF), and the Greens voted in favor of approving the report, the minority members of the RPR and UDF parties opposed it, denouncing a "tendency to place the blame for the events leading to the genocide on France" and expressing reservations about the "appropriateness" and "content" of the proposals put forward. The mission's Communist vice-president, Jean-Claude Lefort, abstained [47]. Its content can be considered ambiguous [48]. While dysfunctions were highlighted, France was exonerated of any involvement in the genocide. Criticism was voiced in Belgium and Rwanda. Belgian Senator Alain Destexhe, a key figure in the Belgian commission of inquiry, laments that "responsibilities have not been cleared" at the Élysée Palace, Matignon, or the Quai d'Orsay, despite the criticisms being voiced. Modeste Rutabayiru, the Rwandan chargé d'affaires in Paris, condemns France's "ambiguity" in allowing the massacres to occur because of its "privileged ties" [49] with the Rwandan leaders of the time.

2.4.3. Hearings

Finally, the issue of the genocide against the Tutsi was addressed by members of parliament through hearings, a standard method of gathering information. Political figures and experts can be heard by parliamentary committees that deem their testimonies useful. On December 22, 2009, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, was questioned by the Foreign Affairs Committee, chaired by UMP majority party MP Axel Poniatowski (Val-d'Oise), on current national affairs, particularly the restoration of diplo-

matic relations between France and Rwanda, which he supported: "There is no point in dwelling on the past. It is better to talk about the future - about the relations that can be re-established with Rwanda and the role that this country will play in an unstable region that threatens, if not to explode, at least to remind us of its existence in a very painful way." [50].

In mid-April 2014, Hubert Védrine, former Secretary General of the Élysée Palace (1991-1995), responded to "a distressing controversy surrounding the commemoration of the Rwandan genocide" and "the unjust accusations leveled against the French armed forces, both by the Rwandan regime and by certain Parisian commentators" during a session of the National Defense and Armed Forces Committee chaired by Socialist MP Patricia Adam (Finistère). He rejected the attacks against France, which he called "false," even while acknowledging "possible mistakes made." He criticized the terms used by Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who referred to France's "direct participation" in the genocide. He reiterates his arguments justifying the policy carried out in the 1990s in Rwanda, namely "the efforts (...) to stop the civil war", "the success of the Arusha Accords" [51] and the support for an interim government open to opponents of President Habyarimana.

A few weeks after the official submission of the Duclert Commission report on May 11, 2021, the parliamentary committees on Defense and the Armed Forces and Foreign Affairs held a hearing with its chairman. The session proceeded in a standard manner. After introductory remarks, first by Françoise Dumas, on behalf of the Defense and Armed Forces Committee, and then by Jean-Louis Bourlanges, for the Foreign Affairs Committee - both members of the presidential and parliamentary majority since 2017 - Vincent Duclert spoke at length, addressing the framework within which he and his colleagues conducted their research, the knowledge highlighted, and the recommendations formulated. He observed that the French authorities "chose a consistent alignment with a racist, corrupt, and violent regime (...) and granted everything to this regime, that of President Habyarimana, without demanding anything firmly." He deplores a biased interpretation of the Rwandan situation, "ideological frameworks, unrelated to reality itself, particularly the obsession with the Anglo-American presence and influence," as well as the "sacrifice of the opposition, the opposition to Habyarimana's regime," and the endangerment of Rwandan Tutsi and democratic Hutus, once the RPF became an enemy, and an ethnicized one at that. He observes the preeminence of the "presidential bloc" over everything concerning the French presence in Rwanda and the disregard for warnings issued by clear-sighted officials on the ground. The historian offers three recommendations: "strengthening the study of genocides," reflecting on "crisis management by officials and political leaders," and drafting "a new comprehensive law on archives." He then answered questions from representatives of the various parliamentary groups: Hervé Berville (Côtes d'Armor) for LREM, Charles de La Verpillière (Ain) for The Republicans, Maud Gatel (Paris) for the Democratic Movement, Alain David (Gironde) for the PS, Aina Kuric (Marne) for Agir ensemble,

Yannick Favennec-Bécot (Mayenne) for the Union of Democrats and Independents, Jean-Paul Le Coq (Seine-Maritime) for the Democratic and Republican Left, Frédéric Dumas (Hauts-de-Seine) for the Liberties and Territories group. In line with the speech that Emmanuel Macron would deliver ten days later in Kigali, the historian took the opportunity to recall that "France was not complicit in the genocide of the Tutsi insofar as it did not intentionally associate itself with the extermination enterprise" and that it proved incapable of "thinking about this genocidal process" [52]. The last part of the hearing allowed LREM deputies Amélia Lakrafi (French citizens living abroad), Jacques Marilossian (Hauts-de-Seine), Jean-François Mbaye (Val-de-Marne) and Mireille Clapot (Drôme), their LR colleague Laurence Trastour-Isnart (Alpes-Maritimes), and the independent Hubert Julien-Laferrrière (Rhône) to question Vincent Duclert individually.

