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## Rwanda: Full Country Dossier

March 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Rwanda

## Brief country details

Rwanda: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
13,924,000	12,767,000	91.7

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Rwanda: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	58	63
WWL 2023	57	63
WWL 2022	50	67
WWL 2021	42	72
WWL 2020	42	71

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Rwanda: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties
Christian denominational protectionism	Religious leaders of other churches, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

The fear of history repeating itself looms over the nation like an ominous cloud, and the government cites the devastating 1990s genocide as a justification for its heavy-handed tactics. While the intent may be to preserve societal peace, the consequence is a society walking on eggshells. Government oversight does not stop at political boundaries but pervades the most intimate aspects of life, such as religious practice and personal beliefs. Freedom House (Global Freedom Index 2023 Rwanda) sheds light on these disturbing realities: Legislation passed in recent years has laden religious organizations with bureaucratic complexities, ostensibly for the sake of public safety and order. The catch-all nature of these regulations has led to mass closures of places of worship and created an environment where religious leaders are scrutinized based on their educational qualifications.

The financial transactions of religious organizations are also under government scrutiny. Beyond the grip of these regulatory measures, the shadow of intimidation looms large and the government's reach extends into the domestic sphere. Security agents routinely conduct unwarranted searches of religious leaders' homes, contributing to an atmosphere of unease and distrust. The social fabric is further strained as individuals who deviate from traditional religious norms — such as converting from Roman Catholicism to a non-traditional Christian denomination — often face ostracization from their families. Intimidation, surveillance, and monitoring are not abstract concepts but everyday realities for many. Such government interference serves to create an environment where the ruling authority's word is final, stifling any hope of open dialogue or freedom of association.

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- 120 churches were closed during the WWL 2024 reporting period, in addition to the hundreds that were closed in the WWL 2023 period.
- Intimidation of religious leaders has escalated, with security agents frequently conducting unwarranted searches of their homes.
- Individuals who transition from historical Christian communities (e.g., the Catholic Church) to non-traditional groups often face familial backlash and social ostracization.
- Churches face undue bureaucratic burdens, required to submit extensive documentation to the government for legal status, an action that many see as an effort to exert greater control over religious institutions.

# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Rwanda

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Rwanda country report	AI Rwanda 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/rwanda/report-rwanda/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/rwanda/report-rwanda/</a>	14 September 2023
BBC News Rwanda profile - updated 31 July 2023	BBC Rwanda profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14093238">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14093238</a>	14 September 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 Rwanda report	BTI Rwanda Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RWA">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RWA</a>	14 September 2023
Crisis24 Rwanda report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Rwanda report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/rwanda">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/rwanda</a>	14 September 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Rwanda summary 2023	EIU 2023 Rwanda summary	<a href="http://country.eiu.com/rwanda">http://country.eiu.com/rwanda</a>	14 September 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 Rwanda	FSI 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	14 September 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries (Rwanda not included)	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report Rwanda	Freedom on the net 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-net/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-net/2022</a>	14 September 2023
Freedom House's Global Freedom index 2023 Rwanda	Global Freedom Index 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2023</a>	14 September 2023
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – Rwanda	GIWPS 2021 Rwanda	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/rwanda/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/rwanda/</a>	14 September 2023
Girls Not Brides Rwanda report	Girls Not Brides Rwanda	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/rwanda/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/rwanda/</a>	14 September 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Rwanda country chapter	HRW 2023 Rwanda country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/rwanda">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/rwanda</a>	14 September 2023
Internet World Stats 2023 Rwanda	IWS 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#rw">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#rw</a>	14 September 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index Rwanda	World Press Freedom 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/rwanda">https://rsf.org/en/rwanda</a>	14 September 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – Rwanda	CPI 2022 Rwanda	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/rwa">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/rwa</a>	14 September 2023
UNDP Human Development Report Rwanda - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Rwanda	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/RWA">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/RWA</a>	14 September 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Rwanda	IRFR 2022 Rwanda	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/rwanda/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/rwanda/</a>	14 September 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL (Rwanda not included)	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Rwanda - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Rwanda	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f5c5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-rwa.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f5c5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-rwa.pdf</a>	14 September 2023
World Bank Rwanda data - 2021	World Bank Rwanda data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=RWA">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&amp;id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=RWA</a>	14 September 2023
World Bank Rwanda overview - updated 23 March 2023	World Bank Rwanda overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview</a>	14 September 2023
World Factbook Rwanda - updated 11 September 2023	World Factbook Rwanda	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/rwanda/</a>	14 September 2023

## Recent history

Rwanda is a landlocked country in the Great Lakes region of Africa - one of the most volatile areas on the continent. Approximately 84% percent of the population is Hutu and 14% Tutsi.

Germany arrived in what is currently called Rwanda in 1894 and opted to rule the region via the Tutsi king. Germany lost its colonial territories following defeat in the First World War and Rwanda was subsequently placed under Belgian administration. The Belgians also ruled the country via the Tutsi king. The country declared independence on 1 July 1962 from the Belgian administered UN trusteeship.

On 6 April 1994 a plane carrying Rwandan President Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira - both Hutu - was shot down and the two presidents were killed. In what was called the '100 days of slaughter', the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) and Hutu militia (the Interahamwe) went from home to home killing Tutsi and moderate Hutu politicians. The slaughter continued and on 13 May 1994 the UN Security Council agreed to send in 5,500 troops, mainly from the Organization of African Unity. However, as there was a disagreement as to who should cover the cost, the deployment was delayed. Radical Hutus continued the massacre. On 4 July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) captured Kigali and the Hutu government fled to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). The international community was ashamed of its inability to save thousands of lives. In 2013, US President Clinton said that "if the USA had intervened in Rwanda, roughly 300,000 lives could have been saved." The then UN Secretary-



General Kofi Anan also joined President Clinton in extending an apology to the Rwandan parliament.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide is considered to be one of the darkest moments in the second half of the 20th century. It claimed the lives of more than 800,000 people. This dark history has created an environment of background fear and the government is using the memory of those atrocities to its advantage. Paul Kagame is still leading the country since the end of the genocide in 1994.

