
World Watch Research

Rwanda: Persecution Dynamics

February 2025



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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research@od.org

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World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- [Persecution dynamics](#) (published annually in January/February).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

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/>.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Rwanda: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
14,415,000	13,226,000	91.8

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Rwanda: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	13,226,000	91.8
Muslim	705,000	4.9
Hindu	720	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethnic religionist	425,000	2.9
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	27,400	0.2
Atheist	39	0.0
Agnostic	30,000	0.2
Other	0	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



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

While the government claims to be preserving societal peace, its actions have led to a society that feels constantly under surveillance. Government control extends beyond political realms, permeating even the most personal aspects of life, including religious practices and personal beliefs. According to Freedom House ([Freedom in the World 2024 Rwanda](#)), religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, yet the government has taken steps to exert significant control over religious institutions.

A 2018 law mandates that religious organizations must obtain legal status from the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), requiring extensive documentation. As a result, thousands of places of worship, including churches and mosques, have been closed under the pretext of violating health, safety, or noise regulations. Religious leaders are now required to hold a degree in religious studies from a recognized institution, and religious organizations must report grants to the RGB, with donations to faith-based groups required to be deposited in Rwandan banks. The financial transactions of religious organizations are under close government scrutiny, further tightening the control over religious life.

Beyond these regulatory measures, the government’s pervasive presence extends into the domestic sphere, with security agents routinely conducting unwarranted searches of religious leaders' homes. This contributes to an atmosphere of fear and distrust. The social fabric is also strained, as individuals who deviate from traditional religious norms—such as those converting from Roman Catholicism to non-traditional Christian denominations—often face ostracism from their families. Intimidation, surveillance, and monitoring are not abstract threats but daily realities for many. Such government interference fosters an environment where the ruling authority’s word is absolute, suffocating any potential for open dialogue or freedom of association.

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- Government restrictions:** Christians face challenges due to stringent government regulations, such as the requirement for places of worship to meet specific health, safety, and noise pollution standards, which could disproportionately affect smaller or less-resourced churches. Christians also face challenges, such as restrictions on religious practices (e.g., prohibiting loudspeaker announcements) or government criticism of certain religious activities.

- **Discrimination in education:** Christian students, particularly those in government-funded religious schools, are compelled to engage in a curriculum on world religions, ethics and citizenship without the option to opt out, potentially leading to conflicts with their religious beliefs or practice.
- **Government intervention in religious affairs:** The government's monitoring and intervention in the internal affairs of religious organizations can lead to tensions and undermine the autonomy of Christian groups, particularly those that are newly established or lack significant resources.
- **Church closures and harassment:** Many churches have been closed due to government actions, and Christians are often harassed by the state. In some cases, Christians face detention, which heightens the pressure and risks associated with practicing their faith.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Foreign Christians in the country are not involuntarily 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 many churches being closed down and leaders arrested.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

Position on the World Watch List

Rwanda: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	58	64
WWL 2024	58	63
WWL 2023	57	63
WWL 2022	50	67
WWL 2021	42	72

Despite the overall score for Rwanda remaining stable, there was a significant increase in pressure within the *Church sphere*, which had the drastic impact of at least 4,000 churches being forced to close. This rise in pressure has made the process of establishing a new church or obtaining and renewing licenses—whether for new churches or those whose licenses were suspended or revoked—practically impossible. Over the past five years (from WWL 2021 to WWL 2025), Rwanda's persecution score rose steadily moving from 42 points in WWL 2021 to 58 points in WWL 2025. Although the violence score remained stable at 9.4 points, security agents frequently conduct searches of church leaders' homes, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust. The government's particular targeting of non-traditional Protestant churches contributes to the growing challenges faced by Christians in the country.

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
	WEAK			VERY WEAK	MEDIUM		WEAK	VERY STRONG	
Government officials							Weak	Very strong	
Ethnic group leaders				Very weak					
Non-Christian religious leaders	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.

