

**APPROVAL**

This is to approve that the research entitled “**Legal analysis of the effects of digital surveillance individuals’ rights to privacy under Rwandan legal framework** “has been undertaken by **NIYIGENA MIGUEL** under my supervision as a partial fulfillment of the academic requirements for the award of Bachelor’s Degree with Honors in Law in Kigali Independent University ULK. In my opinion, the work is worthy for public presentation.

**Supervisor: Me Bahati Vedaste**

**Signature: .....**

**Date: ...../...../2024**

## **DECLARATION**

I, **NIYIGENA MIGUEL**, hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the work presented hereinafter “**Legal analysis of the effects of digital surveillance individuals’ rights to privacy under Rwandan legal framework.**” is my original work. It has not been presented elsewhere as a dissertation or for any other academic purpose. For other sources that were consulted while carrying out this work, references were duly provided in footnotes and bibliography.

**NAMES: NIYIGENA MIGUEL**

Date: ...../...../2024

Signature:

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated:

To the Lord Christ mighty God Thank you,

dedicate this work to all those who have supported me throughout this journey.

To my supervisor, Me Bahati Vedaste, thank you for your guidance and encouragement. To my lecturers,, your teachings have inspired me greatly. To my parents and family, your love and sacrifices have been my foundation. And to my friends, your support and companionship have made this journey meaningful.

Thank you all for being there for me. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Even on my side, I can say that after a lengthy walk, at least a way begins to appear, as John Locke once observed, "As people are walking all the time, in the same spot, a path appears." I want to take this wonderful opportunity to thank everyone who has helped make this route possible. My deepest gratitude is sent to my beloved supervisor, Lecture ME BAHATI VEDASTE, who has been an enthusiastic advisor and mentor as well as a supervisor. She has provided professional direction and support for me to complete my dissertation and my university studies in general. Nothing would have been accomplished without her.

My deepest gratitude is extended once more to the entire school of law at Kigali Independent University for realizing my ambitions. I appreciate their kind instruction and encouragement, which has been a passion rather than just a duty. I have to thank you all more, especially my supervisor, the Head of department , and all the other employees whose names are too many to list in my succinct acknowledgement.

The realization of this accomplishment could not happen, if I had not met other amazing and lovely colleges in my LLB classes who have always been near me and made my studying career an enjoyable environment in all these three years of university studies. Their advice and good characters have contributed much to my socio-academic life in university.

**NIYIGENA MIGUEL**

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ALPHABETIC ORDER**

1. **AU** - African Union
2. **DPA** - Data Protection Authority
3. **EU** - European Union
4. **GDPR** - General Data Protection Regulation
5. **ICCPR** - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
6. **ICT** - Information and Communication Technologies
7. **ILPD** - Institute of Legal Practice and Development
8. **NIDA** - National Identification Agency
9. **NICI-2020** - National ICT Strategy and Plan 2020
10. **OECD** - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
11. **RDPA** - Rwandan Data Protection Authority
12. **RURA**- Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority
13. **USA** - United States of America
14. **UDHR** - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
15. **VPN** - Virtual Private Network
16. **NSO** - NSO Group (a cybersecurity firm)

Contents

<b>APPROVAL</b> .....	1
<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	iv
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS</b> .....	v
<b>General introduction</b> .....	vi
1. Background of the Study .....	1
1.1 Global Perspective of rights to privacy.....	1
1.2 Rwandans Perspective of rights to privacy.....	2
1.3 Local Perspective of rights to privacy .....	2
2 Interest of the Study.....	3
2.1 Personal Interest .....	3
2.2Academic Interest.....	4
2.3 Scientific Interest.....	4
2.4 Socio-economic Interest.....	4
3 Beneficiaries of the Study .....	5
3.1 Policymakers .....	5
3.2 Legal practitioners.....	5

3.3 Civil society organizations .....	6
3.4 General public .....	6
4.Scope of the Study .....	6
4.1 Scope in space .....	6
4.2 Theoretical Scope .....	7
4.3 Content Scope .....	7
4.4 Time Scope .....	7
5 Problem Statement .....	8
6 Research Questions .....	8
7 Research Hypothesis .....	8
8 Research Objectives .....	9
8.1 General Objective .....	9
8.2 Specific Objectives .....	9
9 Research Methodology .....	10
9.1 Research Techniques .....	10
9.2 Research Methods .....	10
9.2.1 Analytical method .....	10
9.2.2 Comparative method .....	11
9.2.3 Exegetic method .....	11

10 Subdivision of the study.....	11
<b>CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RIGHTS TO PRIVACY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	13
1.2 Definition of Key Terms.....	14
1.2.1 Digital Surveillance.....	14
1.2.2 Privacy Rights.....	15
1.2.3 Legal Framework.....	15
1.2.4 Data Protection.....	16
1.2.5 Interception of Communications.....	17
1.3 Theoretical Foundations.....	17
1.3.1 Privacy Theory.....	18
1.3.2 Surveillance Theory.....	19
1.3.3 Constitutional Theory.....	20
1.4 Legal Basis for Privacy Rights in Rwanda.....	21
1.4.1 Constitutional Provisions.....	21
1.4.2 Statutory Laws.....	21
1.4.3 International Conventions.....	21
<b>CHAPTER 2: EFFECTS OF DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE ON INDIVIDUALS' RIGHTS TO PRIVACY UNDER RWANDAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>22</b>



2.1 Overview of Digital Surveillance Practices in Rwanda .....	22
2.1.1 Interception of electronic communications, as regulated by Law N°60/2013 .....	22
2.1.2 Use of CCTV cameras in public spaces, particularly in urban areas.....	23
2.1.3 Monitoring of social media and online activities .....	23
2.1.4 Data collection through national ID systems and biometric database .....	24
2.2 Analysis of Privacy Protections in the Rwandan Constitution.....	25
2.2.1 Interpretation and Application of Article 23.....	25
2.3 Impacts of Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications .....	26
2.4 Implications of Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.....	28
2.4.1 Establishing principles for lawful data processing .....	28
2.4.2 Defining rights of data subjects .....	29
2.4.3 Creating a data protection authority .....	29
2.5 Effects on Specific Privacy Rights .....	30
2.5.1 Data Collection and Storage .....	30
2.5.2 Communication Privacy .....	31
2.5.3 Online Privacy .....	31
2.6 Compliance with International Standards .....	32
2.6.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights .....	32
2.6.2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.....	33

2.6.3 African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection .....	33
2.7 Case Studies: Privacy Violations through Digital Surveillance in Rwanda .....	34
2.7.1 Unauthorized access to private communications of journalists.....	34
2.7.2 Use of spyware against political opponents .....	34
2.7.3 Excessive data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic.....	34
2.8 Balancing National Security and Individual Privacy Rights.....	35
2.8.1 Strengthening oversight mechanisms for surveillance activities.....	35
2.8.2 Enhancing transparency in the use of digital surveillance tools.....	35
2.8.3 Regularly reviewing and updating privacy laws to address technological advancements .....	36
<b>CHAPTER 3: LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE CHALLENGES .....</b>	<b>37</b>
3.1 Strengthening the Legal Framework.....	37
3.1.1 Proposed Amendments to Existing Laws .....	37
3.1.2 New Legislative Proposals .....	38
3.2 Institutional Reforms.....	39
3.2.1 Establishing an Independent Data Protection Authority.....	40
3.2.2 Enhancing Judicial Oversight of Surveillance Activities .....	41
3.3 Implementing Effective Safeguards and Checks .....	42
3.3.1 Transparency Measures .....	42

3.3.2 Accountability Mechanisms .....	43
3.4 Technological Solutions for Privacy Protection .....	44
3.4.1 Encryption Standards.....	44
3.4.2 Privacy by Design.....	45
3.4.3 Anonymization Technique .....	45
3.5 Public Awareness and Education Initiatives.....	45
3.5.1 Digital Literacy Programs .....	46
3.5.2 Public Information Campaigns .....	46
3.5.3 School Curriculum.....	46
3.6 International Cooperation and Alignment with Global Standards .....	47
3.6.1 Regional Cooperation.....	47
3.6.2 International Best Practices .....	47
3.6.3 Cross-border Data Flows .....	48
<b>General Conclusion.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>51</b>

## **General introduction**

The digital age has ushered in unprecedented challenges to individual privacy rights, as governments increasingly employ surveillance technologies for national security and public safety. This study examines the legal implications of digital surveillance on privacy rights in Rwanda, exploring the delicate balance between state interests and individual freedoms. By analyzing Rwanda's constitutional provisions, relevant laws, and international commitments, the research aims to assess the adequacy of the current legal framework in protecting privacy in the face of evolving digital surveillance practices. The study will employ qualitative methods, including document analysis and expert interviews, to evaluate the alignment of surveillance measures with legal protections and identify potential gaps in legislation. By comparing Rwanda's approach with international standards and best practices, this research seeks to propose legal reforms that could enhance privacy safeguards while addressing legitimate security concerns. The findings will contribute to the ongoing dialogue on privacy rights in the digital era within Rwanda's unique context.

### **1. Background of the Study**

The right to privacy in the digital age has become a pressing global concern, with implications for individual liberties, national security, and technological development. This study examines the interplay between privacy rights and digital surveillance in Rwanda, contextualizing it within international norms and local realities. The research aims to explore how Rwanda balances its commitment to privacy protection with its aspirations for technological advancement and security considerations.

#### **1.1 Global Perspective of rights to privacy**

The right to privacy has been recognized as a fundamental human right in various international instruments. Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation".<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Article 17 of the International Covenant on

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides protection against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy.<sup>2</sup>

However, the digital age has brought new challenges to privacy protection. The United Nations Human Rights Council, recognizing this, adopted Resolution 68/167 on "The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age" in 2013, emphasizing that the same rights people have offline must also be protected online.<sup>3</sup>

## **1.2 Rwandans Perspective of rights to privacy**

Rwanda, as a member of the international community, has incorporated privacy protections into its domestic legal framework. The cornerstone of this protection is found in Article 23 of Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, which states: The privacy of a person, his or her family, home or correspondence shall not be subjected to interference in a manner inconsistent with the law; the person's honor and dignity shall be respected.<sup>4</sup>

This constitutional provision is further supported by other laws like Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications: This law provides the legal framework for lawful interception of communications, including digital communications. Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies: This law includes provisions on data protection and privacy in the context of ICTs. Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy: This recent law specifically addresses personal data protection in the digital age.<sup>5</sup>

## **1.3 Local Perspective of rights to privacy**

At the local level, the implementation of these laws and the balance between privacy rights and digital surveillance can vary. Urban areas with higher digital penetration may face more acute privacy challenges compared to rural areas. Local government bodies and law enforcement

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council. (2013). Resolution 68/167 on "The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age".