Some clergy from the Roman Catholic church were also implicated in the genocide. RefWorld [summarized](#) the complicated issue that divided the Catholic church in an article dated 6 March 2008:

- "Although there are reports of priests and nuns offering protection and standing up to Hutu 'death squads' (ibid.; IWPR 1 Dec. 2006; RNS 5 Jan. 2008), there are also accounts of certain members of the clergy being complicit in the genocide (ibid.; The New York Times 12 May 2002; ibid. 10 June 2001; IWPR 1 Dec. 2006; BBC 20 Sept. 2004). There are also allegations that some senior clergy members were closely connected to those who planned the genocide or remained silent during the killings (The New York Times 10 June 2001; ibid. 12 May 2002; see also RNS 5 Jan. 2008; IWPR 1 Dec. 2006). A 5 January 2008 news article by the Washington-based Religion News Service (RNS) states that in Rwanda, 'stories circulated ... of a hierarchy [in the Roman Catholic Church] that condoned ethnic hatred from the pulpit, and of top church leaders who held positions of prominence in the Hutu government that orchestrated the genocide' (RNS 5 Jan. 2008)."

The 2020 COVID-19 crisis was used by many dictators to curtail basic human rights and Paul Kagame used the opportunity to effectively decimate opposition in the country. Some Christian groups, who had already been placed under heavy pressure from the government, were told to completely shut down all their places of worship.

In its one of very harshest criticisms of Rwanda, Human Rights Watch stated (HRW 2023 Rwanda country chapter):

- "The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party continued to wage a campaign against real and perceived opponents of the government. Critics, including internet bloggers and journalists, were arrested, threatened, and put on trial. Some said they were tortured in detention. The authorities rarely investigated enforced disappearances or suspicious deaths. Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment in unofficial detention facilities were common, especially around high-profile visits or large international events such as the June Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Kigali."
- Abusive practices by Rwandan authorities stretched beyond the country's borders: "In August [2022], the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo reported 'solid evidence' of Rwandan forces fighting alongside and providing other support to the M23 armed group. Rwandan refugees and members of the diaspora reported being threatened and harassed by Rwandan government agents or their proxies. Human Rights Watch received information about several cases of Rwandan refugees being killed, disappeared, or arrested in suspicious circumstances, including in Mozambique and Uganda."

## Political and legal landscape

Rwanda is a unitary republic state. It has a bicameral national assembly consisting of a Senate with 26 seats and a Chamber of Deputies with 53 seats. The president is head of the state and is elected by universal suffrage. In 1991, Rwanda adopted a more democratic Constitution and in May 2003, the country presented a new draft Constitution for the referendum, which was accepted and came into effect on 4 June 2003. It was amended several times, most recently in 2013.

Rwanda has been accused by international observers of poor governance, lack of rule of law, and the absence of democracy. Chatham House, writing in 2014, stated: "[Over the past two decades](#) the ruling party has presided over a period of stabilization, reconstruction, and development but has also been the subject of controversy and criticism regarding governance, human rights, and the reach of the state." On the positive side, the government has tried to eliminate corruption by introducing reforms in different sectors; however, the independence of the judiciary of the country is still questionable.

President Paul Kagame was re-elected to a third seven-year term in August 2018. This was after an amendment had been made to the Constitution in December 2015 allowing him to serve a third term.

Rating the country 'not free' with 23/100 points, Freedom House's Global Freedom 2023 Rwanda report also highlights the human rights, political and other legal landscapes that characterize Rwanda. It states: "The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by President Paul Kagame, has ruled the country since 1994, when it ousted forces responsible for that year's genocide and ended a civil war. While the regime has maintained stability and economic growth, it has also suppressed political dissent through pervasive surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary detention, torture, and renditions or suspected assassinations of exiled dissidents." The report highlights the following points:

- **Freedom of expression and the media:** The Constitution appears to protect press freedom, but legal restrictions and self-censorship are prevalent. Journalists who engage in independent reporting are subject to criminal charges and intimidation, and many have fled the country. Foreign media outlets also face obstructions, and those that are critical of the government are often suppressed.
- **Freedom of religion:** Although religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, the government exerts control over religious institutions through legal requirements and regulatory oversight. For instance, religious organizations must submit extensive documentation to operate, and thousands of places of worship have been closed for varying reasons.
- **Academic freedom:** Academic freedom is curtailed as the government enforces official views on sensitive topics like genocide. Scholars and students face penalties for engaging in what the government terms as "divisionism". Public and private universities are generally devoid of robust political debate, and language policies may disadvantage certain groups.
- **Personal views and surveillance:** While the Constitution mentions freedom of speech, the practical space for free discussion is limited. The government heavily monitors personal communications and social media. Surveillance and infiltration into civil society by the

authorities discourage individuals from expressing dissenting views.

In summary, the constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression and belief exist mostly in theory but are severely restricted in practice due to government control and surveillance.

The US State Department's [2023 Trafficking in Persons Report for Rwanda](#) states:

- "The Government of Rwanda does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, if any, on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Rwanda remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying more trafficking victims, repatriating trafficking victims from overseas, and convicting more traffickers. For the first time in recent years, the government awarded restitution in one trafficking case. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government continued to lack specialized SOPs to adequately screen for trafficking among vulnerable populations and did not refer any victims to services. The government provided support to and coordinated with the March 23 Movement (M23) armed group, which forcibly recruited and used children."