3. Conclusion

France's policy in Rwanda, a country scarred by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, is a sensitive issue that has long been overlooked. The Duclerc report, which concludes by acknowledging French responsibility, allows us to revisit the

topic and examine the role of political actors in France, including those in the executive branch as well as those who have held legislative power, particularly French members of parliament. Our article shows that these members were not entirely blind to the situation and that they attempted to exercise oversight through questions, fact-finding missions, and hearings. However, this work is hampered by the difficulty of implementing the National Assembly's oversight mechanisms with respect to the executive branch.

The actions of French members of parliament in response to the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda illustrate the difficulties in implementing the National Assembly's oversight mechanisms with respect to the executive branch. Members of parliament were absent from the cooperation agreements signed by France with Rwanda in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. However, they frequently questioned the government in the early 1990s without being able to influence the policies pursued by the executive branch. While they were active during the genocide against the Tutsi, they were powerless in the face of the events. After the tragedy, they utilized the full range of oversight mechanisms granted by the Constitution, including questioning, conducting an information-gathering mission, and holding hearings.

Table 1. Number of written questions asked by French MPs concerning Rwanda between the early 1990s and 2022

Number of written questions concerning Rwanda	Period
16	Early 1990s under the ninth legislature (1988-1993)
2	During the genocide (April-July 1994) during the tenth legislature (1993-1997)
34	After the genocide during the tenth legislature (1993-1997)
12	During the eleventh legislature (1997-2002)
39	During the twelfth legislature (2002-2007)
6	During the thirteenth legislature (2007-2012)
6	During the fourteenth legislature (2012-2017)
8	During the fifteenth legislature (2017-2022)

They also legislated twice to adopt laws allowing the prosecution of genocidaires at the international and national levels in 1996 and 2004. The first adapted French legislation to the creation of an international tribunal "to try persons presumed responsible for acts of genocide or other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in 1994 on the territory of Rwanda and, with regard to Rwandan citizens, on the territory of neighboring states" [53]. The second authorized "the approval of the agreement between the government of the French Republic and the United Nations concerning the execution of sentences pronounced by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda" [54].

French members of parliament thus acted within the scope defined by the institutions of the Fifth Republic, without having the power to influence the policies of the Élysée Palace or prevent the massacres. The limits of their control reflect the dysfunctions of France's "presidentialized" parliamentary system, as denounced by the 1998 fact-finding mission and the 2021 Duclert report. Political scientist Maurice Duverger observed in 1974 the existence of "the republican monarchy" [55] but considered this institutional evolution a lasting and widespread phenomenon across all Western democracies, particularly in the United States and Great Britain,

because the head of the executive branch is elected by universal suffrage, stable parliamentary majorities are formed, and a bipolarization of political life takes hold. Nevertheless, French MPs contributed to ensuring that the genocide of the Tutsi did not fall into oblivion after 1994 despite constitutional obstacles.

Abbreviations

UN	United Nations
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UDF	Union for French Democracy
RPR	Rally for the Republic
OAU	Organization of African Unity
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UMP	Union for a Popular Movement
LREM	The Republic on the Move
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
LR	The Republicans