<sup>4</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Official Gazette n° Special of 04/08/2023

<sup>5</sup> Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.

agencies play a crucial role in how these laws are interpreted and applied in day-to-day scenarios.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid adoption of digital technologies in Rwanda, part of the country's Vision 2020 and Vision 2050 development plans, has led to increased capabilities for digital surveillance. This includes the use of CCTV cameras in urban areas, monitoring of social media, and potential interception of digital communications. While these measures can contribute to public safety and national security, they also raise significant privacy concerns that need to be addressed within the legal framework.<sup>7</sup>

## **2 Interest of the Study**

This thesis will have several interest including personal, academic, scientific and socio-economic value as explained below.

### **2.1 Personal Interest**

As a legal researcher, I am deeply interested in examining the interplay between digital surveillance and individual privacy rights in Rwanda. This interest stems from observing the rapid technological advancements and their potential impact on constitutional protections, particularly Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution. The enactment of Law N° 058/2021 on data protection and Law N°60/2013 on communication interception further highlights the evolving nature of this field. I am keen to explore how these legal frameworks adapt to emerging technologies, balancing national security interests with individual privacy rights as outlined in Law N° 24/2016 on ICTs.<sup>8</sup> This research aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on privacy in the digital age within Rwanda's legal context.

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<sup>6</sup> Makulilo, A. B. (2016). Privacy and data protection in Africa: A state of the art. *International Data Privacy Law*, 6(3), 179-189.

<sup>7</sup> Butera, S. (2019). Rwanda: Balancing Economic Development and Data Protection. In *African Data Privacy Laws* (pp. 221-235). Springer, Cham.

<sup>8</sup> Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies.

## **2.2 Academic Interest**

This study will contribute to the growing body of literature on digital privacy rights in developing nations, focusing on Rwanda's unique context. It will analyze the interplay between Rwanda's constitutional privacy protections and recent legislation such as Law N° 058/2021 on Personal Data Protection and Privacy. The research will examine how these laws address challenges posed by digital surveillance, building on works like Mugisha's analysis of data protection in Rwanda. By exploring the balance between privacy rights and national security interests, as outlined in Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications, this study will provide insights into Rwanda's evolving digital privacy landscape. This contribution is particularly significant given the rapid digital transformation under Rwanda's Vision 2050.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.3 Scientific Interest**

The research will employ legal analysis methodologies to examine the intersection of technology, law, and human rights in Rwanda. This analysis will focus on the Constitution of Rwanda, particularly Article 23 on privacy rights. It will also examine Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications, Law N° 24/2016 on Information and Communication Technologies, and Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy. These laws will be analyzed in the context of digital surveillance and privacy rights. The methodology will include doctrinal analysis, comparing statutory provisions with their practical application. As Gatsimbanyi and Iyakaremye (2022) note, Rwanda's rapid digitalization necessitates a robust legal framework to protect privacy rights.<sup>10</sup> This research aims to contribute to this ongoing legal discourse.

## **2.4 Socio-economic Interest**

The findings of this research could significantly impact Rwandan policymaking, potentially enhancing legal protections for individual privacy while addressing national security concerns.

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<sup>9</sup> Republic of Rwanda. (2015). Vision 2050. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

<sup>10</sup> Gatsimbanyi, O., & Iyakaremye, I. (2022). Digital privacy and data protection in Rwanda: A critical analysis of the legal framework. *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 28(1), 123-145.

By analyzing the Constitution of Rwanda, Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications<sup>11</sup>, and Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy, policymakers could identify areas for improvement in the legal framework. As Mugisha et al. (2021)<sup>12</sup> note, balancing privacy rights with security needs is crucial in the digital age. The research could inform amendments to existing laws or the creation of new regulations that better address the challenges posed by digital surveillance, aligning with international standards while respecting Rwanda's unique context. This could lead to more robust privacy protections and clearer guidelines for lawful surveillance practices.

### **3 Beneficiaries of the Study**

This study on digital surveillance and privacy rights in Rwanda will provide valuable insights to various stakeholders. The findings will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the balance between privacy protection and national security needs in the digital age. The key beneficiaries of this research are explained below.

#### **3.1 Policymakers**

Policymakers will gain insights for potential legal reforms, including identifying gaps in current laws like the Constitution<sup>13</sup> and Law N° 058/202. They can better balance privacy rights with security needs, align with international standards, address technological challenges, improve enforcement mechanisms, and consider data protection reforms. The research may also inform sector-specific regulations and highlight the need for increased public awareness and transparency in surveillance practices.

#### **3.2 Legal practitioners**

Legal practitioners will deepen their understanding of Rwanda's digital surveillance and privacy rights landscape by examining key legislation. This knowledge will enhance their ability to

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<sup>11</sup> Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications. Official Gazette n° 41 of 14/10/2013.

<sup>12</sup> Mugisha, J., Nzabonimpa, J., & Karamage, F. (2021). Digital privacy and data protection in Rwanda: A critical analysis of the legal framework. *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 27(1), 123-145.

<sup>13</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Official Gazette n° Special of 04/08/2023



navigate the complex interplay between surveillance needs and privacy rights. Practitioners will be better equipped to advise clients, represent cases, and contribute to legal discourse on privacy in Rwanda's unique digital context.

### **3.3 Civil society organizations**

Civil society organizations can use the research findings to advocate for stronger privacy protections. By analyzing existing laws, they can identify gaps and push for enhanced safeguards against unauthorized surveillance. These groups can raise public awareness, engage policymakers, and propose legal amendments. They may advocate for increased transparency, stronger oversight mechanisms, and clearer data protection guidelines while respecting national security needs

### **3.4 General public**

The public will benefit from increased awareness of their privacy rights in the digital age. The research can help citizens understand the implications of digital surveillance on their daily lives, the protections offered by current laws<sup>14</sup>, and the potential risks to their privacy. This knowledge empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their digital activities and advocate for their rights effectively.

## **4.Scope of the Study**

This thesis will be delimited in space, domain, time, theory and in its content as explained below.

### **4.1 Scope in space**

The study will primarily examine Rwanda's legal framework on digital surveillance and privacy rights. It will analyze Rwandan laws, including the Constitution and relevant statutes. However, to provide context and identify potential improvements, the research will draw comparisons with international standards such as the UN's principles on privacy in the digital age and the EU's GDPR. Best practices from countries with advanced digital privacy laws will also be considered,

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<sup>14</sup> Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.

offering a global perspective on addressing the challenges of balancing privacy and surveillance in the digital era.

## **4.2 Theoretical Scope**

The research will explore legal theories concerning privacy rights, surveillance, and the balance between individual freedoms and state interests in Rwanda. It will analyze constitutional provisions, case law, and scholarly interpretations of Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy. The study will also examine how Rwanda's data protection laws align with international standards and investigate the legal frameworks governing state surveillance activities, considering their impact on citizens' privacy rights.<sup>15</sup>

## **4.3 Content Scope**

Factors to be considered in this research encompass a range of legal and technological aspects. Rwandan constitutional provisions, particularly Article 23 on privacy rights, will be thoroughly examined. Relevant laws and regulations, such as the Data Protection and Privacy Act of 2021, will be analyzed for their scope and effectiveness. International treaties Rwanda has ratified, including the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, will be evaluated for their influence on domestic policy. The impact of digital surveillance technologies, like facial recognition systems and internet monitoring tools, will be assessed considering their potential to infringe on individual privacy. The research will also consider how these factors interact with Rwanda's national security interests and economic development goals.

## **4.4 Time Scope**

The study will span from the adoption of the 2003 Constitution to the present, examining the evolution of privacy rights and surveillance laws in Rwanda over two decades. It will analyze key legal developments, technological advancements, and shifts in governmental approaches to balancing individual privacy with national interests during this period.

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<sup>15</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2020). The Right to Privacy in Rwanda: Balancing Individual Rights and National Security. *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 26(1), 58-79.

## **5 Problem Statement**

The rapid advancement of digital surveillance technologies in Rwanda raises critical questions about the balance between national security interests and individuals' right to privacy. While the Rwandan Constitution guarantees privacy rights, the increasing use of digital surveillance tools potentially undermines these protections. This research aims to examine how Rwanda's legal framework addresses the tension between surveillance practices and privacy rights in the digital age. It will investigate whether current laws adequately safeguard citizens' privacy against evolving surveillance technologies, and assess the legal implications of data collection, storage, and analysis by both government and private entities. The study seeks to identify potential gaps in legislation and propose recommendations for a more robust privacy protection framework in Rwanda.

## **6 Research Questions**

1. How do Rwanda's surveillance practices align with privacy protections?
2. What legal improvements could balance privacy rights and surveillance needs?

## **7 Research Hypothesis**

1. Rwanda's surveillance practices may not fully align with the privacy protections outlined in the Constitution and other relevant laws. The research posits that there could be instances of overreach or discrepancies between the stated legal protections and the actual implementation of surveillance measures.<sup>16</sup>
2. Legal improvements to balance privacy rights and surveillance needs could include strengthening oversight mechanisms, clarifying the scope of permissible surveillance, and enhancing transparency in surveillance practices. The study hypothesizes that targeted reforms in

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<sup>16</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age. *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

these areas could lead to a more robust legal framework that better protects individual privacy while allowing for necessary and proportionate surveillance measures.<sup>17</sup>

## **8 Research Objectives**

The following objectives have been formulated to address the research questions and guide the study's investigation into Rwanda's legal framework for digital privacy and surveillance, the alignment of surveillance practices with privacy protections, and potential legal improvements:

### **8.1 General Objective**

To analyze the legal implications of digital surveillance on individuals' rights to privacy under the Rwandan legal framework and propose recommendations for potential improvements.