In September 2018, the government enacted a new law determining the organization and functioning of religious groups and non-governmental organizations associated with religious groups. The US State Department's IRFR 2022 Rwanda reports that this law puts undue burden on those who lead churches by demanding they possess a formal academic qualification. The legislation mandates that clergy in leadership roles must hold either a degree in religious studies from an accredited higher education institution or an alternate degree accompanied by a certified religious studies qualification from a recognized establishment. Furthermore, the legal representative of a religious organization or non-governmental organization must possess a degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Individuals obligated to meet these academic criteria have been granted a limit of 5 years from the time the law was enacted to fulfill these requirements.

### **Gender perspective**

The country has seen an increase in women's political participation. The country held elections in 2018 in which [women filled 64%](#) of the seats (UN Women, 13 August 2018).

## Religious landscape

Rwanda: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	12,767,000	91.7
Muslim	724,000	5.2
Hindu	740	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	374,000	2.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	27,400	0.2
Atheist	43	0.0
Agnostic	31,700	0.2
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Rwanda):

- **Infrastructure requirements for houses of worship:** Since 2018, the government has been enforcing rules regarding basic infrastructure, health, safety, and noise pollution standards for places of worship. Initial enforcement led to the closure of nearly 9,000 houses of worship, and over 6,000 remain closed. Some smaller groups merged to form larger organizations to meet these standards, although some community leaders express concerns about maintaining community cohesion with larger memberships.
- **Loudspeaker restrictions on the Islamic call to prayer:** In March 2022, the government announced a prohibition on mosques using loudspeakers for morning calls to prayer, citing noise ordinances. The government suggested alternative means like using lower volumes or technology. This decision led to ongoing discussions and concerns within the religious community.
- **Monitoring of religious organizations and state interference:** The government reportedly monitors internal affairs of religious organizations to potentially intervene against actions viewed as being against national interests. This monitoring is considered by some to be inappropriate interference. Registration requirements for new religious groups are also seen as challenging and can impede their establishment.

## Economic landscape

In general, the small East African nation's economy relies largely on agriculture, tourism and mining.

According to World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Rwanda:

- **GDP growth:** In 2022, Rwanda's economy demonstrated notable resilience, expanding by approximately 8%, largely fueled by a rebound in sectors related to tourism. Yet, mounting inflationary pressures presented certain hazards to at-risk families. Although there was an increase in grant and remittance inflows, the country's current account deficit persisted at significant levels, influenced by fluctuations in the global commodity markets. For 2023, the real GDP growth is expected to be around 6.2%, and forecasts indicate an average growth rate of 7.5% for the years 2024–2025.
- **Imports/exports/Current Account:** Exports experienced a 37.9% surge, primarily fueled by elevated commodity prices and increased re-exports to the Democratic Republic of Congo as pandemic restrictions were lifted. A rise in global prices for oil and other essential commodities led to a 25.1% uptick in import payments in 2022. The current account deficit was partly financed through foreign direct investment and government borrowing, resulting in a depletion of foreign reserves.
- **Inflation:** Inflation soared to its highest point in over 13 years, reaching 21.7% for the year leading up to November 2022, due to a combination of rising global commodity prices and a poor agricultural yield. Food prices were the most significantly impacted category of inflation. This surge in food prices disproportionately burdened low-income households and those in rural regions, who typically allocate more than 70% of their budgets to food. In response to the escalating inflationary pressures, the National Bank of Rwanda (NBR) promptly took action to tighten its monetary policy. Between February 2022 and February 2023, the NBR increased the policy rate by a total of 250 basis points, bringing it to 7%— a level not witnessed since June 2014. This led to a rise in short-term money market rates.  
**Poverty:** "Despite an unprecedented assistance program, poverty likely increased due to the adverse effects of the pandemic on output and employment, but is expected to return to pre-crisis levels in 2022. Poverty rates (measured as US\$1.90 a day) fell from 69.1 percent in 2005 to 56.5 percent in 2017 and was projected to fall even further to 52.9 percent in 2019 behind strong growth in GDP and private consumption. With the emergence of COVID-19, poverty is expected to have increased to 56.0 percent for 2020. Rwanda has relatively higher poverty rates than African peers with similar income per capita, and poverty reduction has become less responsive to growth in recent years."

According to Heritage Foundation's [2023 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

Rwanda's economic freedom score stands at 52.2 in the 2023 Index, placing its economy at #137 in terms of freedom. This score is a 4.9-point decline from the previous year. Within the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Rwanda ranks 30th out of 47 countries, with its economic freedom score falling below both global and regional averages.

While reforms have contributed to economic growth and a slow alleviation of poverty, challenges like weak rule of law and ongoing corruption serve as obstacles to long-term econom-

ic prosperity. Speeding up judicial reforms and consistently working to make public administration more efficient could further boost economic growth and lead to more significant improvements in the standard of living.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Rwanda and UNDP HDR Rwanda:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hutu, Tutsi, Twa (Pygmy). According to the [World Atlas](#) (accessed 1 July 2021): Hutus make up 84%, Tutsis 15% and Twa (Batwa) 1% of the population. Originally the Tutsis were herdsmen and the Hutus farmers.
- **Main languages:** Kinyarwanda (official, universal Bantu vernacular) 93.2%, French (official), English (official), Swahili/Kiswahili (official, used in commercial centers), other 6.3%, unspecified 0.3% (2002 est.).
- **Average population growth:** 1.8% (2021 est.)
- **Urban population:** 17.6% of total population (2021)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.07% annual rate of change (2020- 2025 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 11.2 years
- **Literacy rate, adult (ages 15 and older):** 73.2%
- **Employment to population ratio (ages 15 and older):** 82.8%
- **Unemployment, total:** 1.0% of labor force
- **Unemployment, youth (ages 15-24):** 1.7%
- **Human Development Index (HDI) score and ranking:** Rwanda ranked 160th with a score of 0.543
- **Average life expectancy at birth:** 69.0 years
- **Gender Development Index (GDI):** 0.945
- **Gender inequality index (GII):** 0.402

According to [UNHCR's Operational update \(December 2023\)](#):

- **Refugees:** As of 31 December 2023, Rwanda hosted a total of 134,593 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (62%) and Burundi (37%).

