# Jehovah's Witnesses During and After the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda

## Psychosocial Factors Related to Faith, Forgiveness, and Family


**Prepared by**

Organisation Religieuse des Témoins de Jéhovah

Rwanda

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## Section 3. Faith

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ANOVA | Analysis of Variance |
| CLS-H | Compassionate Love Scale for Humanity |
| CRSS | Community Resilience and Support Scale |
| DFS | Divine Forgiveness Scale |
| DSM-IV | Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition |
| DSM-V | Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition |
| DNK | Do not know |
| EST | Ecological Systems Theory |
| FISI | Four-Item Social Identification |
| HHI | Herth Hope Index |
| ICD-11 | International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Revision |
| JW | Jehovah's Witness |
| JWs | Jehovah's Witnesses |
| JW-RWA | *Jehovah's Witnesses During and After the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda: Psychosocial Factors Related to Faith, Forgiveness, and Family* |
| KMO | Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin |
| *M* | Mean |
| MINUBUMWE | Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement |
| MRND | Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement |
| NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| NOA | None of the above |

| | |
|---|---|
| *ns* | Not (statistically) significant |
| PNA | Prefer not to answer |
| PTG | Posttraumatic growth |
| PTSD | Posttraumatic stress disorder |
| PTSS | Posttraumatic stress symptoms |
| RCS | Rwanda Correctional Service |
| RNEC | Rwanda National Ethics Committee |
| RTLM | Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines |
| SCID-I | Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I Disorders |
| *SD* | Standard deviation |
| SDR | Socially Desirable Responses |
| SFDPS | Self-Forgiveness Dual-Process Scale |
| T-CRS | Transcultural Community Resilience Scale |

# 3. FAITH

The study of religion includes both systems of religious beliefs and practices and those who adopt those beliefs and practices, collectively and individually. The JW-RWA study focused on individual attitudes, beliefs, and social experiences of religiosity rather than institutional features of the religious community. The study aimed, among other goals, to better understand what it meant to become and be one of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda, drawing from the theoretical and empirical literature on (a) religious conversion (Hood et al., 2009; Rambo, 1993), (b) psychological dimensions of religion (Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Saroglou, 2011), and (c) intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Gorsuch & Venable, 1983; Maltby, 1999; Maltby & Lewis, 1996). With this foundation, results from the study are reported on Jehovah's Witnesses' personal religious history, adoption and retention of religious affiliation, religious belief, practices under opposition, sense of religious identity and commitment, and religious orientation. The findings show a demographically diverse population with shared beliefs and practices.

## Literature Review

Religion appeals to individuals by satisfying cognitive, emotional, moral, and social needs (Pargament, 1997). The related concepts of *faith* and *religion* have been defined from various theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and psychological perspectives. By one definition, religion encompasses broad personal and communal dimensions; whereas faith, although associated with religious belief systems, is an "inner attitude, conviction, or trust" shown, for instance, toward a "supreme God or ultimate salvation" (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). The

psychosocial study of religious groups provides insights into the interplay between inner religious convictions and outward practice of religion.

**Conversion—Becoming Jehovah's Witnesses**

Religious conversion is a complex process that can be affected by immediate personal propensities and situations, surrounding social contexts, and larger cultural influences (Pop & Pop, 2024; Rambo, 1993). "Conversion,"—to turn around or be transformed—refers to changes in an individual's beliefs or actions based on a perceived reality (Barbour, 1994). Some conversions may be sudden and emotional, and others gradual and deliberate (James, 1902). Early research on conversion pointed to personality type as the main factor in determining which religion(s) a person chooses (Paloutzian et al., 1999). Subsequent research added environmental and cultural factors accounting for attraction, such as a religion's teachings and traditions, community structure, social ties, demographic composition, and perceived or real benefits (Rambo, 1993). A still later concept is called a "fit model" of conversion, in which an individual's needs combine with a religious group that fits those needs to explain initial conversion and the course of one's membership, as well as the psychosocial effects of conversion (Paloutzian et al., 2013).

Studies have shown that those who become Jehovah's Witnesses come from widely divergent religious backgrounds, ranging from devout members of other faiths to irregular attendees to the altogether irreligious, even to agnostics and atheists (e.g., Beckford, 1975; Dobbelaere & Wilson, 1980). For many people, religious affiliation is a volitional act undertaken in adolescence or adulthood, sometimes in response to such diverse factors as need, crisis, spiritual seeking, or intellectual curiosity. For others, religious affiliation is a matter of familial inheritance, which can differ greatly from the experience of adult religious conversion. Children reared in a religion by one or both parents may be socialized in the religion's beliefs and values from a young

age and internalize those concepts in adolescence (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012; Smith & Adamczyk, 2021). Parents' religious background can have a strong effect on the religious choices and experiences of their children (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). A study of Belgian Witnesses concluded that considering parental teaching and the added influence of other relatives, Jehovah's Witnesses are "a family faith, in which kinship ties reinforce the distinct culture of the movement" (Dobbelaere & Wilson, 1980, p. 101).

The growth pattern in Rwanda with first-generation converts is similar to the development of Jehovah's Witness communities in other parts of Africa. As of 2023, about 1.9 million of Jehovah's Witnesses were actively worshipping and evangelizing on the continent. Among early sociological studies that examined growth patterns is Norman Long's 1968 study of rural Zambia. Long noted that kinship and other social ties, along with age, gender, and socio-economic factors, influenced receptivity to Witness evangelizing (Long, 1968). Renowned Oxford sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson (1973) credited Kenyan Witnesses' success in drawing first-generation converts to their egalitarian ethics and inter-tribal diversity, as well as their all-volunteer structure and singular focus on evangelism. Continuing Bible education at their meetings included training in public speaking and "in setting forth doctrine in an orderly way" (p. 144).

Beckford (1975) described similar characteristics in his 1975 study of Jehovah's Witnesses in Britain, where he reported "the virtual absence of anything which closely resembles the phenomenon of religious conversion as it is customarily understood" (p. 190). Witnesses' instructional pattern of both learning and teaching may account for the comparatively "closer proximity between official teaching and believers' understanding" among Witnesses in general (Chryssides, 2022, p. 4).

## Dimensions of Religion

To categorize the psychological processes of religion, psychologist Vassilis Saroglou (2011) proposed a model involving four interconnected dimensions: believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging, each reflecting cognitive, emotional, moral, and social functions of religion, respectively. These dimensions vary in salience, emphasis, and content from person to person; and some or all may interact to produce individual religiousness. The JW-RWA survey examined aspects of each of these four dimensions in JW beliefs and practices.

### *Believing—A Cognitive Appeal to Logic*

A universal feature of religion is a set of beliefs in things beyond the realm of humanity, such as divine beings, impersonal forces, or principles (Saroglou, 2011). The cognitive processes involved in believing may be seen in the theoretical concept of "quest," a stage of conversion in which one actively seeks to build meaning, erase ignorance, and resolve inconsistency (Rambo, 1993, p. 56; Richardson, 1985). The centrality of religious beliefs to an individual's identity can determine the extent to which those beliefs influence other spheres of the person's life (Murken & Namini, 2006). For instance, a belief in life after death might affect an individual's outlook and decisions in the present.

The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses is classified by scholars as "restorationist" in that it seeks to return to the model of doctrine, practice, and structure of first-century Christianity as described in biblical accounts (Chu & Peltonen, 2024; Weddle, 2006). Several doctrinal beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses (e.g., restoration of paradise earth, resurrection on Earth of the righteous and unrighteous, and the impending rule of God's Kingdom in heaven over the Earth) differ from those

of mainstream Christian religions.[1] Belief in these teachings about future life influences the conduct and choices of Witnesses in the present (Barker, 2024; Chryssides, 2016). Two distinctive practices modeled on early Christianity (Cadoux, 1919; Dombrowski, 1991; Johnson, 1999) are Witnesses' public witnessing, or evangelizing (How & Brumley, 1999), and their apolitical ethic of nonviolence (Brock & Young, 1999; Knox, 2018; Schroeder, 2011).

Before deciding to become Jehovah's Witnesses, individuals participate in an extensive course of Bible study, including both doctrines and moral precepts. Those who decide to accept and agree to adhere to the teachings may be baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses. Sociologists have described the JW belief system as "rational" with "impressive uniformity of doctrine" (Beckford, 1975, p. 119; Wilson, 1973, p. 145). Beckford (1975) observed a "very unusually high degree of doctrinal awareness" among Witnesses (p. 121). Long (1968) found that "joining did not take the form of a sudden conversion but was a gradual awakening to the faith," an "interplay of ethic and action" (p. 239), with the objective to "become mature in the knowledge of the Bible" in order to teach others (p. 208). Hence, JW core beliefs and style of teaching tend to be more cognitive than emotive in nature. However, as noted above, Long observed that Bible study for Jehovah's Witnesses was not merely academic; rather, JW ethical teachings had "action" as their aim, as exemplified in the public evangelizing work.

### *Bonding—Close Relationship or Religious Ritual*

Self-transcendent emotional experiences bond an individual to "a deeper reality that transcends everyday reality and the self." "Awe—the emotion of respectful admiration" and "hope" are examples of this dimension (Saroglou, 2011, p. 1326). Attachment theory originally

[1] Publications regarding the teachings and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses are accessible without cost on the organization's official website, jw.org, in over 1,090 languages.

referred to "styles" of early-life relationships with caregivers (e.g., parent-child) that set the pattern for interpersonal relationships throughout life. Attachment theorists extended the concept to include religious dimensions. For instance, one who desires closeness with God may form a secure attachment bond that sees Him as a safe haven and source of support (Granqvist, 2020). For many religious traditions, bonding to "a deeper reality" is mediated through patterned rituals. The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses has few practices that could be described as ritualistic; however, bonding with God, Jehovah, is a recurring theme in JW publications and study materials. Two-way communication—receiving God's teaching through Bible study and speaking with him in prayer—gradually helps the believer form a close, personal relationship with God, a special Friend who values, cares for, and understands those close to him (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2022, p. 17). Although unity with fellow Witnesses is an important community value, religious studies scholar Artur Artemyev wrote that "the center of their religious life and practice is developing their own relationship with God" (Artemyev, 2021, p. 303).

Belief in a deity's existence or a knowledge of sacred texts may not in itself entail changes in thinking and behavior. In JW teaching, a thorough knowledge of God and his attributes contributes to the formation of an affective, reciprocal bond that engenders love, loyalty, reverence, and other qualities that in turn motivate godly acts. For instance, when faced with extreme coercion and brutality during the genocidal Nazi era, Witnesses consistently explained their refusal to conform to Nazi demands in terms of their loyalty toward God over the State (Garbe, 1993/2008). Historian Claudia Koonz (1986) concluded that Witnesses who refused to perpetrate violence against Jews and others "felt that they acted out of a direct personal responsibility to God, rather than from a commitment to abstract principles" (p. 343). In effect, they attributed their actions to believing, which led to bonding, which in turn motivated their behavior. Although Witnesses'

nonviolent and prosocial behavior during the Nazi era has been thoroughly documented, no systematic study has been done to determine whether Witnesses have adhered to the teaching of nonviolent behavior in other situations of mass violence and genocide, most notably in Rwanda.