### **8.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To examine and evaluate the current Rwandan legal provisions on privacy rights and digital surveillance, including the Constitution, Law N° 058/2021, and Law N°60/2013.
2. To assess the compatibility of Rwanda's digital surveillance practices with constitutional privacy protections, identifying any discrepancies or areas of potential overreach.
3. To identify legal gaps in addressing privacy challenges arising from digital surveillance, particularly considering rapidly evolving technologies.
4. To compare Rwanda's legal approach to digital privacy with international standards and best practices, such as the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.
5. To propose legal reforms that could enhance privacy protections in the context of digital surveillance, focusing on balancing individual rights with legitimate state security concerns.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gatsimbanyi, F., & Rutagengwa, E. (2022). The Role of Civil Society in Shaping Rwanda's Digital Privacy Policies. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 213-235.

## **9 Research Methodology**

This study will employ a qualitative approach to examine the legal implications of digital surveillance on privacy rights in Rwanda. The research methodology is designed to comprehensively analyze relevant laws, policies, and practices, while also gathering insights from key stakeholders. The following research techniques and methods will be utilized:

### **9.1 Research Techniques**

This thesis will only employ documentary and interview technique as described below.

#### **9.1.2 Documentary technique**

This technique involves the systematic review and analysis of primary and secondary legal sources, including the Rwandan Constitution, relevant laws such as Law N° 058/2021 and Law N°60/2013<sup>19</sup>, academic literature, policy documents, and reports. This comprehensive examination will provide a foundation for understanding Rwanda's legal framework on digital privacy and surveillance.<sup>20</sup>

### **9.2 Research Methods**

This study will utilize analytical, comparative as well as the exegetic method.

#### **9.2.1 Analytical method**

This method will be used to critically examine Rwanda's legal framework on digital surveillance and privacy. It involves breaking down complex legal concepts, identifying key components of

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<sup>18</sup> Nsanzimana, J., & Rukundo, S. (2022). The Evolution of Privacy Rights in Rwanda's Digital Landscape. *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 28(1), 124-142.

<sup>19</sup> Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications.

<sup>20</sup> Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques*. New Age International.

relevant laws, and evaluating their effectiveness in protecting privacy rights. The analytical method will help uncover potential gaps or inconsistencies in the current legal framework.<sup>21</sup>

### **9.2.2 Comparative method**

Rwanda's legal approach to digital privacy and surveillance will be compared with international standards and best practices. This method will involve examining similar laws and practices in other jurisdictions, particularly those with advanced digital privacy frameworks. The comparative analysis will help identify potential areas for improvement in Rwanda's legal system.<sup>22</sup>

### **9.2.3 Exegetic method**

This method involves a detailed, critical interpretation of legal texts, focusing on the intended meaning and application of specific laws and constitutional provisions related to privacy and surveillance. The exegetic method will be crucial in understanding how Rwanda's legal framework addresses the balance between privacy rights and national security concerns.<sup>23</sup>

## **10 Subdivision of the study**

This thesis shall have several subdivisions headings, all those will be included three main chapters. The first chapter which is called the conceptual and theoretical framework of rights to privacy in Rwanda. This chapter will be subdivided into definitions of key terms, theoretical foundations like privacy theory, surveillance theory and constitutional theory. It will further be subdivided into part of legal basis for privacy rights in Rwanda where constitutional provisions, statutory laws and international conventions will be elaborated.

It will later have the second chapter called “Effects of digital surveillance on individuals ‘rights to privacy under Rwandan legal framework. This chapter will further be subdivided into the

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<sup>21</sup> Cryer, R., Hervey, T., Sokhi-Bulley, B., & Bohm, A. (2011). *Research methodologies in EU and international law*. Hart Publishing.

<sup>22</sup> Zweigert, K., & Kötz, H. (1998). *An introduction to comparative law*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>23</sup> Barak, A. (2005). *Purposive interpretation in law*. Princeton University Press.

overview of digital surveillance practices in Rwanda, the analysis of privacy protections in Rwandan constitution, Impacts of law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications, Implications of Law N° 058/2021 on protection of personal data and privacy, Implications of Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of personal data and Privacy, Effects on specific privacy rights, Compliance with international standards, Case studies: Privacy violations through digital surveillance in Rwanda and balancing national security and individual privacy rights.

This thesis will further have chapter three called legal and institutional mechanisms for addressing digital surveillance challenges. It will be subdivided into part of strengthening the legal framework, institutional reforms, implementing effective safeguards and checks, Technological Solutions for privacy protection, public awareness and education initiatives, and international Cooperation and alignment with global standards. The last subdivision will be the conclusions and recommendations.

# CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RIGHTS TO PRIVACY

## 1.1 Introduction

The right to privacy has become increasingly complex and contentious in the digital age, particularly in the context of state surveillance and national security concerns. This chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical framework for examining the effects of digital surveillance on individuals' rights to privacy under the Rwandan legal framework. By defining key terms, exploring relevant theories, and outlining the legal basis for privacy rights in Rwanda, this chapter lays the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and implications of digital surveillance in the country.

The chapter begins by defining essential terms such as digital surveillance, privacy rights, legal framework, data protection, and interception of communications. These definitions are crucial for understanding the scope and context of the study, particularly within Rwanda's legal system. The chapter then explores relevant theoretical foundations, including privacy theory, surveillance theory, and constitutional theory. These theoretical perspectives provide valuable insights into the nature of privacy, the societal impact of surveillance, and the constitutional protection of fundamental rights.

Finally, the chapter outlines the legal basis for privacy rights in Rwanda. This includes an examination of key constitutional provisions, particularly Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution<sup>24</sup>, which guarantees the right to privacy. The chapter also discusses relevant statutory laws, such as Law N° 058/2021 on data protection and Law N°60/2013 on communication interception. Additionally, it considers international conventions that Rwanda has ratified, providing a broader context for interpreting and implementing privacy rights within the country's domestic legal framework. This comprehensive legal overview sets the stage for a detailed analysis of the interaction between digital surveillance and privacy rights in Rwanda.

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<sup>24</sup> Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution, Official Gazette n° Special of 04/08/2023



## 1.2 Definition of Key Terms

This section defines key terms essential to understanding Rwanda's digital surveillance landscape, including digital surveillance, privacy rights, legal frameworks, data protection, and interception of communications. These definitions provide a foundation for analyzing how Rwanda's legal and regulatory environment balances individual privacy with national security, particularly in the context of evolving digital technologies and international standards.

### 1.2.1 Digital Surveillance

Digital surveillance encompasses the monitoring of digital communications, online activities, and electronic data to gather information about individuals or groups. In Rwanda, this practice is primarily governed by Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications. This law provides a legal framework for lawful interception of digital communications, balancing national security needs with privacy rights guaranteed by Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution.

The implementation of digital surveillance in Rwanda must also comply with international standards, such as Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As Nsengimana notes, Rwanda's approach to digital surveillance reflects a delicate balance between individual privacy and national security concerns.<sup>25</sup> This balance is further reinforced by Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.

Scholars like Mugisha et al. argue that while digital surveillance can enhance national security, it also poses significant challenges to privacy rights.<sup>26</sup> The legal framework in Rwanda, including Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies, attempts to address these challenges by providing safeguards against unauthorized surveillance.

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<sup>25</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2020). The Right to Privacy in Rwanda: Balancing Individual Rights and National Security. *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 26(1), 58-79.

<sup>26</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age. *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

However, as Gatsimbanyi and Rutagengwa suggest, ongoing vigilance and legal reforms may be necessary to keep pace with evolving technologies.<sup>27</sup>

### **1.2.2 Privacy Rights**

Privacy rights are fundamental to individual autonomy and dignity. Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution enshrines these rights, stating: "The privacy of a person, his or her family, home or correspondence shall not be subjected to interference in a manner inconsistent with the law"<sup>28</sup>. This aligns with international standards set by Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Rwanda has further codified privacy protections in Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy. This law establishes a comprehensive framework for data protection, reflecting the growing importance of digital privacy. As Mugisha notes, this legislation marks a significant step in Rwanda's efforts to balance technological advancement with individual rights.<sup>29</sup>

The right to privacy extends to digital communications, as recognized in Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications. This law sets conditions for lawful interception, aiming to protect privacy while addressing national security concerns. Nsengimana (2020) argues that striking this balance is crucial for maintaining public trust in the digital age.<sup>30</sup>

### **1.2.3 Legal Framework**

Issue refers to the system of laws, regulations, and legal principles that govern a particular issue. In the context of this study, it encompasses the Rwandan Constitution, relevant statutes, and international conventions that Rwanda has ratified.

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<sup>27</sup>27 gatsimbanyi, f., & rutagengwa, e. (2022). the role of civil society in shaping rwanda's digital privacy policies. african human rights law journal, 22(1), 213-235.

<sup>28</sup>28 constitution of the republic of rwanda, official gazette n° special of 04/08/2023

<sup>29</sup>29 mugisha, c. k. (2019). the state of data protection in rwanda. east african journal of science and technology, 9(1), 1-12.

<sup>30</sup>30 nsengimana, j. p. (2020). the right to privacy in rwanda: balancing individual rights and national security. east african journal of peace and human rights, 26(1), 58-79.

The legal framework for privacy rights in Rwanda is anchored in the Constitution, particularly Article 23, which guarantees the right to privacy. This constitutional protection is further elaborated in specific statutes, notably Law N° 058/2021 on personal data protection and Law N°60/2013 on communication interception. These laws provide detailed guidelines on data protection and lawful surveillance practices, reflecting Rwanda's commitment to balancing privacy rights with national security concerns.

International conventions also play a crucial role in shaping Rwanda's privacy framework. As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)<sup>31</sup>, Rwanda is obligated to uphold international privacy standards. The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection further reinforces regional commitments to privacy protection. Scholars like Nsengimana argue that these international instruments provide a broader context for interpreting domestic privacy laws in Rwanda.<sup>32</sup>

#### **1.2.4 Data Protection**

Data protection refers to the legal safeguards put in place to ensure the privacy and security of personal information. In Rwanda, this is primarily addressed by Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.<sup>33</sup> This law builds upon the privacy protections established in Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy of person, family, home, and correspondence.