## Technological landscape

Reports vary in the figures presented. According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Rwanda):

- **Internet users:** 44.3% of the country's population (survey date: December 2021)
- **Facebook users:** 7.1% penetration rate (survey date: January 2022)

According to Data Reportal's [Digital 2023 - Rwanda](#):

- As of the beginning of 2023, Rwanda had 4.25 million internet users, accounting for an internet penetration rate of 30.5% across the country.
- In the realm of social media, Rwanda had approximately 800,700 active users in January 2023, making up 5.7% of the nation's total population.

- Additionally, the country reported a total of 10.57 million active mobile cellular connections in early 2023, representing 75.9% of the entire population.

Rwanda has come a long way since the 1994 Genocide and there has been a general improvement in infrastructure. The education sector has also shown considerable improvement. The Internet penetration rate is also increasing although citizens are not able to use the available technology freely. As reported by Freedom House (Freedom on the Net 2023 Uganda):

- "Internet freedoms remained highly restricted in Rwanda during the coverage period: the government continued imprisoning and intimidating online journalists and critics, as well as subjecting them to harassment and violence while in detention. Self-censorship online remains common as the government increasingly tightens its control of the online media environment. Over the past several years, evidence has implicated Rwandan authorities in the widespread use of commercial surveillance tools against journalists, activists, and opposition leaders."

## Security situation

Rwanda has made significant progress since the 1994 genocide, but domestic security concerns remain. The government has been criticized for stifling political dissent, engaging in extensive surveillance, and not fully addressing underlying ethnic tensions. While the official stance promotes a unified Rwandan identity, latent ethnic divisions still exist. These issues contribute to a climate of fear and mistrust among citizens, posing a risk to long-term stability. Despite efforts in economic development and national unity, more transparent governance and respect for civil liberties are essential for ensuring the security and well-being of Rwanda's citizens.

Furthermore, there is tension between Rwanda and DRC. The Rwandan government considers certain rebel groups in DRC to be a threat to the national security of Rwanda. This has pitted the country against the government of DRC. An August 2023 report by the [International Crisis Group](#) highlighted the following points:

**Missile attack on Congolese jet:** On 24 January 2023, the Rwandan army fired a missile at a Congolese fighter jet, claiming it had violated Rwandan airspace. The incident escalated tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), leading to public fear of open warfare between the two countries.

**Support for M23:** Rwanda has been accused of supporting the M23 rebel group in the DRC, particularly around Kitshanga in North Kivu province. These operations have displaced half a million people and led to an intensification of hostilities.

**Deteriorating diplomatic relations:** The relationship between the governments of Rwanda and the DRC has been worsening, with President Kagame not attending regional talks and not meeting Congolese President Tshisekedi since the UN General Assembly in September 2022.

**Sharp rhetoric and accusations:** Both the leaders and citizens of Rwanda and the DRC have been using increasingly aggressive language, portraying their respective countries as victims and laying the groundwork for possible incursions.

**Regional involvement:** The involvement of East African Force troops, including those from Kenya, Uganda and Burundi, indicates that the conflict is drawing in regional powers and escalating the situation.

## Trends analysis

### 1) Government restrictions on public assembly

In light of new regulations in 2023, the Rwandan government continues to view public gatherings with increasing suspicion, further constraining the right to freedom of assembly and association. Despite constitutional protections, public gatherings, even those with official approval, face a high likelihood of disruption due to governmental interventions.

### 2) Autocratic governance in a seemingly stable nation

Even as Rwanda maintains a semblance of stability in 2023, the autocratic nature of the government persists. President Kagame's regime shows no signs of easing its hold on power, aggressively clamping down on dissenters through a spectrum of punitive measures including arrest, exile, or worse.

### 3) Official animosity towards non-traditional Christian groups

In 2023, the Rwandan government sustains its adversarial stance towards non-traditional Christian groups. Despite growing international scrutiny, unregistered churches and house-churches continue to be subject to governmental harassment, indicating that religious freedoms remain under considerable strain.

### 4) Regional instability: The role of Rwanda in the DRC crisis

In a significant escalation in 2023, Rwanda launched missile strikes targeting DRC military jets, causing widespread alarm and heightening tensions in the Great Lakes Region. These aggressive actions further cloud Rwanda's role in the complex geopolitical landscape involving the DRC and surrounding nations. The event has intensified concerns about Rwanda's involvement in the region and its potential for triggering a broader conflict, thereby affecting the social, political and religious fabric of the region.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: summarized - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49b92b279.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Over the past two decades - <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/rwanda-under-rpf-assessing-twenty-years-post-conflict-governance%20>
- Political and legal landscape: 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report for Rwanda - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/Rwanda/>
- Political and legal landscape: women filled 64% - <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-rwanda-women-in-parliament>
- Economic landscape: 2023 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/rwanda>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Atlas - <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/ethnic-groups-of-rwanda.html>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR's Operational update (December 2023) - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106269>
- Technological landscape: Digital 2023 - Rwanda - <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-rwanda>



- Security situation: International Crisis Group - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo-rwanda/dangerous-escalation-great-lakes>

## WWL 2024: Church information / Rwanda

### Christian origins

As in many other African countries, the first Christian missionaries to arrive in Rwanda were the Roman Catholic White Fathers. According to Storica Mente (last accessed 15 February 2023): “Between 1900 and 1910, the [White Fathers](#) had acquired a decisive advantage in the Rwandan territory with respect to the German army by constructing seven missionary stations.” By the time the Germans were forced to leave the country during the First World War (1916), ten mission stations had been opened.

Other Christian denominations followed the White Fathers. As described by BU School of Theology (last accessed 27 March 2024), 1907 saw the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries, German Lutherans from the [Bethel Mission](#) (also known as the Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft für Deutsch-Ostafrika). These German Lutherans founded eight mission stations, along with two commercial sites to compete with Muslim traders. Before they too were forced to leave the country, the Lutherans had managed to edit a translation of the four Gospels and a textbook in Kinyarwanda (the Rwandan language).