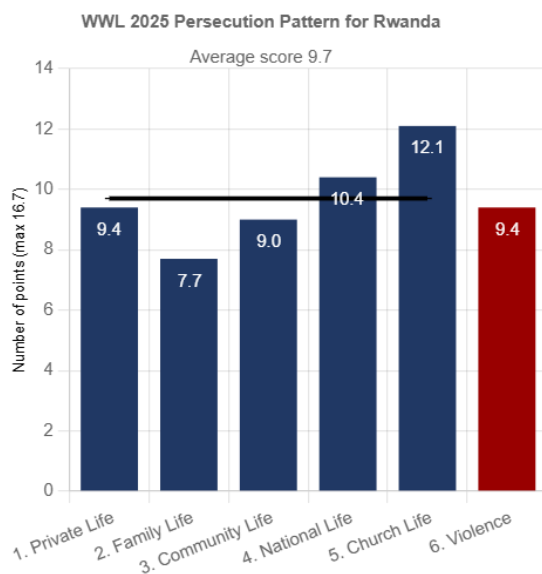
Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **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 2025 Persecution pattern for Rwanda shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Rwanda for WWL 2025 is 9.7 points (up very slightly from 9.6 points in both WWL 2024 and WWL 2023).
- Pressure is greatest in the *Church sphere*, scoring 12.1 points (up from 11.7 points in WWL 2024), followed by the *National sphere* with 10.4 points. The *Family sphere* has the lowest score, 7.7 points, similar to WWL 2024.
- The level of violence remains in the 'very high' category, scoring 9.4 points, the same as in WWL 2024.

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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

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)

Openly revealing one's Christian faith through personal expressions such as blogs or social media platforms carries significant risks for a convert from ATR, Islam or a 'rival' Christian denomination. If a Christian attempts to express themselves by highlighting injustices or issues that their faith compels them to address, the consequences could be even more severe, since there is strict government control over dissent and any perceived criticism of the state's stability.

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

Christians, particularly those transitioning from a dominant denomination such as the Catholic Church to smaller groups like Pentecostal or non-denominational churches, face significant challenges when discussing their faith with immediate family members. The pressure to conform to predominant religious norms within families can lead to rejection, ostracism, or even more severe repercussions, making it exceedingly difficult for individuals to freely express their beliefs.

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

Conversion between Christian denominations, particularly from a dominant group like the Catholic Church to smaller non-traditional denominations, often revolves around theological differences rather than outright opposition or punitive actions. However, in such contexts, individuals may encounter significant tension within their families and communities.

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (2.50 points)

Christians in Rwanda, particularly those belonging to smaller or non-denominational churches, face significant risks when meeting with fellow believers. These smaller congregations are especially

vulnerable to government actions, including the demolition or closure of churches, which has made it increasingly difficult for members to gather for worship. Furthermore, Christian gatherings are often misinterpreted as political meetings, exposing attendees to potential legal repercussions, including imprisonment. This environment not only restricts their ability to worship freely but also hinders meaningful fellowship among believers.

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)

Christian parents in Rwanda encounter considerable difficulties in raising their children according to their faith, largely due to the influence of government ideology. Policies that emphasize conformity to state-defined norms often conflict with Christian values. For parents in smaller or non-denominational groups, the situation is even more complex. They frequently feel compelled to align with dominant denominations, such as the Catholic Church, to improve their children's opportunities in education or future employment. Such pressure restricts parents' ability to freely express and instill their religious beliefs, affecting the spiritual development of their children.

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

Christian children in Rwanda face indirect pressure to participate in lessons with content that conflicts with their religious beliefs, particularly within an educational system shaped by the dominant religion or government-promoted ideologies. For children from smaller or non-denominational Christian groups, the difficulty is heightened, as their families often feel obligated to conform to dominant religious practices to secure better opportunities in education and future careers.