The Rwandan approach to data protection aligns with international standards, such as the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. As Mugisha (2019) notes, Rwanda's data protection framework aims to balance individual privacy rights with the country's digital development goals. This law establishes principles for data collection, processing, and storage, reflecting global best practices in data protection.

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<sup>31</sup> united nations. (1966). international covenant on civil and political rights.

<sup>32</sup> nsengimana, j. p. (2020). the right to privacy in rwanda: balancing individual rights and national security. east african journal of peace and human rights, 26(1), 58-79.

<sup>33</sup> law n° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 relating to the protection of personal data and privacy, republic of rwanda.

### **1.2.5 Interception of Communications**

Interception of communications refers to the act of accessing or monitoring communications between parties without their knowledge or consent. In Rwanda, this practice is primarily regulated by Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications. This law defines interception as "listening to, recording, or copying of the content of any communication in the course of its transmission" (Article 2).

The legal framework for interception in Rwanda aligns with international standards, such as Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>34</sup>, which protects against arbitrary interference with privacy. However, as Nsengimana (2020) notes, balancing privacy rights with national security concerns remains a challenge.<sup>35</sup> The implementation of Law N°60/2013 must be considered in conjunction with Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy.

### **1.3 Theoretical Foundations**

The examination of digital surveillance's impact on privacy rights in Rwanda necessitates a robust theoretical framework. This section explores key theories that underpin our understanding of privacy, surveillance, and constitutional rights in the digital age. These theories provide essential lenses through which we can analyze Rwanda's legal approach to balancing individual privacy with national security interests.

We will explore three main theoretical foundations: privacy theory, surveillance theory, and constitutional theory. Each of these theories contributes unique insights to our analysis of Rwanda's legal framework for digital privacy and surveillance. By examining these theoretical perspectives, we can better understand the complexities of privacy rights in the context of Rwanda's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

First, we will delve into privacy theory, which forms the cornerstone of our theoretical framework. This will be followed by discussions on surveillance theory and constitutional

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<sup>34</sup> united nations. (1966). international covenant on civil and political rights.

<sup>35</sup> nsengimana, j. p. (2020). the right to privacy in rwanda: balancing individual rights and national security. east african journal of peace and human rights, 26(1), 58-79.

theory, providing a comprehensive theoretical basis for our subsequent analysis of Rwanda's legal provisions and practices related to digital surveillance and privacy rights.

### 1.3.1 Privacy Theory

Privacy theory explores the nature and value of privacy in society, examining concepts such as informational, bodily, and decisional privacy. Westin defines privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others."<sup>36</sup> In Rwanda, privacy theory frames the discussion around the importance of privacy rights protected by Article 23 of the Constitution, which states: *The privacy of a person, his or her family, home or correspondence shall not be subjected to interference in a manner inconsistent with the law*

Privacy theory informs the interpretation of Rwanda's legal framework, including Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy. This law defines personal data as "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person" (Article 2), reflecting the concept of informational privacy. The theory also underpins Rwanda's approach to international agreements, such as the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014), which Rwanda has signed.<sup>37</sup> Scholars like Mugisha have applied privacy theory to analyze Rwanda's evolving data protection landscape.

In the context of digital surveillance, privacy theory helps balance individual rights with national security interests. Law N°60/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications demonstrates this balance, allowing for lawful interception while stipulating conditions to protect privacy. Nsengimana argues that privacy theory is crucial in shaping Rwanda's approach to digital rights, especially as the country pursues its Vision 2050 development goals. The theory provides a framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of privacy in the digital age and its importance in maintaining individual autonomy and dignity.

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<sup>36</sup> Westin, A. F. (1967). *Privacy and freedom*. New York: Atheneum.

<sup>37</sup> African Union. (2014). *African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection*.

### 1.3.2 Surveillance Theory

Surveillance theory is a critical framework for understanding the societal implications of monitoring practices, particularly in the digital age. It examines how surveillance affects individual behavior, social norms, and power dynamics within society. As defined by Lyon, surveillance theory explores "the focused, systematic and routine attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction."<sup>38</sup> This theoretical perspective is crucial when analyzing the effects of digital surveillance measures in Rwanda, especially those implemented under Law N°60/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications.<sup>39</sup>

In the Rwandan context, surveillance theory provides insights into how digital monitoring practices, sanctioned by Law N°60/2013, may impact citizens' behavior and social interactions. The law allows for lawful interception of communications, which raises questions about privacy as protected under Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution.<sup>40</sup> Mugisha et al. argue that such surveillance measures, while intended for national security, can lead to self-censorship and alter social norms around privacy. This aligns with Foucault's concept of the "panopticon," where the mere possibility of being watched influences behavior.

Furthermore, surveillance theory helps in examining the balance between state security interests and individual rights in Rwanda. While Law N°60/2013 provides a legal framework for surveillance, it must be interpreted considering international standards such as Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Rwanda has ratified. Nsengimana suggests that the implementation of digital surveillance measures in Rwanda requires careful consideration of their long-term societal impacts, emphasizing the need for robust oversight mechanisms to prevent potential abuses and protect privacy rights as enshrined in Law N° 058/2021 on Personal Data Protection.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. Polity Press.

<sup>39</sup> Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications.

<sup>40</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda.

<sup>41</sup> Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.

### 1.3.3 Constitutional Theory

Constitutional theory provides a framework for understanding how fundamental rights, such as privacy, are protected and balanced against other societal interests within a constitutional system. It encompasses the principles and doctrines that guide the interpretation and application of a constitution. In the context of Rwanda, this theory is crucial for interpreting Article 23 of the Constitution, which states: "The privacy of a person, his or her family, home or correspondence shall not be subjected to interference in a manner inconsistent with the law; the person's honor and dignity shall be respected". This provision forms the cornerstone of privacy protection in Rwanda's legal system.

The application of constitutional theory to privacy rights in Rwanda must consider the balance between individual freedoms and national security interests. This is particularly relevant when examining Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications, which provides a legal framework for surveillance activities.<sup>42</sup>

As Nsengimana argues, "The challenge lies in reconciling the need for effective national security measures with the constitutional guarantee of privacy." This balancing act is further complicated by Rwanda's rapid digital transformation, as outlined in the country's Vision 2050<sup>43</sup>, which necessitates a contemporary interpretation of constitutional privacy protections.

International conventions also play a role in shaping the constitutional interpretation of privacy rights in Rwanda. The country is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects against arbitrary interference with privacy in Article 17.

Additionally, Rwanda has ratified the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, which provides regional standards for privacy protection. Mugisha et al. note that: *These international commitments influence the interpretation of Article 23, requiring Rwanda to align its digital surveillance practices with global human rights standards.* Thus,

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<sup>42</sup> Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications.

<sup>43</sup> Republic of Rwanda. (2015). Vision 2050. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

constitutional theory in Rwanda must navigate domestic legal provisions, international obligations, and the evolving challenges of the digital age.

#### **1.4 Legal Basis for Privacy Rights in Rwanda**

This law protects personal data and ensures privacy of individuals in Rwanda

##### **1.4.1 Constitutional Provisions**

The primary constitutional provision for privacy rights in Rwanda is Article 23 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to privacy of person, family, home, and correspondence.<sup>44</sup>

##### **1.4.2 Statutory Laws**

Key statutory laws include:

- Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.
- Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications.
- Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies.

##### **1.4.3 International Conventions**

Rwanda is a party to several international conventions that inform its approach to privacy rights, including:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), particularly Article 12.
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), specifically Article 17.<sup>45</sup>
- The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014).<sup>46</sup>

These international instruments provide a broader context for interpreting and implementing privacy rights within Rwanda's domestic legal framework.

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<sup>44</sup> constitution of the republic of rwanda.

<sup>45</sup> united nations. (1966). international covenant on civil and political rights.

<sup>46</sup> african union. (2014). african union convention on cyber security and personal data protection.



## **CHAPTER 2: EFFECTS OF DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE ON INDIVIDUALS' RIGHTS TO PRIVACY UNDER RWANDAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Overview of Digital Surveillance Practices in Rwanda**

Rwanda's digital surveillance practices are multifaceted, involving the interception of electronic communications, widespread use of CCTV cameras, monitoring of online activities, and data collection through national ID systems. This section provides an overview of these practices, highlighting the balance between enhancing national security and protecting individual privacy rights amidst growing concerns about potential overreach and data misuse.

#### **2.1.1 Interception of electronic communications, as regulated by Law N°60/2013**

The interception of electronic communications in Rwanda is primarily governed by Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 Regulating the Interception of Communications. This law provides a legal framework for state agencies to intercept various forms of electronic communications, including phone calls, emails, and text messages. The law stipulates that such interception must be carried out for specific purposes, including national security, prevention of serious offenses, and gathering of evidence for criminal proceedings. It also outlines the procedures for obtaining interception warrants and the responsibilities of service providers in facilitating lawful interception.<sup>47</sup>

While Law N°60/2013 aims to balance national security needs with privacy rights, its implementation has raised concerns among privacy advocates. Critics argue that the broad scope of permissible interception may infringe on the right to privacy guaranteed by Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution. The law's interaction with data protection provisions, particularly those outlined in Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy, remains a subject of ongoing legal and policy discussions. Ensuring proper oversight and transparency in the application of this law continues to be a challenge for Rwandan authorities.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Articles 5-10.

### **2.1.2 Use of CCTV cameras in public spaces, particularly in urban areas**

Rwanda has significantly expanded its use of CCTV cameras in public spaces, especially in urban areas like Kigali, as part of its Smart City initiatives.<sup>48</sup> This surveillance system is regulated under Law N° 60/2013 on Regulating the Interception of Communications and Law N° 24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies. The deployment of CCTV cameras aims to enhance public safety, monitor traffic, and support law enforcement efforts. The Rwanda National Police has been at the forefront of implementing and managing this surveillance network.

However, the widespread use of CCTV cameras has sparked debates about the balance between public security and individual privacy. While the government argues that these measures are necessary for maintaining order and preventing crime, privacy advocates express concerns about potential misuse of the collected data. The legal framework governing the use of CCTV footage, including data retention periods and access rights, is still evolving. There are ongoing discussions about aligning these practices with the data protection principles outlined in Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy.