After the Belgians took over control of the country from Germany, they allowed other missionaries to enter. As a result, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church from the USA (1916), Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society (1921), Danish Baptists (1938), Swedish Pentecostals (1940), and the Free Methodist Church (1942) from the USA came to the country to work among the local population, building schools and hospitals. In particular the Roman Catholics invested in education and founded the majority of schools operating in the country.

### Church spectrum today

Rwanda: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	1,500	0.0
Catholic	5,772,000	45.2
Protestant	4,549,000	35.6
Independent	1,604,000	12.6
Unaffiliated	840,000	6.6
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,766,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)*

Evangelical movement	2,983,000	23.4
Renewalist movement	2,613,000	20.5

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

Rwanda has been a Catholic majority country since the colonial days under Belgium. Some Catholic leaders openly oppose the growth of non-traditional church groups.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

In recent years, the capital city, Kigali, has seen most hostility targeting Christians, particularly Evangelical and Pentecostal groups.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Foreign Christians in the country are not involuntary isolated and are therefore not treated as a separate category in WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination and faces difficulties with the government at times. On 20 November 2016, it released a statement officially apologizing for its role in the 1994 Genocide, which was signed by the country's nine bishops. Several Catholic priests have been indicted by international tribunals for crimes committed during the genocide, but the Church never officially acknowledged its role until this statement was issued. The government often uses this as a pretext for interfering in church affairs.

**Converts to Christianity:** There are some converts from Islam and ATR.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** In recent years the Pentecostal branch of Protestantism has grown quickly in the country. These church groups have faced the brunt of persecution in the country, with churches being closed down and leaders arrested.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: White Fathers - [https://storicamente.org/cristofori\\_1](https://storicamente.org/cristofori_1)
- Christian origins: Bethel Mission - <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/church-john-edward-1899-1989/>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Rwanda

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Rwanda: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	58	63
WWL 2023	57	63
WWL 2022	50	67
WWL 2021	42	72
WWL 2020	42	71

In WWL 2024, the country score only increased by one point but altogether this marked an increase of 16 points in just 4 years. (This included an increase of 8 points in WWL 2022 and 7 points in WWL 2023 and was due to marked rises in the level of pressure mostly orchestrated by the government.) In WWL 2024, the rise is mostly due to an increase in the violence score from 8.9 to 9.3 points. This included 12 churches being closed during the reporting period. Government hostility against non-traditional Christian groups is particularly severe and historical Christian denominations like the Catholic Church support the government in putting pressure on new and smaller churches.

## Persecution engines

Rwanda: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Weak
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Very weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Medium
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)**

While Paul Kagame is often lauded for his leadership role in ending Rwanda's tragic genocide and fostering subsequent stability and economic advancement, his prolonged tenure as president is attracting increasing scrutiny for its autocratic tendencies. A pivotal moment came in 2015, when a referendum approved constitutional changes that allowed Kagame not only to run for a third term in 2017 but also paved the way for two additional five-year terms. This move tightened his grip on power, leaving citizens and institutions with little room to challenge the government's authority. The regime's strict control is also evident in religious matters, highlighted by the large-scale closure of churches across denominations.

The government remains authoritarian and regards virtually any form of assembly and association as a potential threat. Government hostility against non-traditional Christian groups is particularly severe. State legislation and the regulation of society all aim to make sure that the government is in tight control of the country. Accordingly, the government suppresses freedom of association, assembly and religion, and wants to make sure that it is in a position to control the running and activities of all religious associations. As a result, the application process for licenses and the registration of new churches has been made very complicated. The government has placed stringent requirements on Christians (for instance, the need for pastors to have a university degree). Traditional churches face high levels of interference, for instance, when it comes to choosing leaders and the content of religious teaching. The government wants all churches in the country to agree and support the government. If they are found not to be acting in accordance with government policy, they can easily be labeled 'revisionist'.

### **Christian denominational protectionism (Medium)**

The Roman Catholic Church has historically been the dominant religious institution in Rwanda. However, the growth of non-traditional Christian groups in recent years has led to heightened tensions. Some leaders within the Catholic Church have reportedly sided with the Rwandan government to suppress these burgeoning religious communities. This tacit alliance suggests a level of religious protectionism, where the established Catholic Church is using its influence to limit the growth of smaller, non-traditional Christian denominations.

## Drivers of persecution

Rwanda: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
				VERY WEAK	MEDIUM		WEAK	VERY STRONG	
Government officials							Weak	Very strong	
Ethnic group leaders				Very weak					
Religious leaders of other churches					Medium				
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs					Medium				
One's own (extended) family					Medium				
Political parties								Medium	