### *Behaving—Adhering to Principles During Persecution*

Religions promote moral norms of right and wrong that often go beyond those of surrounding society, including "altruistic sacrifice, humility, or strong self-control of impulsivity-related behaviors" (Saroglou, 2011, p. 1327). Behavior according to the moral norms of a religion may be an indicator of strong religious commitment. A religious adherent's alignment or misalignment with the moral and behavioral norms of the chosen belief system can impact the individual's religious experience (McCullough & Carter, 2013). On one hand, religion can "promote morally virtuous behavior by means of improving self-control" (Zell & Baumeister, 2013, p. 498). On the other hand, lack of compliance can produce spiritual struggles or the closely related experience of moral injury (Koenig & Al Zaben, 2021; Pargament & Exline, 2021; Pargament & Exline, 2022).

Behaving according to religious norms presents a challenge when the religion's values differ sharply from those of the surrounding society, such as during the periods of mass political movements and collective violence. This was the situation during the period of 1982 to 1992, when the Witnesses were banned in Rwanda and faced severe pressure to abandon their ethic of nonviolence and their teaching of "political neutrality." Although Witnesses generally paid their taxes, performed community service, and obeyed civil law, their stance of political neutrality precluded participation in patriotic ceremonies, political elections, armed civil service, and military service. This period of persecution tested the religious congruence between beliefs and behavior. Fully one third of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country, male and female, were incarcerated

during this period rather than violate their religious values. At one point, all imprisoned Witnesses were transferred to the central prison in Kigali, bringing them in close proximity to one another. Witnesses at liberty later recalled that they expected to be arrested; but in the meantime, some reportedly cared for the children of their imprisoned co-religionists (Seminega & Nkurikiyinka, 2025; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2012, pp. 178–186, 254). Such shared experiences and the mutual reinforcement of their religious values of neutrality and nonviolence would potentially have strengthened solidarity and established mutual trust. Their experiences could also have increased empathy for other victims of discrimination and propaganda, leading to altruistic acts. (See further discussion on prosocial and helping behavior in Sections 4 and 5.)

Until the JW-RWA study, no scholarly research had quantified the experiences of Jehovah's Witnesses during this 10-year period of persecution. Nor have researchers investigated whether the pattern of religious behavior among Witnesses during the ban was consistent with their behaviors and choices during and after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, as was the case in a study of genocide rescuers whose various options were shaped by their "prior decisions or actions" (Burnet, 2023, p. 2).

Only a small minority of the JW-RWA sample population were Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda during the periods of the ban and the 1994 Genocide. A large majority of respondents who were not then Witnesses came from other backgrounds and behaved at the time according to other values and social situations.

### *Belonging—Commitment and Identity*

The social dimensions of religious belonging in some ways mirror those of other types of social collectives. However, features such as shared religious narratives or symbols, sacred texts,

a common source of religious authority, and organized worship bind believers together and contribute to feelings of religious communion in distinctive ways (Saroglou, 2011). Researchers measure religious commitment using a variety of factors, such as formal affiliation, frequency of religious behaviors (e.g., church attendance, prayer), subjective importance of religion (Brenner, 2017), and conformity to religious values and moral standards. Based on their religious participation, Belgian Witnesses appeared to "manifest a very high level of commitment to their religion" (Dobbelaere & Wilson, 1980, p. 96).

A related concept, religious identity, encompasses not only one's inner personal relationship to the religion but also the individual's psychological experience of belonging to a group (Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Postmes et al., 2013). (Postmes prefers the term *social identification* rather than *social identity* when referring to the relationship between an individual and an ingroup.) Religious identity may be strongly rooted in the belief system itself since those particular beliefs may explain the individual's choice of a given religion. Similar to religious commitment, strong convictions about religion as a guide to life and belonging to a shared community are marks of individuals with high levels of religious identification, made evident in their everyday attitudes and actions.

Research has pointed to strong political or religious ideology as a potential factor in the turn of group identities toward violent extremism (e.g., Horz, 2024; Rasoulikolamaki et al., 2023). However, little research has been done on the role of ideologies, such as Jehovah's Witnesses' teaching on nonviolence as a distinctive feature of their religious group identity that potentially contributes to the decision by individual adherents to refuse participation in violent conflict (Chu, 2015).

Challenging social contexts, such as low social status, may actually strengthen ingroup collective identification (Ellemers et al., 1993). Similarly, religious identities tend to be stronger for individuals in minority religions who face discriminatory practices and governmental restrictions (Beyer, 2023). It has been noted of Soviet Witnesses that meetings held in secret "created a sense of kinship" (Baran, 2014, p. 115). Religious communities that encourage social friendship, emphasize intrinsic religiosity, and promote values such as love and commitment can shape individual identities and reduce prejudices (Burch-Brown & Baker, 2016). Given the marginalized status of the mixed-ethnic minority group during the period of the ban of 1982 to 1992 and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, these dynamics may possibly apply to the Jehovah's Witness community in Rwanda.

The process of belonging to a religion is different for those who stop and later resume their religious affiliation. With rising secularization and declines in religious affiliation, church attendance, and other indicators of religiosity in recent decades, attention has turned to how, when, and why people leave religious groups, with or without joining a different religion. Considerable scholarly attention has been given to religious "switching" from one faith to another (e.g., Loveland, 2003); and the few deconversion studies have focused on those who have left small and new religious groups (Hood et al., 2009) or the reasons for deconversion: pursuit of autonomy, disillusionment, crisis and self-reflection, and finding a new frame of reference (Streib et al., 2009). Demographers have also identified "reverts" who have left a faith and then later returned to it (Pew Research Center, 2009); however, little literature is available on those who have left off associating with a faith and later rejoined it. The incidence of those who interrupt association with the JW community for a time, ceasing participation in religious meetings or the public ministry work and then later resuming their activities, has also not been previously examined. Framed as a

reversal and then a repeat of Saroglou's dimensions of religion, the JW-RWA survey investigated the extent to which Witnesses in post-Genocide Rwanda stopped affiliation and, after a period of time, resumed their "belonging" to the faith community.

**Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity**

The most widely used psychological measure of religion was developed by Allport and Ross (1967) to categorize religious orientation according to intrinsic and extrinsic (I-E) motivations. Intrinsic orientation referred to "mature" motivations of those who live their religion; extrinsic orientation referred to an "immature" religious outlook that pursued religion for self-serving ends (cf. Benson et al., 1993). Subsequent work criticized the concept as unduly polarized in its positive and negative evaluation of religious motivations (Donahue, 1985). Among numerous revisions of the original I-E scale was the division of extrinsic items into extrinsic-personal items (religion as a source of comfort) and extrinsic-social items (religion as social gain) (Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990; Maltby, 1999). By this revised measure, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan were found to have a high degree of intrinsic religiosity, while extrinsic social religiosity was much less salient (Auyezbek & Beisembayev, 2023).

The theoretical and empirical literature provided a foundation to study the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses. The research results show characteristics of those converting, or becoming baptized Jehovah's Witnesses, including the religious affiliations of respondents' parents, the conversion rate before and after the Genocide against the Tutsi, and the period of preparatory Bible study prior to baptism.

Using Saroglou's framework, the findings show ways in which the dimensions of believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging apply to Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda. Beginning with questions of what originally and currently attracts persons to the religion, results show which

of the four dimensions of religion are priorities. Research findings reveal the extent to which Jehovah's Witnesses believe the main organizational teachings, how they behaved during periods of political persecution, and the extent to which they identify with Jehovah's Witnesses. Finally, characteristics of Jehovah's Witnesses are evident using Allport's model of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity.

## Results

The research findings related to the topic of Faith are presented below under headings and in the same sequence that correspond to the review of literature, following the three models: Conversion (becoming Jehovah's Witnesses), Dimensions of Religion (bonding, believing, behaving, belonging), and Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity.

### Conversion—Becoming Jehovah's Witnesses

Individuals become Jehovah's Witnesses in ways that are both unique from and similar to one another. The findings show the diverse religious affiliations of respondents' parents (those born into families with non-JW parents and second-generation Jehovah's Witnesses), the age of respondents at baptism, and the length of time taken to investigate the religion before baptism.

#### *Religious Upbringing—Parents' Religion*

Religious and cultural dynamics in Rwanda are reflected in the varied religious affiliations of Jehovah's Witnesses' parents. The survey questionnaire asked: *What was your [mother's/father's] religion at the time of your birth?* In the predominantly Catholic country of Rwanda, approximately half of the Jehovah's Witnesses' mothers ($n$ = 7,250, 53.35%) and fathers ($n$ = 6,913, 50.87%) were Catholic, as shown in Table 3.1. However, despite being in a minority religion, a sizable portion of respondents were second-generation Jehovah's Witnesses with fathers ($n$ = 1,440, 10.60%) and/or mothers ($n$ = 1,570, 11.55%) who were affiliated with the faith at the

time of the respondents' birth. Of the total sample with JW parents ($n$ = 1,822), two thirds ($n$ = 1,188, 65.20%) had both JW mothers and fathers and one third ($n$ = 634, 34.80%) had one JW parent.

**Table 3.1**

*Religion of Father and Mother at Time of Respondent's Birth*

| Religion | Father | | Mother | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Anglican | 1,059 | 7.79 | 1,132 | 8.33 |
| Baha'i | 9 | 0.07 | 2 | 0.01 |
| Baptist | 154 | 1.13 | 214 | 1.57 |
| Catholic | 6,913 | 50.87 | 7,250 | 53.35 |
| Evangelical | 20 | 0.15 | 20 | 0.15 |
| Jehovah's Witness | 1,440 | 10.60 | 1,570 | 11.55 |
| Latter-day Saint | 12 | 0.09 | 9 | 0.07 |
| Methodist | 114 | 0.84 | 105 | 0.77 |
| Muslim | 99 | 0.73 | 58 | 0.43 |
| Pentecostal | 399 | 2.94 | 543 | 4.00 |
| Presbyterian | 278 | 2.05 | 301 | 2.21 |
| Seventh-day Adventist | 537 | 3.95 | 596 | 4.39 |
| Traditional/Animist | 158 | 1.16 | 123 | 0.91 |
| Other | 133 | 0.98 | 77 | 0.57 |
| No Religion | 1,070 | 7.87 | 730 | 5.37 |
| Do Not Know | 1,195 | 8.79 | 860 | 6.33 |
| Total | 13,590 | - | 13,590 | - |

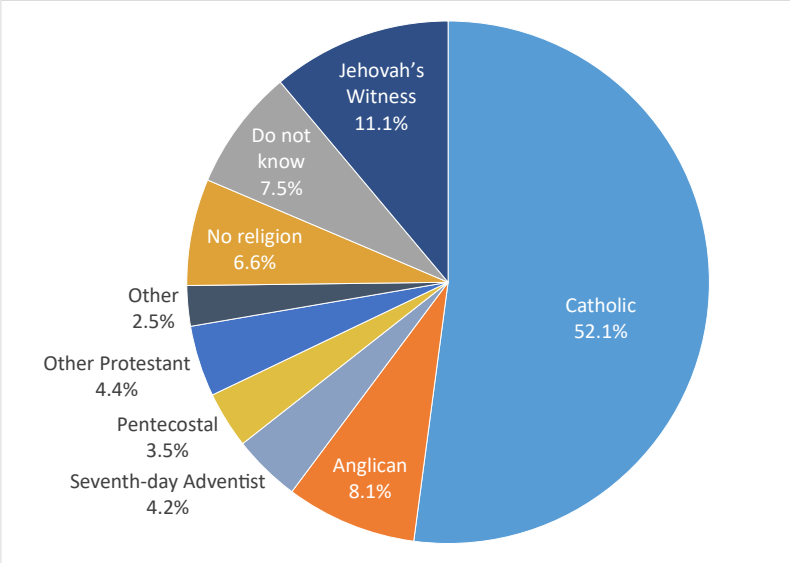
*Note*. Percentages are based on responses from the total sample of 13,590.