Author Contributions

David Stefanelly is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- [1] Piton, F., *The Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda*, Paris, La Découverte, 2018, 276 pages.
- [2] Chrétien, J-P., and Kabanda, M., *Rwanda, Racism and Genocide. Hamitic Ideology*, Paris, Belin, 2013, 379 pages.
- [3] Dumas, H., *Genocide in the Village – The Massacre of the Tutsi in Rwanda*, Paris, Seuil, 2014, 363 pages.
- [4] Robinet, F., “France’s role in Rwanda: a history trap?”, *Journal of Cultural History*, 2021.
- [5] Lepidi, P. and Minassian, G., “Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda: the research commission details its method and resources,” *Le Monde*, April 7, 2020.
- [6] Smolar, P., “Rwanda: The Duclert Commission Concludes a Military and Political Failure of France from 1990 to 1994,” *Le Monde*, March 26, 2021.
- [7] Duclert, V., *France, Rwanda, and the Genocide of the Tutsi (1990-1994) – Report submitted to the President of the Republic*, vie-publique.fr, March 26, 2021, 1222 pages.
- [8] Audoin-Rouzeau, S., *An Initiation: Rwanda (1994-2006)*, Paris, Seuil, 2017, 176 pages.
- [9] Duclert, V., *France Facing the Genocide of the Tutsi*, Paris, Tallendier, 2024, 640 pages.
- [10] Written Question No. 50341 from Mr. Philippe Bassinet, November 25, 1991.
- [11] Letter from the Banyarwanda association, dated January 26, 1991, addressed to Jean-Michel Belorgey, president of the committee on Cultural, Family and Social Affairs of the National Assembly (15 SUP/2360 / National Archives 202110031/11).
- [12] Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roland Dumas, dated February 10, 1992, addressed to Mr. Jean-Michel Belorgey (15 SUP/2360 / National Archives 202110031/11).
- [13] Garrigues, J., “The head of state, because he believed himself all-powerful, is weaker than ever,” *Le Monde*, December 25, 2024.
- [14] Written Question No. 13339 from Mr. Hubert Falco, April 18, 1994.
- [15] “The French intervention plan in Rwanda. Reactions in France. The divided majority,” *Le Monde*, June 23, 1994.
- [16] Written Question No. 14838 from Mr. Gilles de Robien, May 30, 1994.
- [17] Verbatim record of the first sitting of the National Assembly on April 28, 1994; written question no. 319 from Mr. Marc Le Fur, April 27, 1994.
- [18] Full transcript of the first sitting of 13 April 1994, National Assembly.
- [19] Full transcript of the first sitting of 18 May 1994, National Assembly.
- [20] Full transcript of the first sitting of June 22, 1994, National Assembly.
- [21] Full transcript of the first sitting of June 29, 1994, National Assembly.
- [22] Written Question No. 17148 from Mr. Philippe Bonnacarrère, August 1, 1994.
- [23] Written Question No. 18252 from Mr. Michel Fromet, September 19, 1994.
- [24] Written Question No. 23633 from Mr. Michel Fromet, February 6, 1995.
- [25] Written Question No. 26401 from Mr. Jacques Pélissard, April 17, 1995.
- [26] Written Question No. 28074 from Mr. Serge Janquin, July 10, 1995.
- [27] Written Question No. 28902 from Mr. Paul Quilès, July 31, 1995.
- [28] Written Question No. 33948 from Mr. Jean Urbaniak, January 15, 1996.
- [29] Written Question No. 3086 from Mr. François Asensi, September 15, 1997.

- [30] Written Question No. 7310 from Mr. Kofi Yamgnane, December 8, 1997.
- [31] Written questions no. 22745 from Mr. Bernard Derosier and no. 22815 from Ms. Martine Lignières-Cassou, December 14, 1998.
- [32] Written Question No. 74172 from Mr. André Aschieri, March 18, 2002.
- [33] Written Question No. 62296 from Mr. Jacques Floch, April 12, 2005.
- [34] Question to the Government No. 2391 from Mr. Yanick Paternotte, June 24, 2010.
- [35] Question to the Government No. 1737 from Ms. Marie Récalde, April 16, 2014.
- [36] Question to the Government No. 2784 from Mr. Noël Mamère, April 8, 2015.
- [37] Written Question No. 9289 from Mr. José Evrard, June 12, 2018.
- [38] Written Question No. 9601 from Mr. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, June 19, 2018.
- [39] Question to the Government No. 959 from Mr. Hubert Julien-Lafferrière, June 6, 2018.
- [40] Written Question No. 9602 from Ms. Clémentine Autain, June 19, 2018.
- [41] Written Question No. 28557 from Mr. Jean-Louis Tourraine, April 21, 2020.
- [42] Cattier, E., "The Circumscribed Revelations of a Parliamentary Report," *Cités*, no. 57, 2014, p. 23-36.
- [43] Türk, P., *The Institutions of the Fifth Republic*, Gualino, Mémentos Collection, 268 pages.
- [44] "Rwanda: Mr. Quilès emphasizes the parliamentary mission's 'duty of truth'," *Le Monde*, April 2, 1998.
- [45] Quilès, P., "Rwanda, towards the indispensable truth," *Le Monde*, June 11, 1998.
- [46] Information report submitted on December 15, 1998 by the fact-finding mission of the National Defence and Armed Forces Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, on the military operations conducted by France, other countries and the UN in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994.
- [47] Ba, M., "Jean-Claude Lefort, Witness to the Parliamentary Fact-Finding Mission," *La nuit rwandaise*, no. 2, 2008.
- [48] Willame, J-C., "Reflections on the Parliamentary Relations of Belgium and France," *African Politics*, no. 73, 1999, p. 164–171.
- [49] Ourdan, R., "The Quilès report sparks criticism in Rwanda and Belgium," *Le Monde*, December 18, 1998.
- [50] Hearing of Mr. Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, by the Foreign Affairs Committee, December 9, 2009.
- [51] Hearing of Mr. Hubert Védrine by the National Defence and Armed Forces Committee, April 16, 2014.
- [52] Hearing of Mr. Vincent Duclert by the National Defence and Armed Forces Committee, and the Foreign Affairs Committee, May 11, 2021.
- [53] Law No. 96-432 of May 22, 1996.
- [54] Law No. 2004-495 of 7 June 2004.
- [55] Duverger, M., *The Republican Monarchy, or How Democracies Give Themselves Kings*, Robert Laffont, 1974, 284 pages.