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 families with converted members, frequently face harassment and discrimination linked to their parents' faith. This issue becomes even more pronounced when parents or children actively participate in evangelism or express their Christian beliefs in ways that differ from traditional or majority religious practices. Rwanda's societal and cultural dynamics often contribute to these challenges, as such children are frequently targeted or discriminated against due to their association with non-traditional Christian practices.

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

Christians face challenges in celebrating weddings, particularly when their practiced faith deviates from traditional or dominant norms. For those from non-traditional Protestant backgrounds or smaller denominations, the situation is often more difficult. Some churches experience pressure to limit celebrations, especially those involving music or public gatherings, due to societal expectations or restrictions targeting their church practices.

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)

Particularly smaller or non-traditional denominations are often subjected to close scrutiny by local communities and government agents, who monitor their activities rigorously. This includes restrictions on gatherings, limitations on public expressions of faith, and pressure to conform to dominant religious norms. Such measures disproportionately affect smaller groups, further marginalizing their presence and hindering their ability to worship freely.

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

Particularly Christians from smaller, non-Catholic, or non-traditional Protestant denominations encounter significant obstacles in accessing and sharing community resources, such as clean drinking water. These challenges are often exacerbated by discriminatory practices linked to religious affiliation, making it difficult for smaller groups to receive fair access.

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

Particularly Christians belonging to non-traditional church groups experience pronounced discrimination in both public and private employment sectors. This bias is rooted in a system shaped by political motivation and the dominance of groups aligned with government policies, which influences decisions and creates barriers for individuals who wish to prioritize their Christian way of life.

Block 3.13: Christians have been interrogated or compelled to report to the local vigilante/police for faith-related reasons. (2.75 points)

Christians, particularly those from non-traditional denominations and those perceived as not aligned with government policies, face heightened scrutiny and pressure from government agents embedded within local communities. These agents actively monitor their faith-related activities, encouraging individuals to report on religious gatherings and practices. This systematic surveillance creates a restrictive environment, making it difficult for these groups to practice their faith openly and reinforcing a climate of fear and control within their communities.

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 in Rwanda face considerable obstacles when expressing views or opinions that diverge from the government's narrative. The country is rated "Not Free" by Freedom House, reflecting severe restrictions on civil liberties, academic freedom, and public expression. With a media freedom score of 0 out of 4, the environment is tightly controlled, leaving little room for dissent ([Freedom in the World 2024, Rwanda](#)). The government's effort to exert control over religious institutions further compounds these challenges. Speaking out against injustices, human rights violations or other

sensitive issues is a dangerous act, as individuals holding views perceived to contradict the official narrative risk suppression or prosecution. This creates an oppressive environment where Christians, particularly those with dissenting beliefs, must exercise extreme caution and self-censorship.

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 in Rwanda face severe challenges in an environment rated "Not Free" by Freedom House, with tight restrictions on civil liberties, academic freedom, and media independence. The government's efforts to exert control over religious institutions and suppress dissent create significant obstacles for these organizations, particularly those whose convictions or activities are perceived to diverge from official policies. Operating within such a restrictive environment requires a delicate balance, as organizations that advocate for human rights, justice, or values not aligned with the government risk arrest, dissolution, or expulsion. The overall suppression of civil society impacts Christian entities profoundly, limiting their ability to address social or political issues effectively and curtailing their contribution to the broader community.

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 affiliated with non-traditional denominations in Rwanda face systemic discrimination driven by government attitudes toward religious diversity. The government often views these groups with suspicion, particularly when their beliefs or practices are perceived as conflicting with state policies or interests. This has led to discriminatory treatment in interactions with local administration and government institutions, creating barriers for these groups in accessing services, permits, or recognition. The government's efforts to exert control over religious institutions exacerbate the issue, as non-traditional Christian groups are frequently marginalized and treated as non-compliant.