Figure 3.1 shows the religious affiliation of mothers and fathers combined for the main religious categories. For all parents combined, Anglicans were the most common of the Protestant groups (8.06%), followed by Seventh-day Adventists (4.17%) and Pentecostals (3.47%). Parents belonging to other Protestant denominations (i.e., Baptist, Evangelical, Methodist, and Presbyterian) made up 4.44% of the sample population. A smaller percentage of Jehovah's Witnesses (2.50%) had parents who were affiliated with other minority religions (i.e., Baha'i,

Latter-day Saints, Muslim, traditional or animist religions, and "other" religions). Despite the high percentage of Rwandans who identify as Christian, it is noteworthy that 6.62% of parents in the JW sample population indicated that at least one of their parents had no religion. Another 7.56% reported parents with unknown religious affiliations.

**Figure 3.1**

*Parents' Religious Affiliation at Time of Respondents' Birth*




*Note*. *N* = 27,180 (total of mothers and fathers combined).

### *Growth Over Time—Generations of Jehovah's Witnesses*

Most respondents ($n$ = 13,318, 98.00%) were baptized in Rwanda, with only a few baptized in neighboring or other countries: Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo ($n$ = 140), Burundi ($n$ = 26), Tanzania ($n$ = 27), Uganda ($n$ = 22), and other countries ($n$ = 57).

The research findings from the JW sample population show growth patterns consistent with the organization's annual reports. The published annual reports of Jehovah's Witnesses indicate that only a few became affiliated with the religion in the early postcolonial Rwanda of the 1960s, and 1970s. Although the religious organization was legally banned in Rwanda between 1982 and 1992, organizational records show slow but continued growth. After the ban was lifted and before

the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, over 500 new baptisms took place. In the ensuing post-Genocide years, the faith community grew exponentially—approximately 100% by 1996 and 1,600% by 2023.[2] In compliance with governmental public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jehovah's Witnesses held religious meetings virtually, but few were baptized during this period.

Research findings of the baptisms of survey respondents each year showed growth patterns consistent with the organization's annual reports during key historical periods. A total of 64 in the JW sample were baptized before 1982, with single-digit numbers baptized during the years prior to 1980, and numbering in the teens in 1980 and 1981 prior to the government ban on Jehovah's Witnesses. During the legal ban period from 1982 to 1992, 397 in the JW sample were baptized. In the years 1993 and 1994—after the ban and before the Genocide against the Tutsi—another 200 in the sample population were baptized. In total, 661 survey respondents (4.86% of the total sample of 13,590) were baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses in or before the year of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

Respondents baptized in 1995 and 1996—the first 2 years after the Genocide against the Tutsi—numbered 643. This was an increase of almost 100% (97.28%) from the total number of respondents who were baptized by the end of 1994. During the 5-year period between 1995 to 1999, a total of 1,461 in the JW sample were baptized—an increase of 221% from the year 1994.

From 2000 to 2019, the number of respondents baptized each year ranged from 339 to 705, with the most baptisms occurring in the year 2018. As would be expected, the number of baptisms

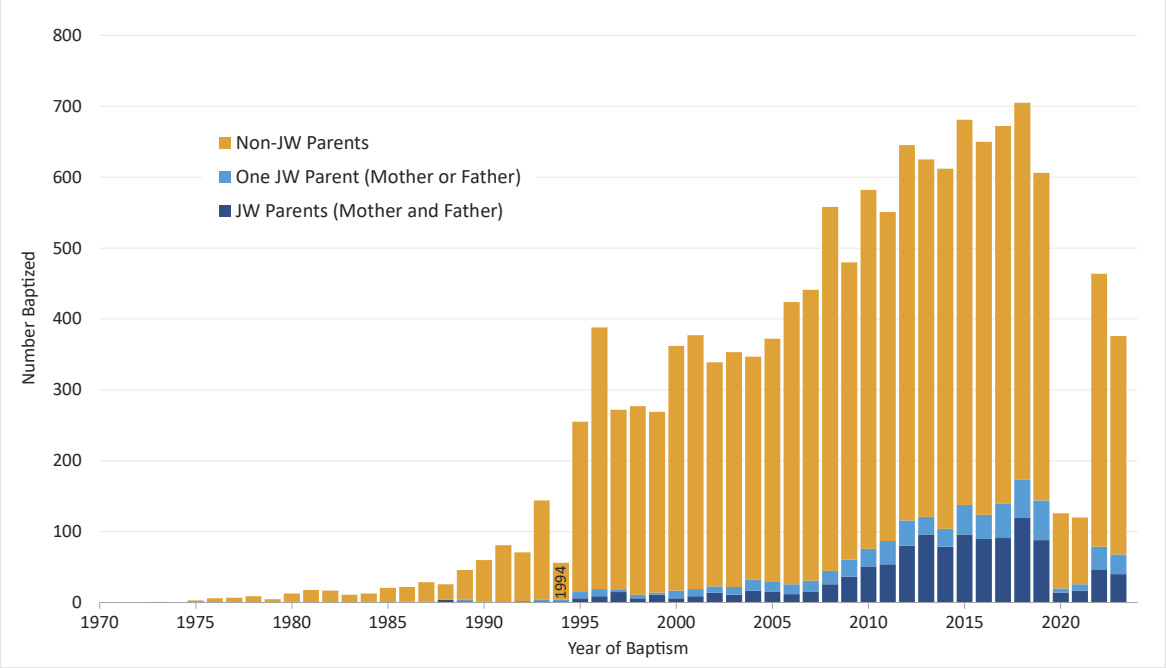
[2] Calculations are based on the pre-Genocide 1994 figure of 2,500, minus the estimated 400 Witnesses (and associates) who perished in 1994; the 1996 service report of 4,223 peak publishers; and the 2023 service year report of 33,664 peak publishers. Reports are calculated by "service year" from September to the following August. For instance, the 2023 service year commenced on September 1, 2022, and ended on August 31, 2023. For 2023 statistics and information about how Jehovah's Witnesses report peak, average, and ratio of publishers by country, see https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2023-Service-Year-Report-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Worldwide/2023-Grand-Totals/.

in 2020 with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic dropped significantly, with an increase again in 2022, when pandemic restrictions ended. (The survey was completed in June 2023, so data for the year 2023 were only for a partial year.)

Figure 3.2 combines data of respondents' year of baptism and their parents' religion to show the number of the sample population baptized each year, with a breakdown of those whose parents were not Jehovah's Witnesses, those with one JW parent, and those whose mother and father were both Jehovah's Witnesses. At the time of respondents' birth, most parents of the sample population were not Jehovah's Witnesses. Second-generation adopters of the religion who had at least one JW parent were relatively few, but their numbers increased over time, particularly after 2005. For the total sample, 86.59% ($n$ = 11,768) were born into families whose parents were not Jehovah's Witnesses and 13.41% ($n$ = 1,822) were second-generation Jehovah's Witnesses with at least one JW parent.

**Figure 3.2**

*Number of Baptisms per Year, With JW and Non-JW Parents at Time of Respondents' Birth*




*Note*. Total baptized, $n$ = 13,590.

The transgenerational family influence in the growth of the Witness faith community in Rwanda was evident by the number of respondents with close relatives who were Jehovah's Witnesses. Table 3.2 shows the number and percentage of JW relatives for respondents with and without a JW parent at birth and how the conversion of one family member might influence others in the family to adopt the religion. Many respondents whose parents were not Witnesses at the time of their birth reported having JW mothers (23.10%) and JW fathers (9.28%) at the time of the survey. Their parents' conversion could have taken place when they were a minor or an adult, or before or after their own baptism. For this subgroup, 27.76% had at least one JW sibling, and 19.02% had other relatives who were also Jehovah's Witnesses.

Compared with those with non-JW parents at birth, second-generation JWs had a larger family network who shared their beliefs. Although the data do not provide specific numbers of those in families with multiple generations of Jehovah's Witnesses, the data do indicate the added influence or support of JW grandmothers (9.44%) and JW grandfathers (3.69%). Over half of second-generation JWs (56.65%) had fellow believers in their sibling network. Beyond their immediate family, 14.08% had other relatives who were Jehovah's Witnesses (cf. Long, 1968).

**Table 3.2**

*Jehovah's Witnesses With JW Family Members*

| Current JW Relatives | Non-JW Parents at Birth (*n* = 11,497) | | Second-Generation JW (With JW Parents at Birth) (*n* = 1,790) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| JW Father | 1,067 | 9.28 | 935 | 52.23 |
| JW Mother | 2,656 | 23.10 | 1,313 | 73.35 |
| JW Grandfather | 76 | 0.66 | 66 | 3.69 |
| JW Grandmother | 225 | 1.96 | 169 | 9.44 |
| JW Sibling | 3,191 | 27.76 | 1,014 | 56.65 |
| Other JW Relative | 2,187 | 19.02 | 252 | 14.08 |

*Note*. *N* = 13,287, after removing PNA responses and missing data.

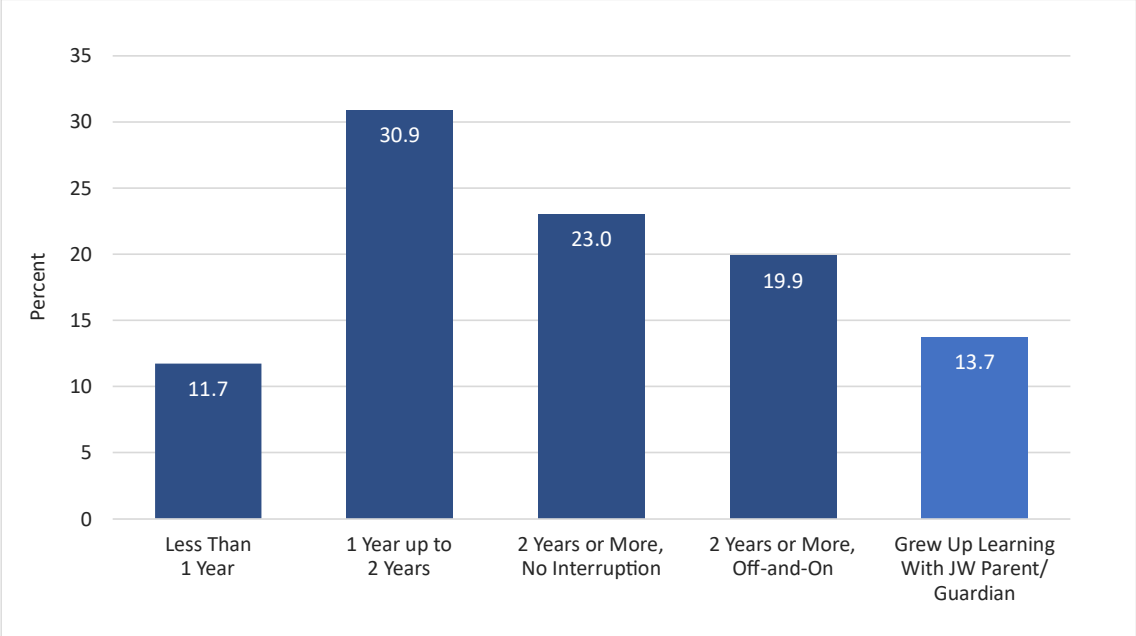
### *Preparatory Study and Age at Baptism*

Before one makes the commitment associated with baptism as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, individuals take time to study and understand the teachings in order to decide whether to adhere to the religion's principles and practices. Figure 3.3 shows the length of time survey respondents studied the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses before they were baptized. Most respondents (42.94%) reported studying for 2 or more years, either without interruption (23.03%) or intermittently during the period of time before baptism (19.91%). Almost one third (30.85%) studied between 1 and 2 years, while a smaller percentage (11.73%) studied for less than 1 year.