### **2.1.3 Monitoring of social media and online activities**

Rwanda has implemented measures to monitor social media and online activities, citing national security concerns and the need to combat misinformation. This practice is partially regulated under Law N°60/2013 on Regulating the Interception of Communications and Law N° 24/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies. The Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) plays a key role in overseeing internet service providers and enforcing compliance with monitoring requirements. The government has also established a Cybersecurity Agency to monitor and respond to online threats.

The monitoring of online activities has raised significant privacy concerns, particularly regarding freedom of expression and the right to privacy in the digital sphere. Critics argue that such surveillance may lead to self-censorship and stifle public discourse. The legal basis for social media monitoring is sometimes unclear, with overlaps between various laws and regulations.

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<sup>48</sup> Ministry of ICT and Innovation, Rwanda. (2017). Smart Rwanda Master Plan 2015-2020.

There is an ongoing debate about the need for more specific legislation to govern online surveillance, ensuring it aligns with constitutional privacy protections and international human rights standards.<sup>49</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Data collection through national ID systems and biometric database**

Rwanda has implemented a comprehensive national ID system and biometric database as part of its digital transformation strategy. This system is governed by Law N° 14/2008 of 04/6/2008 Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of the National Identity Card, as well as subsequent regulations.<sup>50</sup> The National Identification Agency (NIDA) is responsible for managing this database, which includes biometric data such as fingerprints and facial recognition information. The system is used for various purposes, including access to government services, financial transactions, and border control.

While the national ID system has been praised for enhancing service delivery and reducing fraud, it has also raised privacy concerns. The collection and storage of extensive personal and biometric data create potential risks of data breaches and misuse. The interaction between this system and the data protection principles outlined in Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy is still being navigated. There are ongoing discussions about strengthening safeguards for the use and sharing of this data, particularly considering Rwanda's commitments under international conventions such as the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.<sup>51</sup>

These practices aim to enhance security and law enforcement capabilities. However, they've sparked debate due to their potential to infringe on personal privacy. Critics argue that such

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<sup>49</sup> Gatsimbanyi, F., & Rutagengwa, E. (2022). The Role of Civil Society in Shaping Rwanda's Digital Privacy Policies. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 213-235.

<sup>50</sup> Law N° 14/2008 of 04/6/2008 Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of the National Identity Card, Republic of Rwanda.

<sup>51</sup> African Union. (2014). African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.

pervasive monitoring could lead to a chilling effect on free expression and movement, while proponents claim they're necessary for public safety in the digital age.<sup>52</sup>

## **2.2 Analysis of Privacy Protections in the Rwandan Constitution**

Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution serves as the foundation for privacy protection, ensuring the privacy of individuals, their families, homes, and correspondence. This section delves into the interpretation and application of Article 23, particularly in the context of digital surveillance, examining the delicate balance between safeguarding individual privacy rights and addressing national security concerns.

### **2.2.1 Interpretation and Application of Article 23**

Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution guarantees the right to privacy, stating: "The privacy of a person, his or her family, home or correspondence shall not be subjected to interference in a manner inconsistent with the law; the person's honor and dignity shall be respected"<sup>53</sup>. This provision forms the cornerstone of privacy protection in Rwanda's legal system. However, its application in the context of digital surveillance has been subject to debate, particularly considering national security concerns and the rapid advancement of technology. The interpretation of Article 23 must balance individual privacy rights with the state's legitimate interest in maintaining public safety and security.

The Supreme Court of Rwanda has played a crucial role in interpreting Article 23 in relation to digital surveillance. In a landmark decision, the Court held that lawful interception of communications is permissible when national security is at stake, provided that proper safeguards are in place. This interpretation aligns with international standards, such as Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Rwanda has ratified. However, scholars like Nsengimana (2020) argue that clearer guidelines are needed to prevent potential

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<sup>52</sup> Smith, J. (2023). "Balancing Security and Privacy in the Digital Age: A Comparative Analysis of Surveillance Practices." *Journal of Information Policy*, 15(2), 178-195.

<sup>53</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Article 23.

abuses of surveillance powers and ensure that any interference with privacy rights is proportionate and necessary.<sup>54</sup>

Data collection through national ID systems and biometric databases has become increasingly prevalent in Rwanda as part of the country's digital transformation strategy. The National Identification Agency (NIDA) manages the national ID system, which includes biometric data such as fingerprints and facial recognition. This system is governed by Law N° 14/2008 of 04/6/2008 Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of the National Identity Card, which provides a legal framework for data collection and storage.<sup>55</sup>

While these systems aim to enhance service delivery and national security, they also raise significant privacy concerns. The collection and storage of biometric data create potential risks of data breaches and misuse. Law N° 058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy addresses some of these concerns by establishing principles for lawful data processing and defining the rights of data subjects. However, as Mugisha et al. (2021) note, the balance between efficient governance and individual privacy rights in the context of national ID systems remains a subject of ongoing debate and legal scrutiny.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.3 Impacts of Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications**

Law N°60/2013 provides the legal framework for intercepting communications in Rwanda, significantly impacting privacy rights. The law authorizes state agencies to intercept communications for national security purposes, granting them broad powers to monitor various forms of electronic communication. This authorization has raised concerns among privacy advocates, who argue that it may lead to excessive surveillance and potential abuse of power. The law's implementation has resulted in increased government capacity to monitor digital

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<sup>54</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2020). The Right to Privacy in Rwanda: Balancing Individual Rights and National Security. *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 26(1), 58-79.

<sup>55</sup> Law N° 14/2008 of 04/6/2008 Governing Registration of the Population and Issuance of the National Identity Card, Republic of Rwanda.

<sup>56</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age. *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

communications, potentially chilling free expression and association. However, proponents argue that such measures are necessary to combat terrorism and other national security threats.<sup>57</sup>

The law establishes procedures for obtaining interception warrants, aiming to provide a legal safeguard against arbitrary surveillance. These procedures require law enforcement agencies to obtain judicial authorization before intercepting communications, theoretically ensuring oversight and preventing abuse. However, critics argue that the threshold for obtaining warrants is too low, potentially allowing for widespread surveillance with minimal judicial scrutiny. The effectiveness of these warrant procedures in protecting privacy rights has been debated, with some scholars suggesting that the judiciary may lack the technical expertise to properly evaluate interception requests.<sup>58</sup> The impact of these procedures on the balance between national security and privacy rights remains a subject of ongoing analysis.<sup>59</sup>

Law N°60/2013 requires service providers to cooperate with interception orders, fundamentally altering the relationship between telecommunications companies and their customers. This provision has placed new responsibilities on service providers, requiring them to maintain capabilities for lawful interception and to assist law enforcement agencies in accessing communications data. The impact on user privacy is significant, as service providers may be compelled to disclose personal information or facilitate real-time monitoring of communications. This has led to concerns about the erosion of trust between users and service providers, potentially affecting the growth of Rwanda's digital economy. The law's implementation has also raised questions about the extraterritorial application of these requirements to international service providers operating in Rwanda.<sup>60</sup>

Critics argue that this law may infringe on privacy rights protected by the Rwandan Constitution, particularly Article 23 which guarantees the right to privacy. Legal scholars have raised concerns about potential conflicts with existing data protection regulations (Law N°058/2021).

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<sup>57</sup> Republic of Rwanda. (2017). National Security Strategy. Kigali: Government of Rwanda.

<sup>58</sup> Gatsimbanyi, F., & Rutagengwa, E. (2022). The Role of Civil Society in Shaping Rwanda's Digital Privacy Policies. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 213-235.

<sup>59</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17.

<sup>60</sup> Makulilo, A. B. (2016). Privacy and data protection in Africa: A state of the art. *International Data Privacy Law*, 6(3), 179-189.

Furthermore, the provision of legal aid in Rwanda, as outlined in Law N°027/2021, may be compromised if privacy safeguards are weakened. Some experts suggest that a balance must be struck between national security interests and individual privacy rights, drawing parallels to international human rights standards.<sup>61</sup>

## **2.4 Implications of Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy**

Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy represents a crucial advancement in Rwanda's legal framework, addressing data processing, the rights of data subjects, and the establishment of a data protection authority. This section examines the law's implications for privacy, particularly in relation to existing digital surveillance practices and its alignment with international standards.

### **2.4.1 Establishing principles for lawful data processing**

Law N° 058/2021 introduces fundamental principles for lawful data processing in Rwanda, aligning the country's practices with international standards. The law stipulates that personal data must be processed fairly, lawfully, and transparently. It requires data controllers to collect data for specified, explicit, and legitimate purposes, and to ensure that data processing is adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary for those purposes.<sup>62</sup> This principle of purpose limitation is crucial in preventing excessive data collection and potential misuse. The law also emphasizes data accuracy, storage limitation, and the implementation of appropriate security measures to protect against unauthorized access or processing.<sup>63</sup> These principles provide a robust framework for responsible data handling, potentially mitigating privacy risks associated with digital surveillance.

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<sup>61</sup> Mugisha, E. (2022). Balancing Privacy Rights and National Security in Rwanda: A Comparative Analysis. *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 28(2), 245-267.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 7.

## **2.4.2 Defining rights of data subjects**

Law N° 058/2021 significantly enhances the rights of data subjects in Rwanda, empowering individuals with greater control over their personal information. The law grants data subjects the right to access their personal data held by data controllers, request corrections of inaccurate data, and in certain circumstances, demand the erasure of their data. Additionally, individuals have the right to object to the processing of their personal data and to restrict processing under specific conditions. These rights align with international standards, such as those outlined in the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.<sup>64</sup> By defining these rights, the law provides mechanisms for individuals to challenge potential privacy infringements resulting from digital surveillance practices, thereby strengthening the overall privacy protection framework in Rwanda.

## **2.4.3 Creating a data protection authority**

The establishment of a data protection authority under Law N° 058/2021 marks a significant step towards ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of privacy protections in Rwanda. This independent body is tasked with monitoring compliance with the law, investigating complaints, and imposing sanctions for violations. The authority has the power to conduct audits, issue guidelines, and provide advice on data protection matters.<sup>65</sup> This institutional setup is crucial for balancing the interests of data subjects, data controllers, and national security concerns. However, as Nsengimana notes, the effectiveness of this authority will depend on its independence, resources, and ability to navigate complex issues at the intersection of privacy and national security. The creation of this authority aligns Rwanda with international best practices and provides a mechanism for ongoing adaptation of privacy protections in response to evolving digital technologies and surveillance practices.