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

In cases where individuals aligned with the government harm Christians, accountability is often absent, especially when these individuals act under state directives. Government agents tasked with advancing the state's agenda frequently engage in harassment and intimidation of Christians, particularly those from non-traditional denominations. These actions, carried out with implicit or explicit state approval, make it nearly impossible to hold perpetrators accountable through legal or institutional channels. Within the context of family and community, the situation is equally challenging for non-traditional Christians, as societal norms often discourage addressing or punishing acts of persecution. This lack of recourse, both within state mechanisms and community structures, further exacerbates the difficulties faced by Christians.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

Church activities, particularly those of non-traditional Protestant denominations, are subject to intensive government scrutiny and interference in Rwanda. This scrutiny extends far beyond occasional oversight, as the government employs a network of agents specifically tasked with monitoring church

activities. These agents infiltrate church gatherings, closely observing worship services, sermons and administrative functions to identify any perceived deviation from state-approved practices. The monitoring does not stop at the physical premises; it often extends into the personal lives of church leaders and members, with agents tracking communications, such as emails and phone calls, and monitoring community outreach initiatives. This pervasive surveillance has led to the closure of numerous churches and the obstruction of various aspects of their operations, including worship gatherings, evangelism and charity work. For non-traditional denominations, the situation is particularly severe, as they are often viewed as resistant to government narratives or policies. The government's extensive efforts to control these groups highlight a broader strategy to regulate and suppress religious institutions deemed incompatible with its agenda. This creates an oppressive environment where church activities are stifled, and the freedom to practice faith is severely curtailed.

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

Christians face considerable obstacles in selecting their religious leaders due to pervasive government interference. The authorities are intent on placing all churches and other institutions under their control, and one of the key tools used to achieve this is through manipulating the mechanisms for electing church leaders. By exerting influence over leadership selection processes, the government limits the autonomy and independence of Christian communities, ensuring that leaders are aligned with state policies and narratives. For non-traditional Christian denominations, the interference is even more pronounced, with the government actively working to suppress voices and leadership structures perceived as resistant to its authority.

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

The government has created an environment where dissent or criticism is met with severe repercussions. Openly addressing issues of persecution often subjects churches and organizations to heightened scrutiny from government agents and increased monitoring of their activities. This risk of retaliation discourages many from raising concerns, further compounding the challenges they face in operating independently and advocating for their communities.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)

Christians, especially non-traditional Protestant churches in Rwanda have faced significant obstacles in constructing or renovating their buildings due to increasingly restrictive government policies. These policies have resulted in the closure of thousands of churches across the country, with many buildings being destroyed under the pretext of failing to meet stringent new regulations. These laws, often framed as necessary for safety or urban planning, are widely viewed as cumbersome and fundamentally contrary to the principles of freedom of religion. The government's actions disproportionately affect smaller, non-traditional denominations, which often lack the resources to comply with these requirements. For these groups, the inability to establish or maintain places of worship has become a critical issue, severely limiting their ability to gather and practice their faith. The closures and restrictions reflect a broader pattern of interference aimed at consolidating state control

over religious institutions, eroding the independence of these communities, and undermining the basic tenets of religious freedom. This environment leaves the church, especially non-traditional churches struggling to survive in the face of mounting legal and structural challenges.

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 2025	WWL 2024
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?	4,000	120
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
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)?	1,000 *	1,000 *
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 *	10 *

In the WWL 2025 reporting period:

- **Churches closed:** Over [4000 Christian churches](#) were closed under the guise of failing to comply with regulations (BBC News, 2 August 2024). It has become evident that the onerous requirements imposed were selectively applied to churches presumed to be out of alignment with government policies. Pastors in Rwanda described how government regulations are reshaping church life in ways that strain local congregations. Most are led by a single pastor, but a rule mandating university-level theological education has made it difficult for leaders to comply.

Churches are also instructed to install soundproofing, even though bars and entertainment venues face no similar restrictions. Another requirement demands parking spaces, even in communities where most people walk to church. The pastors affected hold the view that the intention of such policies seems to be to bring churches and their leadership in line with government ideology and politics.