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

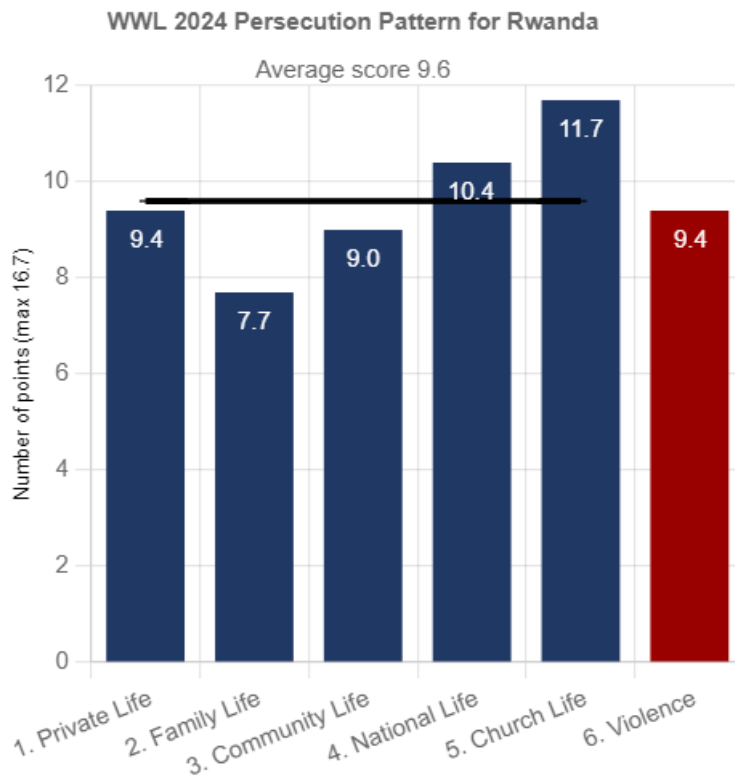
- **Government officials (Very strong):** Government authorities in Rwanda are proactive in controlling religious institutions, particularly churches. Utilizing regulations related to safety standards and noise pollution as a pretext, these authorities have gone as far as to demolish churches, making the practice of Christianity increasingly challenging. It is not uncommon for church leaders to receive official warnings, hindering their freedom to lead their congregations.
- **Political parties (Medium):** The line between Rwanda's government and the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is often indistinct. This lack of separation means that party members and cadres serve as informants, keeping a close eye on churches that do not openly support the government. Reports from these individuals are funneled to state security agencies, contributing to a climate of surveillance and repression.

### Drivers of Christian denominational protectionism

- **Religious leaders of other churches (Medium):** In an act of religious protectionism, some church leaders are providing information to government officials about smaller, non-traditional Christian groups. They appear to be aiding the government's efforts to clamp down on these emerging communities, thereby consolidating their own religious influence.
- **Citizens (Medium):** Ordinary members of established churches are also playing a role in suppressing smaller Christian denominations. These citizens report the activities of non-traditional Christian groups to government officials, further pressuring these already marginalized communities.

- **Extended family (Medium):** The familial dimension adds another layer of scrutiny for non-traditional Christian groups. Catholic families who have members that have converted to other Christian denominations often act as informers. They relay information to government officials about the activities and growth of these smaller religious communities, contributing to a broader environment of religious constraint and control.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Rwanda shows:

- The average level of pressure on Christians is 9.6 points similar to WWL 2023.
- Pressure is greatest in the church sphere (11.7 points) followed by *National sphere* (10.4 points) .
- The *Family sphere* scored lowest with 7.7 points for pressure.
- The score for Violence is in the category 'very high' with 9.4 points, an increase from WWL 2023's 8.8 points.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

**Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)**

Publicly sharing Christian values, such as justice and love, on blogs or social media can easily lead to being labeled a dissenter in environments with strict control over divergent views. The delicate religious dynamics and close government monitoring of online platforms significantly increase the risk for those expressing Christian beliefs, particularly if those expressions are interpreted as critiques of political norms.

**Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.25 points)**

In Rwanda, shifting religious affiliation from Catholicism to newer Christian denominations (e.g., Pentecostalism) is fraught with difficulties. Individuals who make such a transition often confront significant challenges in communicating this change to their family members. The risks of such disclosures include severe family rifts, with the possibility of being ostracized or expelled from the family unit.

**Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (2.75 points)**

Changing denomination from Catholicism to new Christian groups like Pentecostal or Evangelical denominations is notably challenging. This decision can significantly impact familial relationships, often leading to ostracism or expulsion from the family. Additionally, government scrutiny adds another layer of complexity, as authorities closely monitor those changing denominations, further complicating the conversion process.

**Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.50 points)**

Engaging in private acts of worship, such as prayer and Bible reading, poses risks for Christians, especially those with a Catholic background. Sensitivities surrounding religious conversions can attract attention and scrutiny from immediate families and the community, leading to potential social exclusion, physical threats, or property loss. To navigate these dangers, individuals are often forced to practice their acts of worship discreetly, as far as possible.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 points)**

In certain regions, parents, particularly those adhering to the newer forms of Christianity, encounter significant impediments in shaping their children's upbringing according to their religious beliefs. The prevailing societal influence and pressures from the wider community make it challenging for parents belonging to non-traditional Christian communities to instill their understanding of Christian values (including aspects such as baptism and holiday celebrations)

in the upbringing of their children. For example, Christian parents may find it difficult to advise their children against participating in certain ceremonies that contradict their religious beliefs. Doing so could expose their children to potential harm or ostracism within their community.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)**

Children from families belonging to non-traditional church communities often face subtle pressure to attend classes at school which promote Roman Catholicism.

**Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.25 points)**

Children of Christians, particularly those from non-traditional Protestant backgrounds or converts, face discrimination and harassment due to their parents' faith, especially if their parents actively engage in preaching or expressing their Christian beliefs. The societal and cultural dynamics create challenges for these children, leading to instances of discrimination and bullying.

**Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Christians encounter obstacles in celebrating Christian weddings where some churches face pressure to limit celebrations. This poses a challenge for churches aiming to mark weddings with expressive ceremonies, including songs and public gatherings, as they navigate restrictions and societal expectations that may impede the open expression of their faith.

**Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (2.75 points)**

Christian baptisms have faced hindrances, particularly affecting unregistered churches and the baptism of Christians coming from an Historical church background.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)**

Christians face extensive monitoring by local communities and private groups, creating a challenging environment for their activities. The government's influence introduces a sense of risk, with surveillance measures such as reporting activities to the police, and potential monitoring of communication channels.

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.00 points)**

Christians face harassment and obstruction in their daily lives, originating from both community members and government sources. The potential threats from government supporters and spies



contribute to a challenging environment that hinders Christians in their daily lives and interactions within the community. This hostile atmosphere poses significant obstacles for Christians as they navigate their faith in the broader social context.