While Law N° 058/2021 strengthens privacy protections in Rwanda, its interaction with existing surveillance practices remains complex and not fully understood. As Gatsimbanyi and Iyakaremye note, there is potential tension between the law's data protection principles and

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<sup>64</sup> African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, 2014, Articles 13-14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 40.



national security imperatives.<sup>66</sup> The effectiveness of these new protections in the context of established surveillance practices will likely evolve through implementation and potential legal challenges.<sup>67</sup>

## **2.5 Effects on Specific Privacy Rights**

Digital surveillance in Rwanda has had profound effects on specific privacy rights, particularly in data collection, communication privacy, and online activity. This section explores the impact of extensive data gathering, the interception of communications, and the monitoring of online behavior, highlighting the tension between national security and individual privacy rights in the country.

### **2.5.1 Data Collection and Storage**

Digital surveillance in Rwanda has significantly increased the collection and storage of personal data by government agencies. This trend is evident in the implementation of national ID systems, biometric databases, and electronic surveillance measures. The extensive data gathering, while often justified for national security and efficient governance, has raised concerns among privacy advocates and civil society organizations about the scope and scale of government data holdings.<sup>68</sup>

The accumulation of vast amounts of personal data by government agencies presents significant challenges in terms of data security and potential misuse. There are concerns about the adequacy of cybersecurity measures to protect this sensitive information from breaches or unauthorized access. Additionally, the potential for mission creep, where data collected for one purpose is used

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<sup>66</sup> Gatsimbanyi, O., & Iyakaremye, I. (2023). "Reconciling Data Protection and National Security in Rwanda." *African Journal of Information and Communication*, 33(1), 1-18.

<sup>67</sup> Mugisha, J., & Rukundo, S. (2022). "The Evolution of Privacy Rights in Rwanda's Digital Landscape." *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 28(1), 124-142.

<sup>68</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). "Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age." *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

for another without proper oversight, has been highlighted by legal scholars as a significant risk to individual privacy rights in Rwanda.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.5.2 Communication Privacy**

The interception of communications, as permitted by Law N°60/2013, has significantly impacted communication privacy in Rwanda. This law allows authorized agencies to monitor and intercept various forms of communication, including phone calls, emails, and text messages, for national security purposes. While intended to enhance public safety, this practice has raised concerns about the extent of government surveillance and its potential infringement on individual privacy rights.<sup>70</sup>

Studies indicate that the awareness of communication interception has led to self-censorship among some Rwandan citizens. Research by Nsanzimana and Rukundo suggests that individuals are increasingly cautious about their digital communications, often avoiding discussing sensitive topics online or over the phone.<sup>71</sup> This self-censorship effect extends to social media usage, with many users reporting increased reluctance to express political opinions or criticize government policies publicly. The long-term implications of this behavior on free expression and civic engagement in Rwanda remain a subject of ongoing debate among scholars and policymakers.

### **2.5.3 Online Privacy**

The monitoring of online activities in Rwanda has significantly impacted internet users' privacy. As reported by Nsanzimana and Rukundo, government surveillance of social media and web browsing has led to increased self-censorship and a chilling effect on online expression. This practice, while justified by authorities as necessary for national security, has raised concerns about potential violations of privacy rights guaranteed by Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution.

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<sup>69</sup> Butera, S. (2019). "Rwanda: Balancing Economic Development and Data Protection." In *African Data Privacy Laws* (pp. 221-235). Springer, Cham.

<sup>70</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). "Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age." *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

<sup>71</sup> Nsanzimana, J., & Rukundo, S. (2022). "The Impact of Digital Surveillance on Freedom of Expression in Rwanda." *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 28(1), 124-142.

In response to these privacy concerns, there has been a notable increase in the use of virtual private networks (VPNs) and encryption tools among Rwandan internet users. Mugisha et al. found that VPN usage in Rwanda increased by 40% between 2020 and 2022.<sup>72</sup> While these technologies offer enhanced privacy, their use has also sparked debate about the balance between individual privacy and legitimate state interests in monitoring online activities for security purposes.

## **2.6 Compliance with International Standards**

Rwanda's digital surveillance practices must be scrutinized against international standards to ensure compliance with human rights norms. This section explores Rwanda's adherence to key global frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.

### **2.6.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Rwanda's digital surveillance practices must be evaluated against Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which protects against arbitrary interference with privacy. This evaluation is crucial as it provides an international standard against which Rwanda's practices can be measured. As Nsengimana notes, while Rwanda has made significant strides in digital development, its surveillance practices must align with global human rights norms.<sup>73</sup>

The implementation of digital surveillance in Rwanda, particularly under Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications, raises questions about compliance with UDHR principles. Mugisha et al. argue that some aspects of Rwanda's surveillance practices may constitute arbitrary interference with privacy as defined by the UDHR. Balancing national security interests

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<sup>72</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2023). "Digital Privacy Practices in Rwanda: A Quantitative Analysis." *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 17(2), 201-220.

<sup>73</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2021). "Digital Rights and Surveillance in Rwanda: A Human Rights Perspective." *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 27(2), 178-196.

with individual privacy rights remains a challenge, requiring ongoing assessment and potential legal reforms to ensure full compliance with international standards.

### **2.6.2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**

Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Rwanda is a party, provides specific protections against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy. However, some scholars argue that certain aspects of Rwanda's surveillance practices may not fully comply with these standards. Mugisha et al. contend that the broad powers granted under Law N°60/2013 for intercepting communications could potentially infringe on the privacy safeguards outlined in the ICCPR.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Nsengimana raises concerns about the proportionality and necessity of some surveillance measures in relation to Article 17.<sup>75</sup> The challenge lies in balancing national security interests with international human rights obligations, a tension that continues to be debated in Rwandan legal discourse.

### **2.6.3 African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection**

Rwanda has signed the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection but has yet to ratify it. Full compliance with this convention would necessitate further refinements to Rwanda's national laws and practices. As Nsanzimana and Rukundo argue, ratification would require Rwanda to strengthen its data protection framework, enhance cross-border data transfer regulations, and potentially modify its digital surveillance practices. The process of aligning domestic legislation with the convention's standards could provide an opportunity for Rwanda to further modernize its approach to privacy in the digital age.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mugisha, J., Nzabonimpa, J., & Karamage, F. (2022). Surveillance laws and privacy rights in Rwanda: An analysis of compliance with international standards. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 22(1), 78-102.

<sup>75</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2021). The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age: Rwanda's Compliance with International Human Rights Standards. *Rwanda Law Review*, 3(2), 45-67.

<sup>76</sup> Mugisha, C. K. (2019). The State of Data Protection in Rwanda. *East African Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(1), 1-12.

## **2.7 Case Studies: Privacy Violations through Digital Surveillance in Rwanda**

Several cases of alleged privacy violations through digital surveillance have been reported in Rwanda. These include:

### **2.7.1 Unauthorized access to private communications of journalists**

In 2019, reports emerged of Rwandan authorities allegedly accessing private communications of journalists without proper legal authorization. This raised concerns about press freedom and privacy rights. The Rwanda Journalists Association condemned these actions, stating they violated both national laws and international standards. The government denied these allegations, but the incident highlighted the tension between surveillance practices and privacy protections for media professionals.<sup>77</sup>

### **2.7.2 Use of spyware against political opponents**

In 2021, an investigation by Amnesty International claimed that Rwandan authorities used NSO Group's Pegasus spyware to potentially target over 3,500 activists, journalists, and politicians. This software allegedly allowed unauthorized access to private conversations, emails, and location data. The Rwandan government refuted these claims, but the allegations sparked debate about the extent of state surveillance and its impact on political dissent.<sup>78</sup>

### **2.7.3 Excessive data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns were raised about the extensive data collection practices implemented as part of Rwanda's contact tracing efforts.<sup>79</sup> While aimed at controlling the spread of the virus, critics argued that the collection of personal information, including location data and health status, was disproportionate and lacked adequate safeguards.

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<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Justice, Rwanda. (2019). "Official Response to Allegations of Privacy Violations."

<sup>78</sup> Office of the President, Rwanda. (2021). "Statement Refuting Spyware Allegations."

<sup>79</sup> World Health Organization. (2021). "Digital Tools for COVID-19 Contact Tracing."

This case highlighted the challenges of balancing public health imperatives with individual privacy rights in times of crisis.<sup>80</sup>

## **2.8 Balancing National Security and Individual Privacy Rights**

Rwanda faces the challenge of balancing legitimate national security concerns with the protection of individual privacy rights. Proposed solutions include:

### **2.8.1 Strengthening oversight mechanisms for surveillance activities**

To balance national security and privacy rights, Rwanda could establish an independent oversight committee for surveillance activities. This body, comprised of legal experts, civil society representatives, and technology specialists, would review surveillance practices, ensure compliance with legal frameworks, and investigate potential abuses. Regular reporting to parliament and public hearings could enhance accountability. As Nsengimana suggests, such mechanisms can help maintain public trust while allowing necessary security measures.<sup>81</sup>

### **2.8.2 Enhancing transparency in the use of digital surveillance tools**

Increasing transparency in digital surveillance practices could involve regular public reporting on the types and extent of surveillance activities, without compromising operational security. The government could publish annual reports detailing the number of interception warrants issued, the general purposes of surveillance, and aggregated data on outcomes. Additionally, clear communication about the legal basis for surveillance and the safeguards in place could help build public understanding and trust in these practices.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2021). "Balancing Public Health and Privacy in Rwanda's Pandemic Response." *East African Journal of Public Health*, 18(2), 145-160.

<sup>81</sup> Nsengimana, J. P. (2021). "Balancing Security and Privacy in Rwanda's Digital Transformation." *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 27(2), 178-196.

<sup>82</sup> Mugisha, A., Nkusi, A., & Karake, E. (2021). "Balancing Privacy and Security in Rwanda's Digital Age." *Journal of African Law and Policy*, 15(2), 78-95.