- **Christians detained/arrested:** At least ten Christians were detained in circumstances related to their churches, with most facing trumped-up charges.
- **Christians forced to leave the country:** As church closures intensified and intimidation became rampant, at least ten Christians were forced to flee their country.

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.

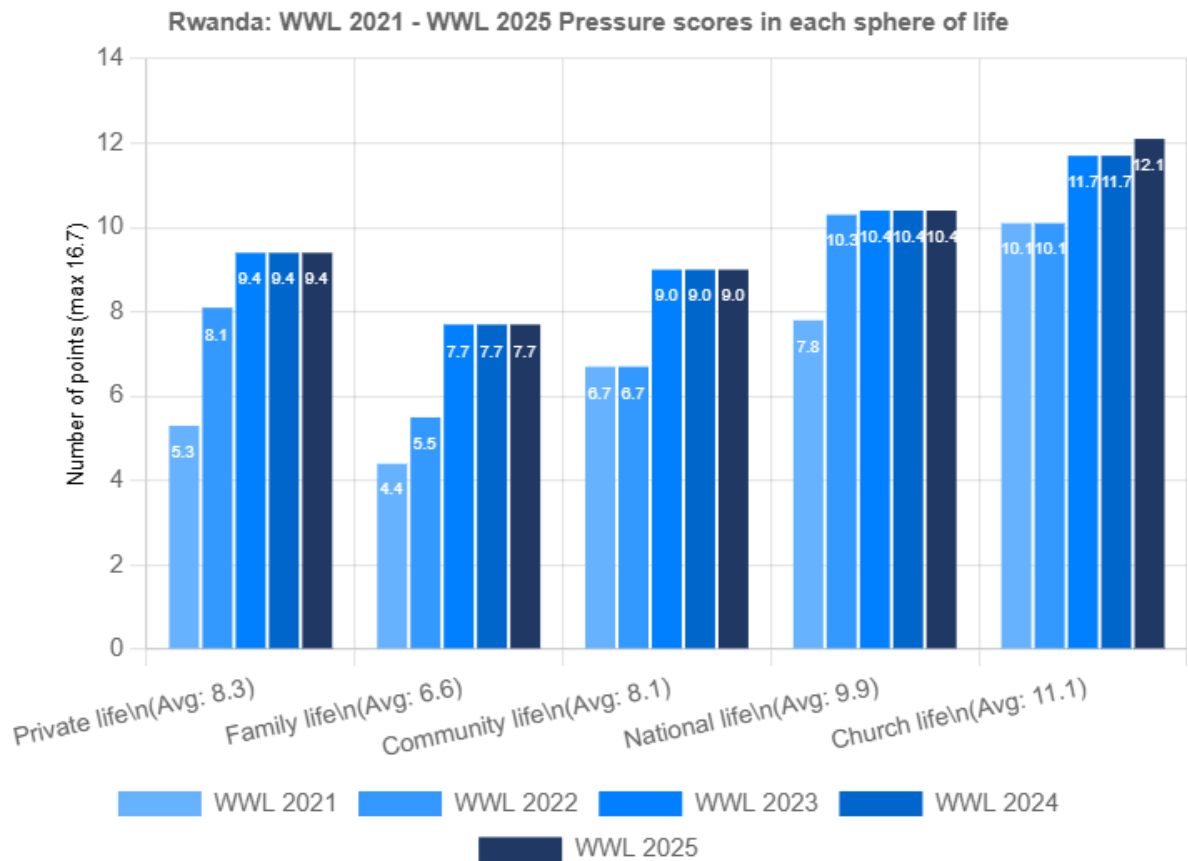
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Rwanda: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	9.7
2024	9.6
2023	9.6
2022	8.1
2021	6.9

As the five-year average pressure score shows, pressure on Christians in Rwanda has been on the rise. The average pressure was 6.9 points in WWL 2021, then sharply rose to 8.1 points in WWL 2022, and has continued to increase, reaching 9.7 points in WWL 2025. This upward trend reflects growing concerns over religious freedom and expression in the country. The government has intensified both direct and indirect pressure on Christians, particularly targeting members of non-traditional Protestant churches.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