**Block 3.4: Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.00 points)**

Christians, particularly those not affiliated with Catholic or traditional Protestant denominations, have faced obstacles in accessing and sharing community resources, such as clean drinking water, due to discrimination based on faith.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Some Christians, such as those known to belong to non-traditional Christian groups, face discrimination in their professional lives, often being overlooked for hiring or promotion without clear justification. In many cases, their faith plays a role in these decisions, reflecting an underlying bias or prejudice against their religious beliefs in the workplace.

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)**

Christians face hindrances in openly expressing views or opinions that deviate from the government's narrative, as the environment for public expression is constrained, particularly for those not in alignment with official policies. Views perceived as contrary to the established narrative are suppressed, putting individuals at risk of prosecution.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.75 points)**

Christian civil society organizations face significant challenges in functioning if their convictions diverge from the government's stance, as any deviation leads to severe repercussions such as arrest, dissolution or expulsion. Operating in the country requires a delicate balance for these Christian entities, highlighting the overarching influence of government policies on their operations and existence.

**Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

Christians, particularly those associated with non-traditional denominations, will often face discrimination when interacting with various authorities, including local administration and government institutions, especially if their activities do not align with or support the government's stance.

**Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (3.50 points)**

Individuals who cause harm to Christians, especially those aligned with the government, are often left unpunished, particularly when acting as agents of the government's agenda. This lack of accountability in cases of harassment and intimidation further contributes to a challenging environment for Christians who diverge from the government's narrative.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (4.00 points)**

Government surveillance and interference are prevalent, affecting various church organizations. While the focus is on non-traditional churches, this pattern extends to all churches. The infiltration by government agents for monitoring purposes instills fear and causes disruption, thus affecting their worship and community interactions.

**Block 5.9: Christians have experienced interference when choosing their own religious leaders. (4.00 points)**

Christians face interference in the selection of their religious leaders, with the government exerting influence and control over leadership decisions within religious institutions. This pattern of interference reflects a broader trend of government involvement in religious affairs, constraining the autonomy of Christian communities.

**Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)**

When churches and Christian organizations attempt to speak out against persecution, especially when the perpetrators are believed to be government agents, they face significant risks. Challenging these agents is often seen as insurmountable, as the government's hostile stance places them in a vulnerable position.

**Block 5.10: Christians have been hindered in training their own religious leaders. (3.75 points)**

Christians, especially those affiliated with non-traditional denominations, have encountered hindrances in training leaders, as the government's influence extends to the training process, posing challenges for independent development and education within Christian communities.

## Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives. In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

### **3. The use of symbolic numbers**

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Rwanda: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	120	100 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	100 *
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	1000
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	10 *	0

## 5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

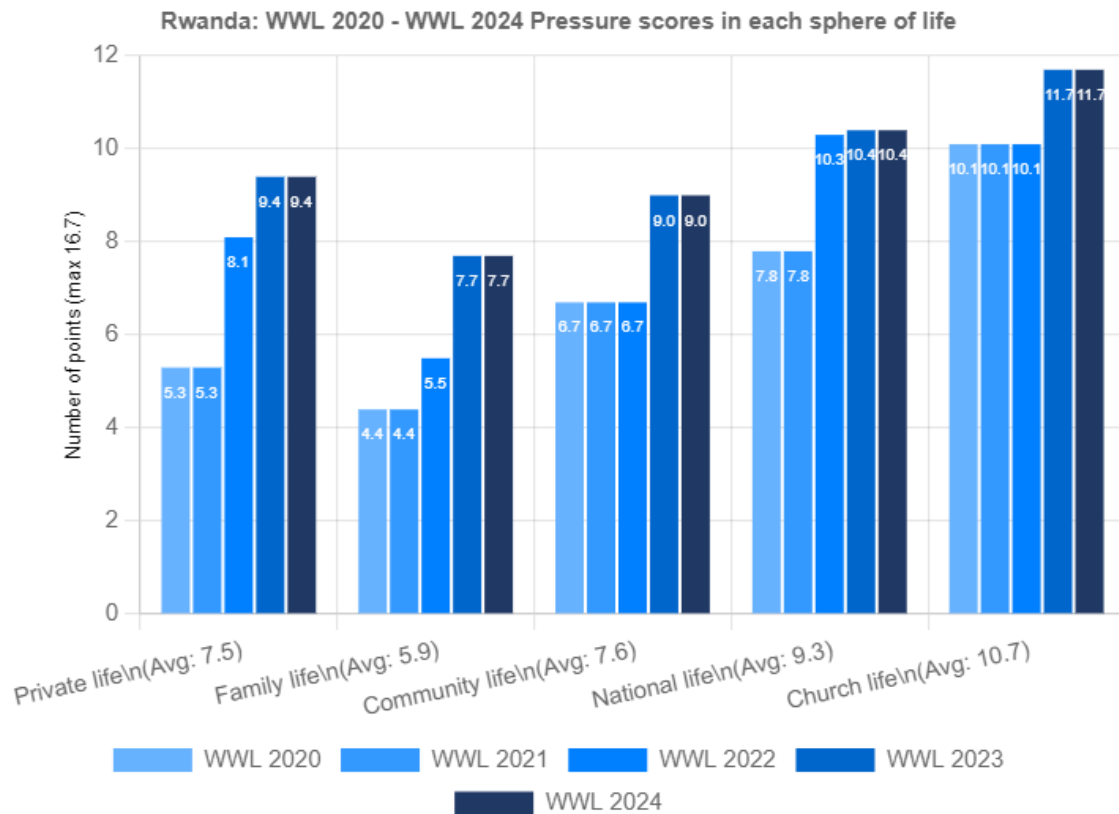
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

In Rwanda, pressure on Christians has intensified over the past five reporting periods. The table below shows that the average pressure on Christians increased after a period of stability at the 6.9 point mark and has now stabilized much higher at the 9.6 point mark. This trend indicates a growing concern for religious freedom and expression within the country. The government has increased its pressure directly and indirectly on Christians, especially on those belonging to the

non-traditional Protestant churches.