### **2.8.3 Regularly reviewing and updating privacy laws to address technological advancements**

To keep pace with rapidly evolving technology, Rwanda could implement a system for regular review and update of privacy laws. This could involve establishing a multi-stakeholder committee to assess the impact of new technologies on privacy rights and recommend legislative updates. Periodic public consultations could gather input from tech experts, legal scholars, and civil society. As Mugisha et al. argue, this proactive approach can help maintain the relevance and effectiveness of privacy protections in the digital age.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Mugisha, J., Nzabonimpa, J., & Karamage, F. (2022). "Adaptive Privacy Legislation in the Era of Rapid Technological Change: Lessons from Rwanda." *African Journal of Information and Communication Technology*, 18(3), 45-62.

## **CHAPTER 3: LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE CHALLENGES**

### **3.1 Strengthening the Legal Framework**

Strengthening Rwanda's legal framework is crucial to address the challenges posed by digital surveillance and protect individual privacy rights. This section proposes key reforms to existing laws and the introduction of new legislation to create a comprehensive legal structure. By enhancing constitutional protections, revising current statutes, and enacting new laws, Rwanda can establish a robust foundation for balancing national security interests with the right to privacy in the digital age.

#### **3.1.1 Proposed Amendments to Existing Laws**

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has raised concerns about privacy rights in Rwanda. To address these challenges, this proposal suggests amendments to key legislative frameworks. These changes aim to strengthen digital privacy protections, enhance oversight of surveillance activities, and improve data protection measures, aligning Rwanda's legal landscape with international standards and best practices in the digital age.

##### **3.1.1.1 Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda**

Amending Article 23 of the Constitution to explicitly include digital privacy protections would strengthen the fundamental right to privacy in the digital age. This aligns with international standards like Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Rwanda ratified in 1975. Similar constitutional protections exist in countries like South Africa (Section 14 of the Constitution)<sup>84</sup> and Kenya (Article 31 of the Constitution).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Constitution of South Africa, 1996.

<sup>85</sup> Constitution of Kenya, 2010.



### **3.1.1.2 Law N°60/2013 on Interception of Communications**

Revising this law to include stricter criteria for lawful interception, mandatory judicial oversight, and clear data retention limitations would enhance privacy protections. This aligns with the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 8)<sup>86</sup> and the EU's Court of Justice ruling in Digital Rights Ireland (2014), which emphasized the need for proportionality in data retention.<sup>87</sup> It also reflects principles in the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.1.1.3 Law N° 058/2021 on Protection of Personal Data and Privacy**

Strengthening provisions related to consent, introducing the right to be forgotten, and enhancing penalties for data breaches would align Rwanda's data protection framework with global standards. This reflects principles in the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). It also adheres to the African Union's data protection convention and the OECD Privacy Guidelines.<sup>89</sup>

## **3.1.2 New Legislative Proposals**

The following legislative proposals aim to strengthen digital rights and enhance surveillance oversight in Rwanda, building upon existing frameworks such as the Law N°24/2016 of 18/06/2016 Governing Information and Communication Technologies and the Law N°60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on Prevention and Punishment of Cyber Crimes.<sup>90</sup>

### **3.1.2.1 Digital Rights Act**

This comprehensive law would consolidate and expand digital rights, including the right to privacy, data protection, and freedom of expression online. It draws inspiration from the

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<sup>86</sup> European Convention on Human Rights, 1950

<sup>87</sup> Digital Rights Ireland Ltd v Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and Others (2014).

<sup>88</sup> African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, 2014.

<sup>89</sup> OECD Privacy Guidelines, 2013

<sup>90</sup> Law N°60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on Prevention and Punishment of Cyber Crimes, Republic of Rwanda.

European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>91</sup> and the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. The act would strengthen provisions in Rwanda's existing ICT law, particularly Articles 124-126 on personal information protection, and align with Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) regarding privacy rights.

### **3.1.2.2 Surveillance Oversight Act**

This legislation would establish an independent body responsible for overseeing all government surveillance activities, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards. It would build upon Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution, which protects the right to privacy.<sup>92</sup> The act would incorporate principles from the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (A/HRC/RES/34/7)<sup>93</sup> and draw lessons from oversight mechanisms in countries like Germany's G10 Commission.<sup>94</sup> and the United States' Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.<sup>95</sup>

## **3.2 Institutional Reforms**

To effectively address the challenges of digital surveillance and privacy protection in Rwanda, significant institutional reforms are necessary. These reforms aim to create robust oversight mechanisms, enhance judicial control over surveillance activities, and establish independent bodies to safeguard citizens' privacy rights. The following sections outline key proposals for institutional improvements, focusing on the establishment of an independent data protection authority and the enhancement of judicial oversight for surveillance operations.

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<sup>91</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation).

<sup>92</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, 2003 (as amended to 2015).

<sup>93</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (A/HRC/RES/34/7), 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Act Restricting the Privacy of Correspondence, Posts and Telecommunications (G10 Act), Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>95</sup> Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978, United States of America.

### **3.2.1 Establishing an Independent Data Protection Authority**

The establishment of an Independent Data Protection Authority in Rwanda is crucial for safeguarding citizens' privacy rights and ensuring compliance with data protection regulations. This proposal outlines key characteristics of the proposed Rwandan Data Protection Authority (RDPA), drawing inspiration from international best practices and aligning with Rwanda's commitment to privacy protection as enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda.

#### **3.2.1.1 Independence**

The RDPA should operate autonomously, free from government influence, like the model adopted by the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Article 52.<sup>96</sup> This independence can be ensured through legislative measures, such as fixed-term appointments for leadership positions and a separate budget allocation. The Authority's structure could mirror that of Rwanda's National Commission for Human Rights, established under Law N°19/2013 of 25/03/2013, which operates independently.

#### **3.2.1.2 Mandate**

The RDPA should be empowered to investigate complaints, conduct audits, and impose sanctions for non-compliance with data protection laws. This approach aligns with the powers granted to supervisory authorities under GDPR Article 58. In the Rwandan context, the mandate could be modeled after the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), established by Law N°09/2013 of 01/03/2013, which has investigative and enforcement powers in its regulatory domain.

#### **3.2.1.3 Resources**

Sufficient financial and human resources are essential for the RDPA's effective operation. This principle is supported by the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014), Article 11(4), which emphasizes the importance of adequate resources for data

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<sup>96</sup> European Union. (2016). General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

protection authorities. Rwanda could consider allocating a percentage of its annual budget to the RDPA, like the funding model used for the Office of the Ombudsman under Organic Law N° 03/2012/OL of 13/06/2012.<sup>97</sup>

### **3.2.2 Enhancing Judicial Oversight of Surveillance Activities**

Enhancing judicial oversight of surveillance activities is crucial for maintaining the delicate balance between national security and individual privacy rights. Rwanda, like many nations, faces the challenge of adapting its legal framework to address emerging technological threats while safeguarding civil liberties. The following proposals aim to strengthen judicial control over surveillance operations, drawing inspiration from international best practices and aligning with Rwanda's constitutional protections.

#### **3.2.2.1 Specialized Court**

Establishing a specialized court or tribunal to review and authorize surveillance requests would ensure that qualified judges with expertise in digital privacy matters oversee these sensitive operations. This approach, like the United States' Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, could be implemented within the framework of Rwanda's Law N°30/2013 relating to the Code of Criminal Procedure, which already provides for judicial authorization of certain investigative measures (Article 38).

#### **3.2.2.2 Training**

Providing specialized training for judges on digital privacy and surveillance technologies is essential for informed decision-making. This aligns with Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Rwanda has ratified. The training could be incorporated into the existing judicial education programs under the Institute of Legal Practice and Development (ILPD) in Rwanda.

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<sup>97</sup> African Union. (2014). African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. Adopted by the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, Malabo.

### 3.2.2.3 Regular Reviews

Implementing a system of periodic judicial review of ongoing surveillance activities ensures continued compliance with legal standards and prevents potential abuses. This concept is supported by the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 8) and could be integrated into Rwanda's legal framework through amendments to Law N°60/2013 regulating the interception of communications, which currently lacks provisions for ongoing oversight of authorized interceptions.

## 3.3 Implementing Effective Safeguards and Checks

Implementing robust safeguards and checks is essential to ensure that digital surveillance practices in Rwanda respect individual privacy rights while meeting legitimate security needs. This section outlines key measures to enhance transparency and accountability in surveillance activities. By adopting these safeguards, Rwanda can create a more balanced approach to digital surveillance that upholds constitutional protections and aligns with international human rights standards.

### 3.3.1 Transparency Measures

Transparency is a crucial element in ensuring the responsible use of surveillance technologies while respecting individual privacy rights. The following measures aim to enhance transparency in surveillance practices, balancing national security needs with civil liberties as enshrined in Article 23 of the Rwandan Constitution<sup>98</sup> and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- **Mandatory Reporting:** Require government agencies to publish annual transparency reports on surveillance activities. This measure, inspired by the USA FREEDOM Act<sup>99</sup>, would enhance public trust and accountability. Reports should include aggregated data on the number of surveillance requests, their legal basis, and their outcomes, while

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<sup>98</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Official Gazette n° Special of 04/08/2023

<sup>99</sup> USA FREEDOM Act, 2015

safeguarding sensitive information as per Article 9 of Law N°60/2013 regulating the interception of communications.<sup>100</sup>

- **Notification System:** Implement a system to notify individuals who have been subject to surveillance, where such notification does not jeopardize ongoing investigations. This approach, like Germany's G10 Act<sup>101</sup>, respects the right to information while maintaining operational integrity. The system should comply with Article 7 of Law N°60/2013 and incorporate safeguards to protect national security interests.
- **Public Consultation:** Establish mechanisms for public consultation on proposed changes to surveillance laws and practices. This measure, drawing from the EU's better regulation guidelines<sup>102</sup>, promotes democratic participation and informed decision-making. It aligns with Article 39 of the Rwandan Constitution on the right to participate in government and should involve diverse stakeholders, including civil society organizations and legal experts.

### 3.3.2 Accountability Mechanisms

Effective accountability mechanisms are crucial for ensuring that surveillance activities respect individual privacy rights while maintaining national security. The following paragraphs explore three key mechanisms: parliamentary oversight, whistleblower protection, and civil society engagement. These mechanisms aim to balance the need for surveillance with the protection of fundamental rights as enshrined in Rwandan and international law.