The percentage of the total sample who grew up learning the Bible as children of JW parents or guardians was 13.72%. The total number of those who studied with someone other than a parent or guardian when they were children comprised 85.52% of the sample population, reflecting the religion's growth from evangelizing outside the family circle.

**Figure 3.3**

*Length of Time Studying With Jehovah's Witnesses Before Baptism*




*Note*. *N* = 13,590; PNA responses (*n* = 103, 0.76%) are not shown in the chart.

Just as the length of study prior to baptism varied, Jehovah's Witnesses' age at baptism varied. Table 3.3 shows the percentage of males, females, and the total sample who were baptized at different age groups. Most (45.35%) were baptized as young adults (ages 18 to 29). Over half of the males (52.49%) became baptized Jehovah's Witnesses as young adults. Almost three fourths of the males (73.97%) were baptized before age 30, compared with two thirds (66.45%) of the females. Less than one third of the total sample (30.24%) were baptized at age 30 or older. The average age at baptism was 26 years old.

**Table 3.3**

*Age at Baptism*

| Age at Baptism | Males (*n* = 6,001) | | Females (*n* = 7,589) | | Total Sample (*n* = 13,590) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Under Age 18 | 1,289 | 21.48 | 2,030 | 26.75 | 3,319 | 24.42 |
| Age 18 to 29 | 3,150 | 52.49 | 3,013 | 39.70 | 6,163 | 45.35 |
| Age 30 to 39 | 900 | 15.00 | 1,407 | 18.54 | 2,307 | 16.98 |
| Age 40 to 49 | 407 | 6.78 | 722 | 9.51 | 1,129 | 8.31 |
| Age 50 to 59 | 170 | 2.83 | 292 | 3.85 | 462 | 3.40 |
| Over Age 59 | 85 | 1.42 | 125 | 1.65 | 210 | 1.55 |

Almost all (99.09%) of those who indicated that they learned from a JW parent or guardian were baptized before age 30. Three fourths (72.39%) who studied with parents or guardians were baptized under age 18 and one fourth (26.70%) at ages 18 to 29.

Table 3.4 highlights the influential role of JW parents on the age at baptism. Over 95% of those who had JW parents were baptized before age 30—63.56% under the age of 18 and 32.11% between the ages of 18 and 29. However, a high percentage of those without JW parents (65.76%) were also baptized Jehovah's Witnesses before age 30, suggesting broader cultural influences on Rwandan youths who make religious commitments at relatively young ages.

**Table 3.4**

*Age at Baptism for Those With JW and Non-JW Parents at Birth*

| Age at Baptism | With JW Parent (*n* = 1,822) | | With Non-JW Parent (*n* = 11,768) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Under Age 18 | 1,158 | 63.56 | 2,161 | 18.36 |
| Age 18 to 29 | 585 | 32.11 | 5,578 | 47.40 |
| Age 30 to 39 | 53 | 2.91 | 2,254 | 19.15 |
| Age 40 to 49 | 21 | 1.15 | 1,108 | 9.42 |
| Age 50 to 59 | 3 | 0.16 | 459 | 3.90 |
| Over Age 59 | 2 | 0.11 | 208 | 1.77 |

The path to becoming Jehovah's Witnesses involves personal processes and choices, even for those who are introduced to the faith in childhood. The next section examines factors involved in choosing to remain in the religion, personal consequences of adherence to the teaching of political neutrality, and attitudes toward religious belonging and practice.

## Dimensions of Religion: Being Jehovah's Witnesses

The study investigated aspects of Jehovah's Witnesses' faith to better understand what it means to be affiliated with the religion. The findings in this report follow Saroglou's Dimensions of Religion schema of bonding, believing, behaving, and belonging (Saroglou, 2011). The findings for the main variables include (a) the original and current attractions to the religion (with bonding and believing aspects being most salient), (b) doctrinal beliefs (believing), (c) practices while under political ban (behaving), (d) organizational identity and commitment (belonging), and (e) interrupted affiliation after baptism (belonging).

### *Attraction to Jehovah's Witnesses: Original and Current*

To understand what attracts individuals to Jehovah's Witnesses, the survey asked respondents two related questions. The first question was, *Individuals are attracted to a religion*

*for different reasons. What originally attracted you to Jehovah's Witnesses?* The second question was, *Individuals decide to remain in a religion for different reasons. What attracts you now to Jehovah's Witnesses?*

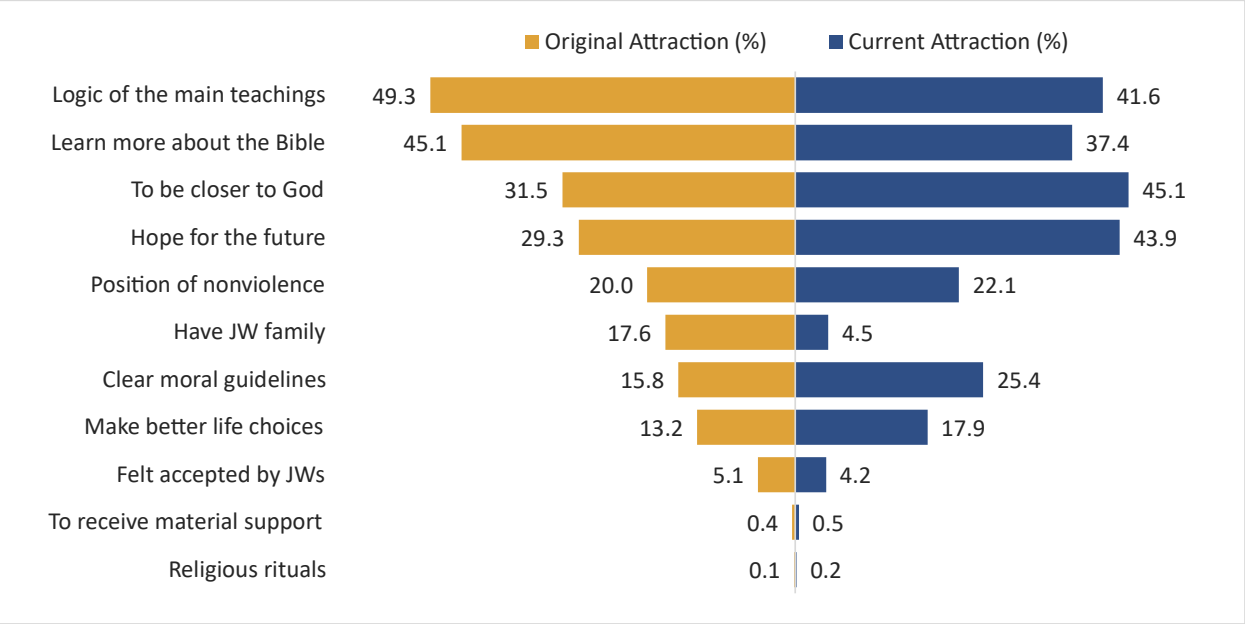
Respondents were asked to select up to 3 out of 12 items. The response options included statements Di Marzio (2020) found that Jehovah's Witnesses often use to explain their religious conversion (e.g., *I wanted to learn more about the Bible*; *I wanted to be closer to God*; *I wanted to make better life choices*). For comparison, the response options also included two possible attractions not associated with Jehovah's Witnesses: *religious rituals* and *to receive material support*. The item *Jehovah's Witnesses' position of nonviolence* was added to the list of attractions for its relevancy to JWs' teachings in the aftermath of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Items for original and current attractions were identical, except the list of original attractions was phrased in the past tense and the current attractions were phrased in the present tense.

As shown in Figure 3.4, the top four original and current attractions were the same, but in a different order. The top two *original* attractions were related to information about beliefs: *the logic of the main teachings* (49.34%) and to *learn more about the Bible* (45.14%). These two items were also among the top four reasons for *current* attractions, but moved to third and fourth place, respectively, replaced by more relational and reflective items: *to be closer to God* (45.08%) and *hope for the future* (43.86%).

Having *clear moral guidelines* was less salient originally but increased over time as a current attraction (from 15.84% to 25.43%). *Religious rituals* and *to receive material support*—two factors that draw some to organized religion—were identified by only a miniscule number in the JW sample population.

**Figure 3.4**

*Original and Current Attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses*

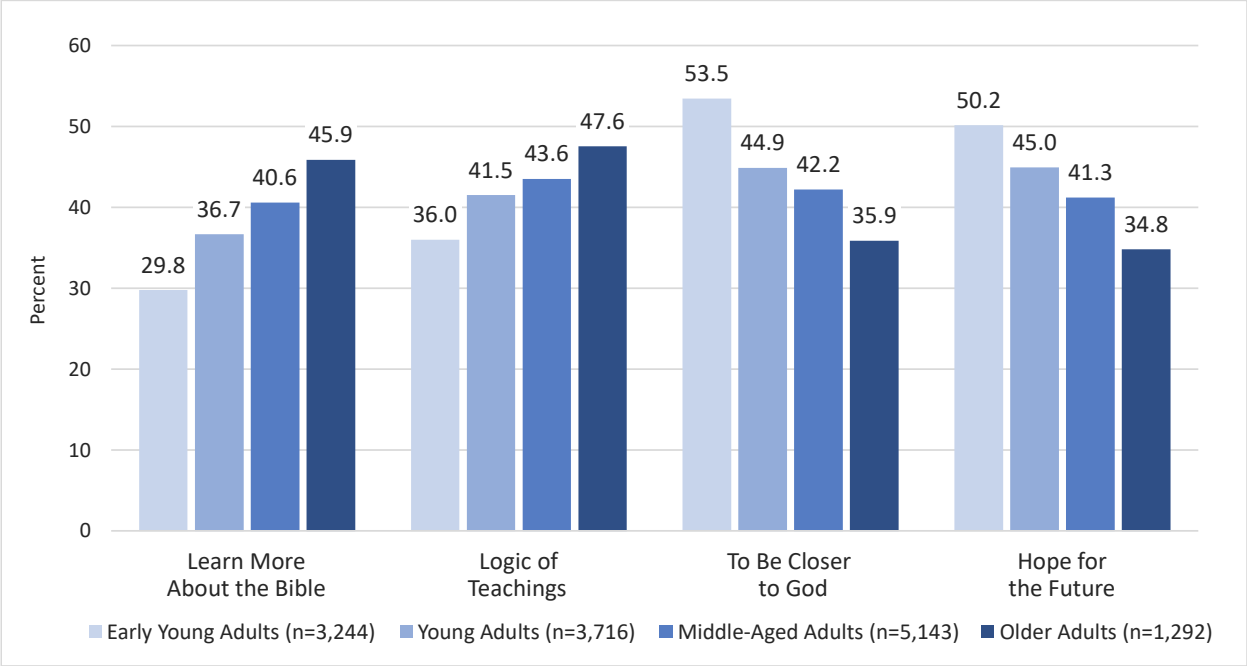



*Note*. *N* = 13,395 for both original and current attractions after removing PNA, NOA, and missing data.