The average score for each sphere of life, as indicated in the blue chart below, highlights that pressure on Christians in Rwanda is highest in the *Church sphere*, with an average score of 11.1 points, followed by the *National sphere*, which averages 9.9 points, reflecting significant governmental control and restrictions on religious expression. The *Family sphere*, with an average score of 6.6 points, represents the lowest level of pressure but still indicates notable challenges for Christians in their personal and familial lives.



5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The average violence score for the most recent five WWL reporting periods is 9.0 points, which is notable for a country like Rwanda which has never ranked among the top 50 WWL countries. From WWL 2022 - WWL 2025 the violence score has more or less stabilized at the 8.9 - 9.4 point range. The violence score is often linked to the closure of churches and the arrest of Christian leaders in the country, which has severely impacted smaller congregations.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

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 fueled by religious motivation (OECD 2024: Social Institutions and Gender Index - Rwanda). Parents of female converts from Islam 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.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

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; however, “this has been the tactic for years,” a country expert added. 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 Freedom in the World 2024 / Rwanda (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. Mosques have also 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 2023 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."
- Although the government took steps to address the above problem, instructing schools to re-admit any wrongfully dismissed students, "Jehovah's Witnesses reported, however, that 11 students had been dismissed or voluntarily left school based on religious belief during the year [2023]".

Trends Summary

1) Government control over public assemblies has increased

The Rwandan government has been progressively tightening its control over public assemblies, a trend that has become more pronounced in recent months. Despite constitutional protections for freedom of assembly, new regulations have been introduced that make it increasingly difficult for citizens to gather publicly. Even when public gatherings receive official approval, they are frequently subject to disruption by state authorities. This pattern of growing control underscores the government's broader efforts to stifle dissent and limit the influence of civil society, contributing to a shrinking space for democratic expression.

2) Persistent autocratic governance under the guise of stability

Rwanda's outward appearance of stability continues to mask the persistent and deepening autocratic nature of President Kagame's regime. The government remains unyielding in its control, employing a range of punitive measures to silence dissent, including arrests, forced exile, and other severe consequences. This trend of autocratic governance shows no signs of abating, as the regime continues

to consolidate power, undermining democratic principles and maintaining a climate of fear and repression.

3) Ongoing hostility toward non-traditional Christian groups

The Rwandan government's adversarial stance towards non-traditional Christian groups has persisted, reflecting a consistent trend of religious repression. Despite growing international scrutiny, unregistered churches and house-churches continue to face harassment and closure by the government. This ongoing hostility highlights the government's determination to control religious expression and restrict religious freedoms that fall outside state-sanctioned norms. The sustained pressure on these groups illustrates the broader issues of religious intolerance and the suppression of fundamental human rights within Rwanda.

4) Regional tensions have increased through Rwanda's Involvement in the DRC crisis

Rwanda's involvement in the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has intensified, contributing to increasing regional tensions. Recent aggressive actions, including missile strikes targeting DRC military jets, have heightened concerns about Rwanda's role in the complex geopolitical landscape of the Great Lakes region. These developments have strained relations between Rwanda and the DRC, raising alarms about the potential for broader conflict. Rwanda's assertive military actions and its alleged interference in DRC's internal affairs, including claims of tampering with the country's Global Positioning System (GPS), have drawn regional powers into the fray, further complicating the situation and contributing to regional instability. This trend underscores the growing concern over Rwanda's impact on regional security and its potential to destabilize the Great Lakes area further.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and 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/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: Freedom in the World 2024 Rwanda - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2024>
- Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points): Freedom in the World 2024, Rwanda - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-world/2024>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: 4000 Christian churches - <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2p9dkdzxo>
- 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>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: IRFR 2023 Rwanda - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/rwanda/>