Rwanda: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	9.6
2023	9.6
2022	8.1
2021	6.9
2020	6.9

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



The five years average pressure on Christians is highest in the *Church sphere* (scoring 10.7 points on average) followed by the *National sphere* (9.3 points on average). This shows that the main pressure is caused by *Dictatorial paranoia* with laws and policies being implemented to restrict freedom of religion. This trend is reflective of a broader strategy of control and suppression by the state, which uses laws and policies to limit religious freedom.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Violence is very high in Rwanda considering that it is a Christian majority country and there have been no killings. Despite a slight decrease in WWL 2023, there has been an upward trend in the scores since WWL 2020.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Despite Rwanda boasting the [largest female](#) Parliamentary representation in the world (Statista, 29 February 2024), patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate culture. As noted in a [2017 CEDAW periodic review](#), “there is a general lack of acceptance of women in decision-making positions and reluctance to implement decisions made by them.” These cultural norms can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution against women.

In a country where forced marriages are common mostly in rural areas and [refugee camps](#), some forced marriages are fuelled by religious motivation (OECD 2024: Social Institutions and Gender Index - Rwanda). Parents of female converts are known to marry them off to Muslims to try and restore them to the Islamic faith. A country expert also contends that the economic position of both Christian and Muslim parents is a contributing factor, especially in the case of minors: “Forced marriage is a crime and is punishable under the law. However, it does occur, and when it does it is in respect of minor children and, more often than not, poverty is the motivation as opposed to religious beliefs.”

Converts from a Muslim background are also vulnerable to physical, sexual, and verbal attacks. Sexual abuse has been widely cited by regional experts as the primary challenge facing female converts. If they are already married when they become a Christian, women from a Muslim or Animist background will most likely be expelled from their homes, divorced, and subsequently refused custody of their children. Additionally, converts are often denied their inheritance rights, which can be hard for them to endure.

### Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Gender-specific persecution against Rwandan men and boys on faith-related grounds is not widely reported. When it does occur, it usually takes the form of physical violence or imprisonment. Pastors in particular are vulnerable to being detained. Arbitrary detentions reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a source. However, “this has been the tactic for years,” a country expert adds. Pressure on church leaders in Rwanda and difficulties in registering churches has led to many migrating to Uganda and Tanzania.

Known converts from a Muslim background are also exposed to hostile treatment; they may encounter discrimination from family, in the workplace, or even lose their job. If men are persecuted, their role as family provider may be compromised and his dependents will also suffer. Likewise, if converts are forced out of their family home because of their faith, they will be vulnerable economically.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 (D2):

- Although religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, the government has taken steps to assert greater control over all religious institutions. The 2018 law requires all religious organizations to obtain legal status from the authorities and submit extensive documentation. Thousands of places of worship, including mosques, have been closed for allegedly violating health, safety, or noise regulations. Islamic religious leaders must also hold a degree in religious studies from a recognized educational institution and any donated funds must be deposited in Rwandan banks.
- Jehovah's Witnesses face arrest for refusing to participate in localized security duties like night patrols or [some] oath-taking ceremonies involving the national flag.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Rwanda):

- "Authorities cited noise pollution ordinances to prohibit several mosques from broadcasting the call to prayer via loudspeaker at the usual volume."
- " Jehovah's Witnesses said they did not encounter significant problems obtaining government employment owing to their religious beliefs, particularly those related to swearing oaths, and said the government generally provided reasonable accommodations to individuals holding these beliefs. They continued, however, to state that certain government-funded religious schools sought to force Jehovah's Witnesses' families to participate in religious ceremonies contrary to their beliefs and laws guaranteeing freedom of worship. This in some cases resulted in conflict and the expulsion or voluntary departure of students from the schools. Jehovah's Witnesses reported this caused an undue financial burden on their communities, as 25 students had to enroll as boarders in more distant schools or pay higher tuition fees, and 16 students remained out of school."

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Under the rule of Paul Kagame, the regime's ever-tightening grip on civil liberties shows no signs of easing. The government has been actively suppressing opposition voices, including those within the Church. Under the pretext of maintaining order and preventing a return to the ethnic tensions that fueled past atrocities, increasingly draconian measures are being implemented. These range from stringent control over religious buildings to targeted surveillance of churches suspected of being breeding grounds for dissent. Particularly at risk are Pentecostal churches, which have been scrutinized more closely in recent years. The pressure on Christians is part of a broader pattern of stifling dissent and maintaining an iron grip on power. While the need to prevent another catastrophe like the 1990s genocide is understandable, the measures employed must be scrutinized for their broader societal impact. Suppressing essential freedoms in the name of security sets a perilous precedent that may, in the long term, prove more divisive and destabilizing than the threats it aims to mitigate. Given the consistent authoritarian trend, no significant positive change is expected in the short term.



## Christian denominational protectionism

The increasing influence of non-traditional Christian denominations has not gone unnoticed by leaders within the Roman Catholic Church, which has historically been the majority denomination in Rwanda. These leaders, concerned about losing their flock to newer religious movements, have reportedly begun aligning more closely with government authorities to restrict the growth of these groups. This uneasy alliance is resulting in increased scrutiny and limitations placed on non-traditional Christian congregations. Given the extent of Catholic involvement in educational institutions in the country, this denominational protectionism also impacts non-Catholics in the academic sphere. They are likely to face discrimination both inside and outside the classroom. With both the government and some Catholic church leaders reinforcing each other's interests, it is unlikely that there will be any significant positive shift in this attitude in the near future.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: largest female - <https://www.statista.com/statistics/267028/women-in-selected-national-parliaments/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: 2017 CEDAW periodic review, - <https://www.refworld.org/publisher,CEDAW,,RWA,596f4b0a4,0.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: refugee camps - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/RW.pdf>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Rwanda>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.