Original and current attractions to the religion were compared for the four adult age groups: early young adults (born after 1994), young adults (born from 1984 to 1994), middle-aged adults (born from 1964 to 1983), and older adults (born before 1964). The most pronounced age group differences were in their four top current attractions. As shown in Figure 3.5, a consistent stair-step pattern by age group was found but in different descending and ascending order for current attractions. Higher percentages of middle-aged and older adults were drawn to *learn more about the Bible* and *the logic of the main teachings*, while younger age groups were more likely to select wanting *to be closer to God* and having *a hope for the future*.

**Figure 3.5**

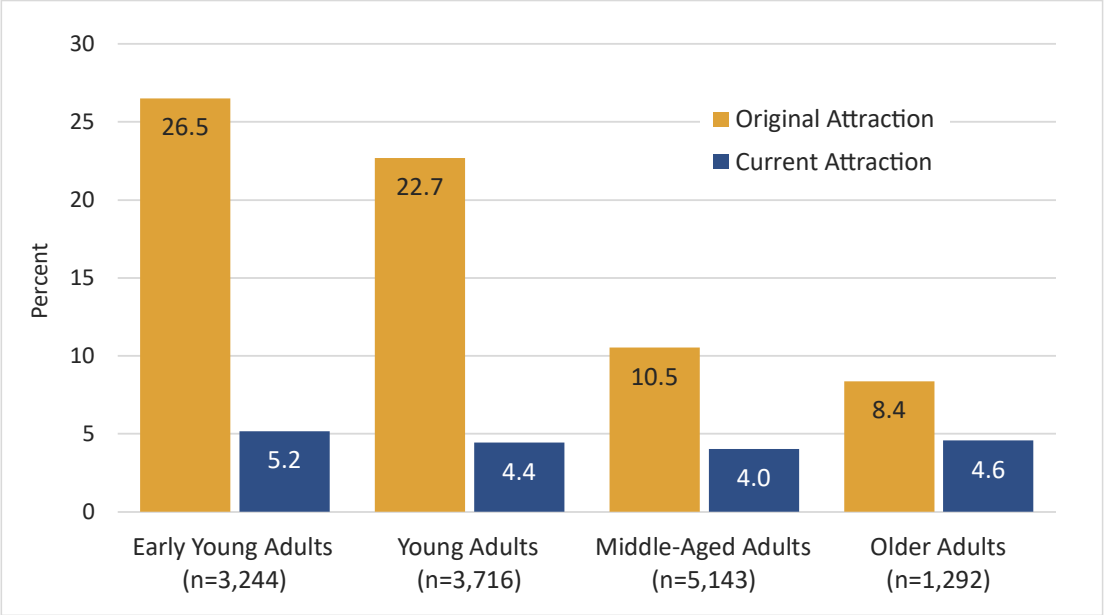
*Current Attraction to Jehovah's Witnesses by Age Group*




The greatest decrease from original to current attraction of any item for the total sample was *family were/are Jehovah's Witnesses*, which dropped from 17.57% as an original attraction to 4.47% as a current attraction. However, as shown in Figure 3.6, the higher percentage for *family* as an original attraction differed by age cohort. For those under age 29, over one fourth (26.51%) were attracted originally because of having JW family. However, consistently across all age groups, only 4% to 5% of respondents indicated that having JW family was a main reason to remain in the faith. Family was an initial draw to the religion, but for Jehovah's Witnesses, having family of the same faith was not a dominant reason why individuals remained Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Figure 3.6**

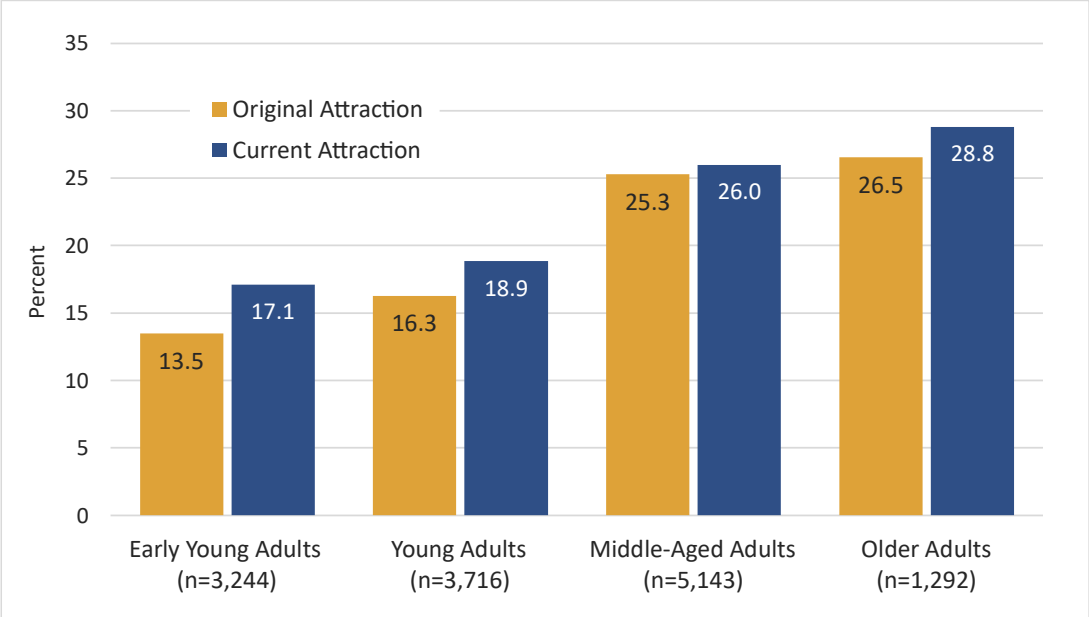
*Family as Main Attraction to Jehovah's Witnesses by Age Group*




Between 10% and 30% of respondents of different age groups selected Jehovah's Witnesses' position of nonviolence as a main attraction to the religion. Figure 3.7 shows the stair-step pattern with incremental increases from younger to older age groups. The older the subgroup, the more likely *nonviolence* was selected; the youngest subgroup—those born after 1994—was the least likely to select this item. However, across all age groups, the position of neutrality became more salient as a current attraction to the faith as compared with their original attraction to the religion, which could reflect developmental shifts or contemporary geopolitical trends of violent political confrontations. If, instead of a "pick three" question, the survey used an agree-disagree scale, the position of nonviolence (as well as other items) might emerge as an important aspect of the religion attracting the JW population.

**Figure 3.7**

*Original and Current Attraction to Position of Nonviolence by Age Group*




The age cohort of early young adults—the post-Genocide generation—was of particular interest, in part because of global trends that show young people increasingly disillusioned with and dropping out of religion (Pew Research Center, 2018). Also, as the youngest age cohort, the time period between original and current attractions would be shorter, so recall of original attraction would be more recent and differences between original and current attractions would be an indicator of shifts in the thoughts and priorities relatively soon after affiliating with Jehovah's Witnesses. The following findings provide insights into the attitudes, values, and priorities of this unique historical cohort of young people growing up as Jehovah's Witnesses in the shadow of the Genocide against the Tutsi.

Figure 3.8 shows the percentages of the Post-Genocide Generation who selected each item as their top original and current attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses. For the under-29 age group, family influence was relatively high originally but dropped from 26.51% to 5.18%. This youngest

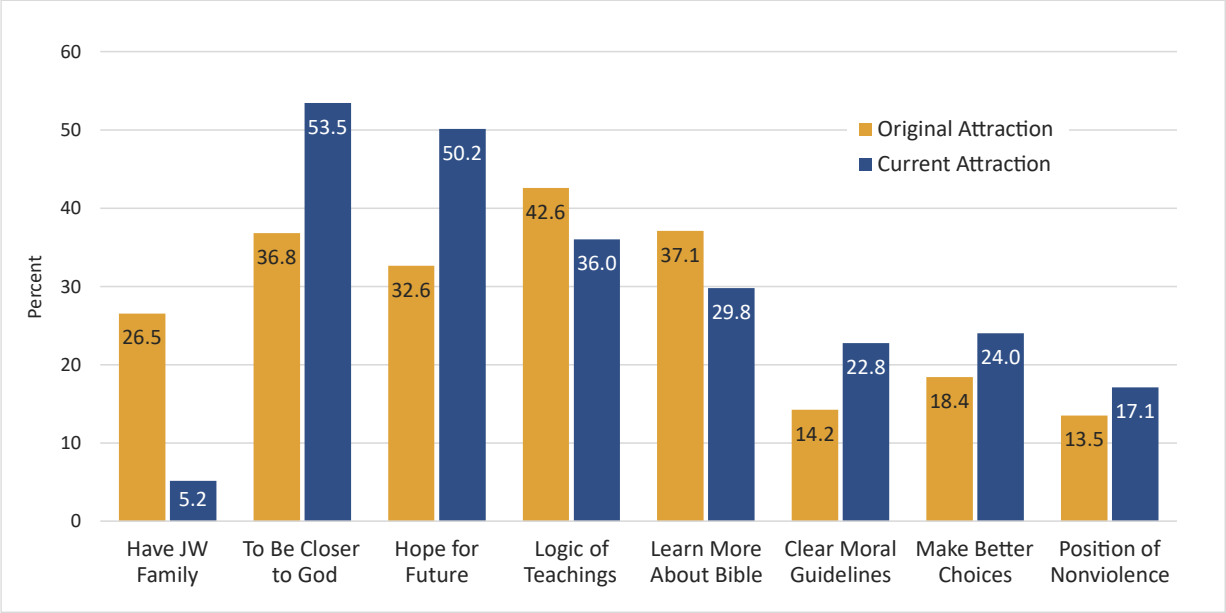
age cohort of the JW sample recognized early family influences but viewed themselves as separate from family when choosing to remain in the religion.