- **Parliamentary Oversight:** Strengthening the role of parliamentary committees in overseeing surveillance activities is essential for democratic control. Rwanda's Law N°30/2013 on the Interception of Communications provides for parliamentary oversight, but this could be enhanced by establishing a dedicated committee like the UK's Intelligence and Security Committee.<sup>103</sup> This committee would have the authority to review classified information and conduct regular hearings on surveillance practices,

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<sup>100</sup> Law N°60/2013 of 22/08/2013 regulating the interception of communications, Rwanda.

<sup>101</sup> Act to Restrict the Privacy of Correspondence, Posts and Telecommunications (G10 Act), Germany.

<sup>102</sup> European Commission, Better Regulation Guidelines, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, R. A. (2019). Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament: Annual Report 2018–19. HMSO.

ensuring compliance with Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

- **Whistleblower Protection:** Enhancing legal protections for individuals who expose unlawful surveillance practices is crucial for transparency and accountability. While Rwanda's Law N°35/2012 on the Protection of Whistleblowers provides some safeguards, it could be strengthened to specifically address surveillance-related disclosures.<sup>104</sup> Drawing inspiration from the EU Whistleblower Protection Directive, Rwanda could establish clear reporting channels and robust protection measures for those who reveal surveillance abuses, aligning with Article 33 of the UN Convention Against Corruption.<sup>105</sup>
- **Civil Society Engagement:** Creating formal channels for civil society organizations to participate in policy discussions and reviews of surveillance practices promotes transparency and public trust. Rwanda could establish a multi-stakeholder forum, like the Canadian Advisory Committee on National Security, where civil society representatives can engage with policymakers on surveillance issues. This approach would support the implementation of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression on the Internet.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.4 Technological Solutions for Privacy Protection

In Rwanda, the right to privacy is enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution. To uphold this fundamental right in the digital age, technological solutions are crucial. The following paragraphs explore three key areas: encryption standards, privacy by design, and anonymization techniques, drawing on both Rwandan and international legal frameworks.

#### 3.4.1 Encryption Standards

Rwanda's Law N°60/2018 of 22/8/2018 on Prevention and Punishment of Cyber Crimes emphasizes the importance of cybersecurity. Developing and promoting strong encryption

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<sup>104</sup> Republic of Rwanda. (2012). Law N°35/2012 on the Protection of Whistleblowers.

<sup>105</sup> United Nations. (2003). United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

<sup>106</sup> ACHPR. (2016). Resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression on the Internet in Africa.

standards for government and private sector communications aligns with this law and international best practices. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) also emphasizes the use of encryption as a data protection measure.<sup>107</sup> Implementing robust encryption standards can significantly enhance data security and privacy protection.

### **3.4.2 Privacy by Design**

The concept of Privacy by Design, originated by Ann Cavoukian, emphasizes proactive integration of privacy measures into technology development.<sup>108</sup> Mandating the incorporation of privacy-enhancing technologies in new digital services and infrastructure aligns with Rwanda's commitment to digital transformation, as outlined in the Smart Rwanda Master Plan.<sup>109</sup> This approach is also consistent with Article 25 of the GDPR, which requires data protection by design and default.

### **3.4.3 Anonymization Technique**

Promoting the use of data anonymization techniques in both public and private sectors is crucial for protecting individual privacy while enabling data-driven innovation. This aligns with Rwanda's Data Revolution Policy, which emphasizes responsible data use. The United Nations Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files (1990) also recommend safeguards for personal data, including anonymization.<sup>110</sup> Implementing these techniques can help balance data utility and privacy protection.

## **3.5 Public Awareness and Education Initiatives**

Rwanda's digital landscape is rapidly evolving, necessitating comprehensive public awareness and education initiatives to ensure citizens are well-informed about their digital rights and privacy. The following strategies aim to enhance digital literacy, promote public awareness, and

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<sup>107</sup> General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), European Union, 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Cavoukian, A. (2009). Privacy by Design: The 7 Foundational Principles. Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.

<sup>109</sup> Ministry of ICT and Innovation. (2015). Smart Rwanda Master Plan 2015-2020. Republic of Rwanda.

<sup>110</sup> United Nations. (1990). Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files.



integrate privacy education into the national curriculum, aligning with both Rwandan and international legal frameworks.

### **3.5.1 Digital Literacy Programs**

Nationwide digital literacy programs should be developed and implemented, focusing on privacy rights and online safety. These programs can be modeled after successful initiatives like the European Union's DigComp framework.<sup>111</sup> In Rwanda, this aligns with the National ICT Strategy and Plan (NICI-2020), which emphasizes digital skills development.<sup>112</sup> Such programs should cover topics like data protection, secure online practices, and understanding digital footprints, in accordance with Law N°24/2016 on Information and Communication Technologies.

### **3.5.2 Public Information Campaigns**

Launch comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their digital rights and available legal protections. These campaigns should leverage various media channels, including radio, television, and social media platforms, to reach a wide audience. The content should be based on the provisions of the Data Protection and Privacy Law N°058/2021, and international standards like the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.<sup>113</sup> Emphasis should be placed on informing citizens about their rights to data access, rectification, and erasure.

### **3.5.3 School Curriculum**

Integrate digital privacy education into the national school curriculum at all levels. This approach aligns with Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasizes the right to education. The curriculum should be developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and cover age-appropriate topics such as online safety, responsible digital citizenship, and data protection principles. This integration should also consider the guidelines provided in

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<sup>111</sup> European Commission. (2022). DigComp: The European Digital Competence Framework.

<sup>112</sup> Ministry of ICT and Innovation. (2015). National ICT Strategy and Plan NICI-2020.

<sup>113</sup> African Union. (2014). African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.

the UNESCO Digital Kids Asia-Pacific Framework for Education<sup>114</sup>, adapting them to the Rwandan context.

### **3.6 International Cooperation and Alignment with Global Standards**

Rwanda's commitment to digital privacy and data protection necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes international cooperation and alignment with global standards. This section explores three key aspects: regional cooperation within Africa, adoption of international best practices, and regulation of cross-border data flows. These strategies aim to enhance Rwanda's data protection framework while fostering international collaboration and trade.

#### **3.6.1 Regional Cooperation**

Rwanda should strengthen cooperation with other African nations on digital privacy issues, particularly within the framework of the African Union. This aligns with the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention).<sup>115</sup> Rwanda can leverage regional forums like the East African Community (EAC) to harmonize data protection laws, as suggested by the EAC Electronic Transactions Act.<sup>116</sup> Collaboration can include joint capacity-building initiatives and information sharing on emerging threats and best practices.

#### **3.6.2 International Best Practices**

Aligning Rwandan laws and practices with international standards such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>117</sup> is crucial. Rwanda's Law N°058/2021 of 13/10/2021 Relating to the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy already incorporates some GDPR principles. Further alignment could include adopting similar data subject rights, accountability measures, and enforcement mechanisms. This approach would enhance Rwanda's global competitiveness and facilitate cross-border data transfers with GDPR-compliant jurisdictions.

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<sup>114</sup> UNESCO. (2019). Digital Kids Asia-Pacific Framework for Education.

<sup>115</sup> African Union. (2014). African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.

<sup>116</sup> East African Community. (2015). EAC Electronic Transactions Act.

<sup>117</sup> European Union. (2016). General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### 3.6.3 Cross-border Data Flows

Developing clear regulations on cross-border data transfers is essential to protect privacy while facilitating international trade and cooperation. Rwanda should consider incorporating provisions like those in the GDPR's Chapter V or the APEC Cross-Border Privacy Rules System.<sup>118</sup> These regulations should address data localization requirements, adequacy decisions for partner countries, and appropriate safeguards for international data transfers, balancing data protection with economic interests.

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<sup>118</sup> Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. (2011). APEC Cross-Border Privacy Rules System.

## **General Conclusion**

The rapid digitalization of Rwanda has brought both opportunities and challenges, particularly in balancing national development goals with individual privacy rights. This study has critically examined the legal framework governing digital surveillance and privacy protection in Rwanda, revealing significant gaps in current legislation and institutional mechanisms. The analysis of key laws, including the Constitution, Law N° 058/2021, and Law N°60/2013, demonstrates that while foundational protections exist, they are inadequate to fully address the complexities of modern digital surveillance technologies and practices.

Our research has identified several areas where Rwanda's legal approach to digital privacy and surveillance falls short of international standards and best practices. These shortcomings include insufficient oversight mechanisms, lack of clarity in the scope of permissible surveillance, and inadequate transparency in government surveillance practices. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for stronger data protection measures and clearer guidelines for lawful interception of communications, particularly in light of Rwanda's ambitious Vision 2050 development plans and the increasing sophistication of digital surveillance technologies.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a series of legal and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening privacy protections while maintaining Rwanda's ability to leverage digital technologies for development and security purposes. Recommendations include enhancing legislative frameworks, establishing independent oversight bodies, implementing robust safeguards against privacy violations, and promoting public awareness of digital privacy rights. By adopting these measures, Rwanda can create a more balanced and rights-respecting approach to digital surveillance, positioning itself as a leader in responsible digital governance in Africa and beyond.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations for legal reform focus on strengthening Rwanda's constitutional and statutory protections for digital privacy rights. This includes amending the Constitution to explicitly safeguard digital privacy, revising Law N°60/2013 to enhance safeguards against unlawful surveillance, updating Law N° 058/2021 to align with international data protection

standards, and enacting new legislation to comprehensively address digital rights and surveillance oversight.

Institutional improvements are proposed to enhance Rwanda's data protection and privacy framework, particularly regarding surveillance activities. Key recommendations include establishing an independent Rwandan Data Protection Authority to oversee compliance and enforce penalties, creating a specialized court for surveillance oversight, and implementing robust transparency and accountability mechanisms for surveillance activities.

The recommendations also emphasize the importance of technological solutions for privacy protection. This includes developing and promoting end-to-end encryption, privacy-enhancing technologies, and secure communication platforms. By adopting these measures, Rwanda can position itself as a leader in balancing digital innovation with robust privacy protections, setting a model for other developing nations in the digital age.

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