The findings show that, during their relatively short time as Jehovah's Witnesses, early young adults identified spiritual, emotional, and moral aspects of the religion as important current attractions. From the original attraction to the current attraction, *to be closer to God* and *hope for the future* increased about 17%, from 36.81% to 53.45%, and 32.64% to 50.15%, respectively. From their original to current attractions, more young Jehovah's Witnesses selected *clear moral guidelines* (from 14.24% to 22.78%) and wanting *to make better life choices* (from 18.40% to 24.01%). The Post-Genocide Generation, born after 1994, would have learned about Genocide atrocities from secondhand accounts; but the position of nonviolence became more important even between the short interval period of their original to current attraction (from 13.50% to 17.11%).

Information learned from Jehovah's Witnesses—the *logic of the main teachings* and wanting to *learn more about the Bible*—were top current attractions for about one third of early young adults; but the percentages dropped some 7% from original attractions to current (*logic of the main teachings*, from 42.57% to 36.04%; *learn more about the Bible*, from 37.08% to 29.78%). Overall, for early young adults, the more informative or cognitive aspects of the religion were important, but less so over time. Personal application of Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings became more salient, with higher percentages currently attracted to *moral guidelines* (22.78%) and wanting *to make better life choices* (24.01%) compared with their original attraction to these items.

**Figure 3.8**

*Original and Current Attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses for Early Young Adults*




*Note*. *N* = 3,244.

Data on attraction to the religion were also analyzed by gender. Differences between males and females of close to 3% for either original or current attractions were found for four items: *to be closer to God*, *hope for the future*, *logic of teachings*, and *moral guidelines*. (For all other items, the percentage of males and females was similar or had differences less than 3%.)

As shown in Figure 3.9, more females than males selected wanting *to be closer to God*. Both males and females showed a similar upward trend from original to current attraction, with an increase of 14.56% for males (from 29.59% original to 44.15% current attraction) and 12.82% for females (from 32.98% to 45.80%). For both men and women, the bond with God became more salient over time, which respondents identified as a main attraction to Jehovah's Witnesses. The percent increase between original and current attractions was slightly more for males than females.

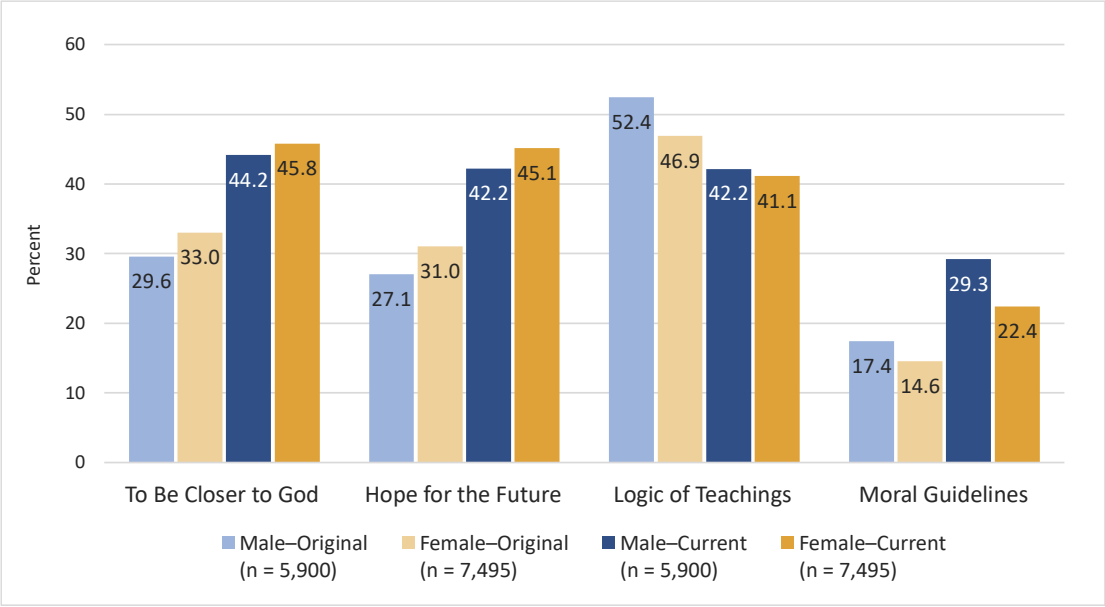
The original attraction to the *logic of the main teachings* was higher for males (52.44%) than females (46.90%)—a difference of 5.54%. The percentages decreased for both males and

females from original to current attraction, but with only a difference of 1% between males (42.17%) and females (41.13%).

Having *moral guidelines* was not one of the top four attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses but had noteworthy gender differences. The original attraction to *moral guidelines* had less than a 3% difference in the percent of males (17.44%) and females (14.58%). However, the gender gap increased to almost 7% for the current attraction to *moral guidelines* for males (29.25%) and females (22.43%). As a reason to remain in the religion, a higher percentage of males than females were attracted to the moral guidelines of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Figure 3.9**

*Original and Current Attractions to Jehovah's Witnesses by Gender*




### *Believing: Doctrinal Teachings*

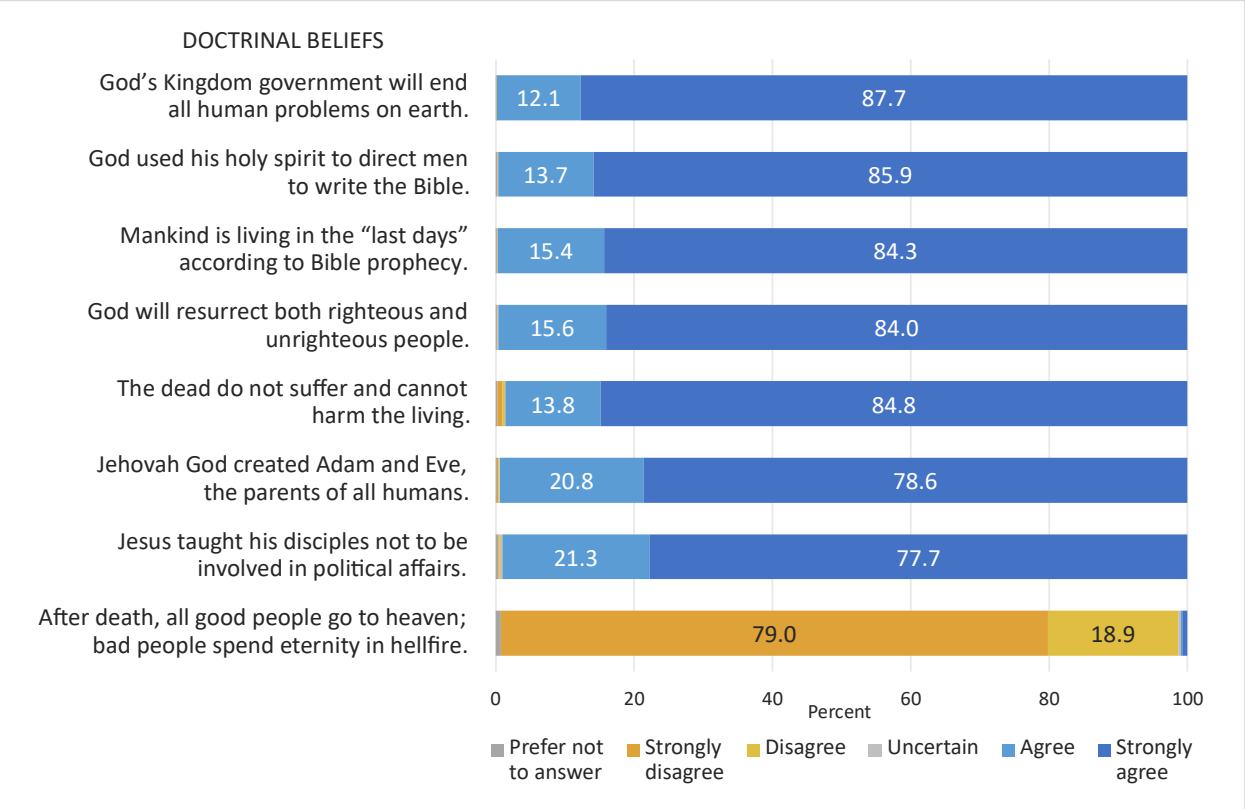
Some core teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses differ from those of other Christian groups. Yet, as discussed previously, respondents were attracted to learning about the Bible and the logic of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. To investigate the degree of agreement with core

teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses among respondents, the survey included a question set with a list of eight doctrinal teachings, using a 5-point Likert scale for respondents to indicate agreement or disagreement. Four of the eight items were related to beliefs about the Bible, the account of Adam and Eve, the condition of the dead, and who go to heaven and hell. The other four items were related to concepts that Jehovah's Witnesses might use to reason on the suffering and injustices during the Genocide against the Tutsi or other life traumas: *Mankind is living in the "last days." God will resurrect both righteous and unrighteous people*. Christians are *not to be involved in political affairs*. *God's Kingdom government will end all human problems on earth*. Seven of the eight statements are teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses; but the statement that *all good people go to heaven, and bad people spend eternity in hellfire* is not a JW teaching.

Figure 3.10 shows a 98% to 100% agreement among the JW sample population on each doctrinal teaching, indicating a broad awareness of the religion's core beliefs. Jehovah's Witnesses share a common belief system. Believing is an integral part of being one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Figure 3.10**

*Extent of Agreement With Jehovah's Witnesses' Doctrinal Teachings*




*Note*. *N* = 13,587, total sample minus missing data.

### *Behaving: Persecution During Government Ban*

One distinguishing characteristic of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious organization is their neutrality toward political matters, coupled with the obligation to obey governmental laws that do not conflict with moral or scriptural commands. Their apolitical stance means that followers would not involve themselves in political activities, siding with one position over another, even if their neutral stand would result in perceived injustices or serious personal consequences. It would also follow that Witnesses would reject politically motivated ethnic divisions as irrelevant to their moral obligations toward fellow humans. This study provided an opportunity to investigate how individual Jehovah's Witnesses faced the decade-long government ban on the small group of believers between 1982 and 1992, before the Genocide against the Tutsi. During this period of

political persecution, findings show ways in which individuals maintained political neutrality and with what consequences. How this minority behaved under the government ban would provide a template for how Jehovah's Witnesses as individuals and as a group would handle the more dangerous conditions during the Genocide against the Tutsi.

During the ban period from 1982 to 1992, 1,137 survey respondents (8.37% of the total sample) identified themselves as either being Jehovah's Witnesses or associated with the religion as family members, Bible students, or unbaptized publishers. This number included 533 males and 604 females.

The survey listed five acts of refusal that were associated with Jehovah's Witnesses' position of political neutrality during the ban (e.g., *refused to make political donations*) and asked this subgroup of respondents if they did any of the acts during the ban period. Table 3.5 presents the politically neutral actions by gender. For each refusal act, a higher percentage of males than females faced these situations. Females were slightly more likely to select *prefer not to answer* (10.60%) compared with males (8.44%).

**Table 3.5**

*Politically Neutral Acts of Jehovah's Witnesses by Gender, 1982–1992*

| Politically Neutral Acts During Ban, 1982–1992 | Males (*n* = 533) | | Females (*n* = 604) | | Total (*n* = 1,137) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| I refused to | | | | | | |
| . . . make political donations. | 296 | 55.53 | 275 | 45.53 | 571 | 50.22 |
| . . . join or participate in the military. | 190 | 35.65 | 70 | 11.59 | 260 | 22.87 |
| . . . participate in political observances or celebrations. | 247 | 46.34 | 241 | 39.90 | 488 | 42.92 |
| . . . wear a political emblem. | 247 | 46.34 | 197 | 32.62 | 444 | 39.05 |
| . . . cease evangelizing. | 175 | 32.83 | 166 | 27.48 | 341 | 29.99 |
| None of the above | 94 | 17.64 | 128 | 21.19 | 222 | 19.53 |
| Prefer not to answer | 45 | 8.44 | 64 | 10.60 | 109 | 9.59 |

Table 3.6 lists the politically neutral stance taken by those who were adults aged 18 and over in 1992 and minors under age 18 in 1992. As confirmed by the data, minors faced fewer political demands than adults during the ban period. Three fourths (75.12%) of adults refused to make political donations and over half refused to wear a political emblem (56.72%) or to participate in political observances (53.23%). The percentage of those who refused to stop evangelizing was 40.05% for adults and 24.49% for minors. Between one third and one fourth of minors indicated that they refused to participate in political celebrations (37.28%), make political donations (36.60%), or wear political emblems (29.39%).

**Table 3.6**

*Politically Neutral Acts of JW Adults and Minors, 1982–1992*

| Politically Neutral Acts During Ban, 1982–1992 | Age 18 and Over in 1992 (*n* = 402) | | Under Age 18 in 1992 (*n* = 735) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| I refused to | | | | |
| . . . make political donations. | 302 | 75.12 | 269 | 36.60 |
| . . . join or participate in the military. | 121 | 30.10 | 139 | 18.91 |
| . . . participate in political observances or celebrations. | 214 | 53.23 | 274 | 37.28 |
| . . . wear a political emblem. | 228 | 56.72 | 216 | 29.39 |
| . . . cease evangelizing. | 161 | 40.05 | 180 | 24.49 |
| None of the above | 32 | 7.96 | 190 | 25.85 |
| Prefer not to answer | 25 | 6.22 | 84 | 11.43 |

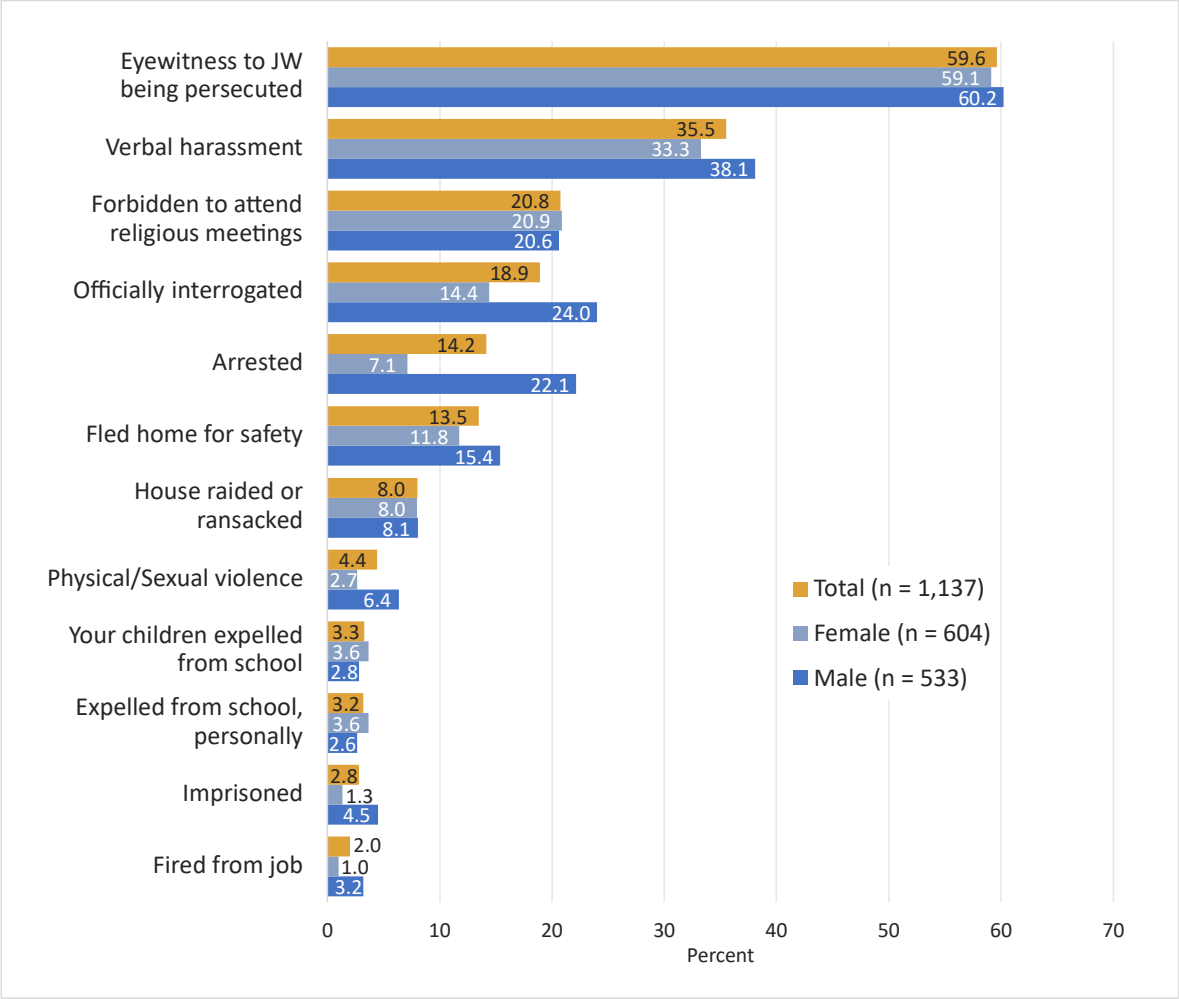
The study investigated the consequences that those affiliated with the small religious group might experience for their refusal to be politically involved. The survey asked this subgroup who lived during the government ban which of 12 experiences happened to them because of their religious affiliation with Jehovah's Witnesses during the ban. Figure 3.11 lists the 12 items from most to least experienced. Over half (59.63%) indicated that they saw Jehovah's Witnesses being persecuted. Verbal harassment was experienced by 35.53% of the subgroup, and 20.76% indicated they were banned from attending religious meetings. Other physically dangerous experiences included being arrested (14.16%), fleeing for safety (13.46%), experiencing physical or sexual violence (4.40%), and being imprisoned (2.81%). The ban affected parents and children, with 3.17% reporting being personally expelled from school and another 3.25% having children who were expelled.

The gender breakdown was similar for certain experiences that were common to Jehovah's Witnesses in general (observing persecution, meetings forbidden, house raids); whereas males

more often faced persecution for refusal to take part in military service or armed night patrols, hence undergoing more harassment, interrogations, and arrests than women.

**Figure 3.11**

*Religious Persecution Jehovah's Witnesses Experienced During Legal Ban, 1982–1992*




*Note*. *N* = 1,137.

### *Religious Identity and Commitment*

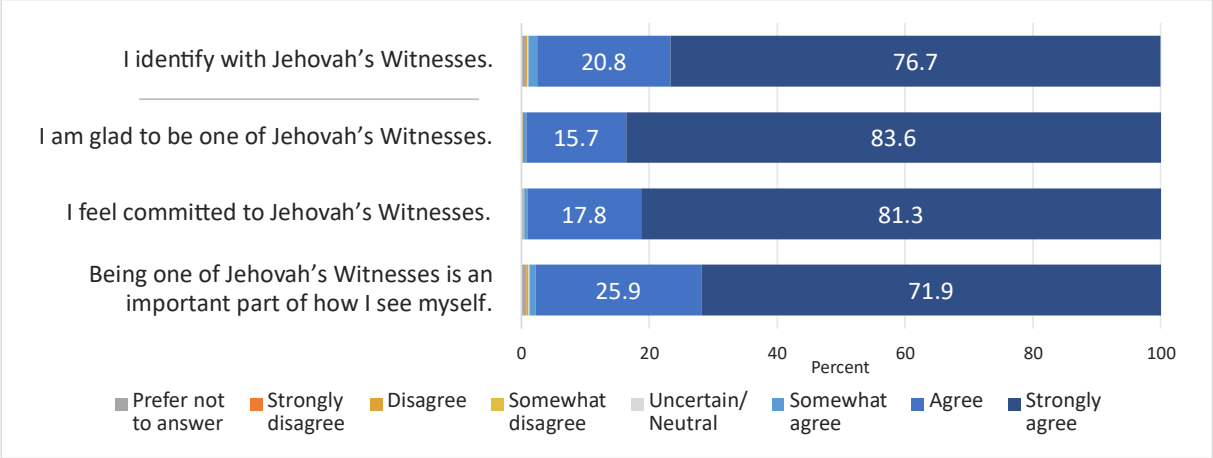
The study investigated the extent to which Jehovah's Witnesses self-identify with the religious organization, using the Four-Item Social Identification (FISI) measure developed by Postmes, Haslam, and Jans (2013). The developers of the 4-item measure tested the reliability and validity of a single-item measure—*I identify with [In-group]*—to measure "the positive emotional

valuation of the relationship between self and ingroup" (Postmes et al., 2013, p. 599). If space in the study instrument allowed, they recommended the three additional tested items that incorporate (a) self-investment, *I feel committed to [In-group]*; (b) satisfaction, *I feel glad to be [In-group]*; and (c) centrality, *Being [In-group] is an important part of how I see myself*. The measure used a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Figure 3.12 separates the first single item with almost all respondents indicating that they self-identify with the religious organization. Similarly, responses to the other three items showed that being Jehovah's Witnesses is a central part of how they view themselves and that they have a high degree of satisfaction and solidarity with the religious organization. Less than one percent for each item (range of 0.15% to 0.73%) selected *prefer not to answer*. The vast majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with all items (97.48% to 99.18%), and a negligible fraction of respondents selected *neutral* or the three disagree options (between 0.11% to 0.52%).

**Figure 3.12**

*Self-Identification With Jehovah's Witnesses*



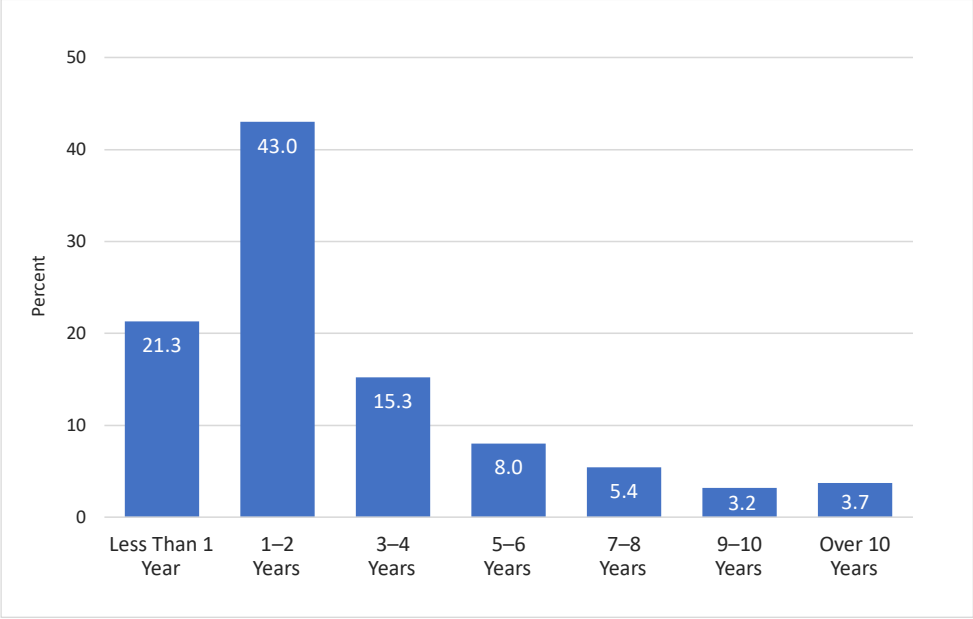

*Note*. *N* = 13,583, total sample minus missing data. Items are based on the Four-Item Social Identification measure recommended by Postmes, Haslam, and Jans (2013), using Jehovah's Witnesses as the identification ingroup.

**Interrupted Association After Baptism.** The survey asked respondents if they had ever stopped their association with Jehovah's Witnesses, and if so, for how long? A large majority of respondents (89.83%) reported having remained active Jehovah's Witnesses after their baptism without interruption. Nine percent (9.45%, $n$ = 1,284) reported that they had stopped associating with Jehovah's Witnesses after their baptism for a period of time and later resumed association, which could have occurred for different reasons (e.g., inactivity in the ministry, temporary lapse in moral behavior, or a physical, emotional, or financial crisis).

As shown in Figure 3.13, of the 1,069 who reported how long they were away from the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, almost two thirds (64.36%) reported that they resumed their association within 2 years or less. Just under one third (31.9%) resumed association after being away between 3 and 10 years; 3.74% resumed association after an extended time away of 10 years or more.

**Figure 3.13**

*Length of Interrupted Association*




*Note*. $N$ = 1,069. Percentages are based on those who stopped their association with Jehovah's Witnesses for a time and reported the length of time they were not affiliated.

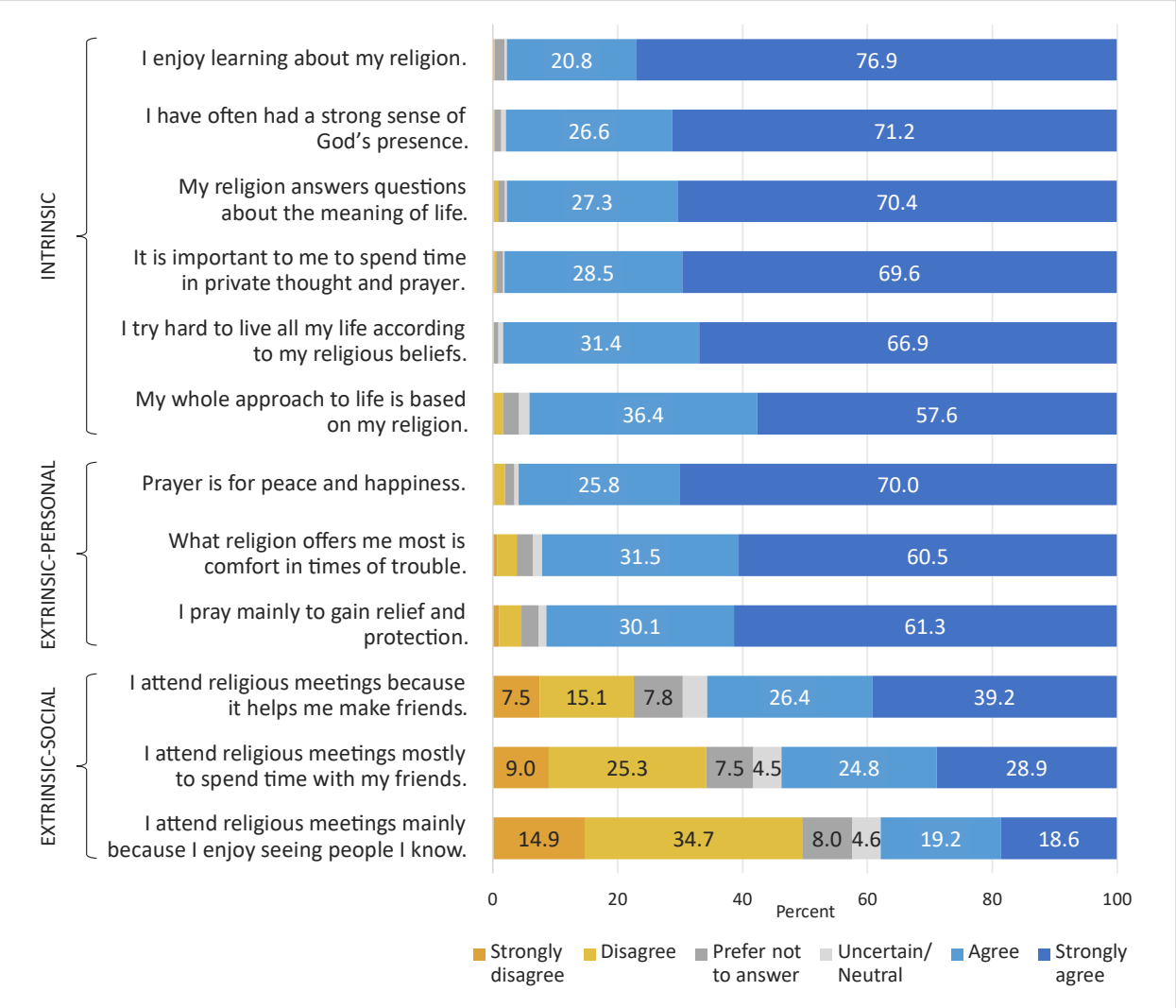
***Religious Orientation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity***

To better understand what being Jehovah's Witnesses means, the survey questionnaire examined their intrinsic, extrinsic-personal, or extrinsic-social religious orientation—those committed to beliefs that influence every aspect of their life and those who see in their religion a source of protection or social connection (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Gorsuch & Venable, 1983). The 12-item validated measure of Maltby and Lewis (1996) was used, with six items related to intrinsic religiosity (e.g., *I have often had a strong sense of God's presence*); three items related to extrinsic-personal religiosity (e.g., *Prayer is for peace and happiness*); and three items related to extrinsic-social religiosity (e.g., *I attend religious meetings because it helps me make friends*). The total religiosity score on a 7-point Likert scale ranged from 12 to 84, with subscales of intrinsic religiosity (range of 6 to 42), extrinsic-personal (range of 3 to 21), and extrinsic-social (range of 3 to 21).

Figure 3.14 shows the breakdown for each item and the dominant extrinsic orientation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Their religion is an integral part of their lives, with nearly 95% agreeing with each of the six intrinsic items. However, an intrinsic orientation does not exclude extrinsic motivations, as shown by the three extrinsic-personal items that indicate personal benefits that Jehovah's Witnesses associate with their religion (e.g., happiness, comfort, and relief). Similarly, along with the intrinsic and extrinsic-personal orientation, some identify extrinsic-social motivations for their religiosity motivation: to *make friends* (65.63%), to *spend time with my friends* (53.73%), and less so, to *see people I know* (37.81%).

**Figure 3.14**

*Religious Orientation: Intrinsic, Extrinsic-Personal, and Extrinsic-Social*




*Note*. *N* = 13,583, total sample minus missing data. Items are based on the 12-item religious orientation scale used by Maltby and Lewis (1996).

The data were analyzed for group differences based on gender (male and female), age group (early young adults, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults), generation (Genocide Generation, Returnees, and Post-Genocide Generation). Notably, results from ANOVAs with post hoc tests found no meaningfully statistical differences in any of the group comparisons for the total religiosity or subscales. Regardless of gender, age, or generation, what motivates or orients Jehovah's Witnesses to their religion is much the same. Religion

was an integral part of their lives (intrinsic religiosity) with perceived psychological benefits (extrinsic-personal religiosity). Jehovah's Witnesses recognize social benefits of the religion, but extrinsic-social religiosity is less characteristic of motivations to be part of the faith community than are intrinsic and personal motivations.

## Conclusion

The research findings of the personal religious history and experience of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda show how, when, and why they became Jehovah's Witnesses, what some experienced because of their religious affiliation, and features of their current religious life. In line with findings from previous religious studies about Jehovah's Witnesses (Auyezbek & Beisembayev, 2023; Hu & Murata, 2024), JW-RWA confirms that spiritual learning is central to the group's religious practice and personal religiousness. Whether adopting the faith after a period of Bible study or with parental teaching during their youth, respondents' decision to adopt the religion was driven largely by cognitive, not emotional, processes.

Other findings appear contrary to general trends:

1. The study identified a small percentage of Rwandan respondents whose parents had no religious affiliation, which may reflect broader secularizing trends or specific disillusionment with religion that has not been well-researched. The finding illustrates the appeal of the JW faith to those of both religious and nonreligious backgrounds.
2. Contrary to the trend worldwide of younger age cohorts abandoning organized religion, the findings show that among Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda, young people are attracted, not repelled, by religious moral guidelines and adopt a strong religious identity. That most Jehovah's Witnesses are baptized before age 30 and that the average age at baptism is 26 may reflect the strongly religious culture in Rwandan society.

Another factor may be certain post-Genocide effects, such as accelerated maturation of young people due to the drastic reordering of family structures or increased spiritual seeking as a means of solace, healing, and hope.

3. Similarly, the heightened attraction of males to the moral guidelines of the religion may reflect a keenly felt need among those who seek support because of having seen or experienced the negative consequences of extreme social pressure when many of them were in early adulthood.
4. Across cultures and religious groups, women are more religiously involved than men. However, gender differences were not found among Jehovah's Witnesses on religious measures, with male Jehovah's Witnesses indicating religiosity and religious attractions similar to females. This may indicate an influence of the religious culture and/or the broader Rwandan culture in the religious socialization of males.
5. Previous research identified religious rituals as a "bonding" religious dimension. For Jehovah's Witnesses, bonding with God was characterized by a perceived relationship with or attachment to God, but not by rituals. More research and statistical analysis are needed to understand the effect on both the Genocide and post-Genocide generations of the profoundly devastating experience of 1994.

Personal bonding or attachment to God as prominent motivation among respondents may explain Witnesses' strong adherence to what they perceive as divine commands, even in situations that present strong social pressure to the contrary. Broad agreement with key doctrines of the faith suggests a clear understanding and consensus of teachings. Strong identity with the religious community is another consistent characteristic of Witness adherents, and yet counterintuitively, respondents scored relatively lower in extrinsic social orientations toward their faith, with intrinsic

and extrinsic-personal orientations clearly more salient. Respondents came from various demographic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. While they expressed diverse opinions regarding religious motivations, for certain measures of religiosity, Jehovah's Witnesses were relatively consistent. Such general consensus merits cross-cultural exploration to see if the same patterns hold in populations of Jehovah's Witnesses in other cultures and political climates, as well as with future generations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda.

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