IIRF Reports

Dennis P. Petri, Jonathan Fox and Ariel Zellman

Global Religious Freedom Index 2024–2026

Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia

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International Institute for Religious Freedom

IIRF International Institute for Religious Freedom

Internationales Institut für Religionsfreiheit
Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse
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The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) was founded in 2007 with the mission to promote religious freedom for all faiths from an academic perspective. The IIRF aspires to be an authoritative voice on religious freedom. We provide reliable and unbiased data on religious freedom – beyond anecdotal evidence – to strengthen academic research on the topic and to inform public policy at all levels. Our research results are disseminated through the International Journal for Religious Freedom and other publications. A particular emphasis of the IIRF is to encourage the study of religious freedom in university institutions through its inclusion in educational curricula and by supporting postgraduate students with research projects.

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We understand Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental and interdependent human right as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In line with CCPR General Comment No. 22, we view FoRB as a broad and multidimensional concept that needs to be protected for all faiths in all spheres of society.

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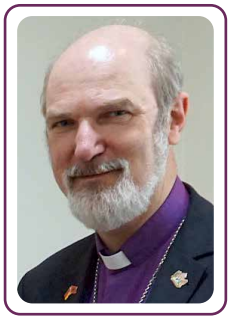

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Key facts

Most hostile religious policy 2023: Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	
Top 5 government religious support 2023: Russia Poland Romania Servia Czech Republic	**Mean government religious support 2023:** 8.97 (maximum score 59) **Increase government religious support 1990–2023:** 64 %
Top 5 government discrimination against religious minorities 2023: Belarus Russia Armenia Kazakhstan Turkmenistan	**Mean government discrimination against religious minorities 2023:** 23.8 (maximum score 177) **Increase government discrimination against religious minorities 1990–2023:** 71 %
Top 5 government regulation of the majority religion 2023: Azerbaijan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan Kazakhstan	**Mean government regulation of the majority religion 2023:** 20 (maximum score 156) **Increase government regulation of the majority religion 1990–2023:** 97 %
Top 5 societal discrimination against religious minorities 2023: Russia Ukraine Bulgaria Georgia Armenia	**Mean societal discrimination against religious minorities 2023:** 10.5 (maximum score 102) **Increase societal discrimination against religious minorities 1990–2023:** 19 %
Top 5 Anti-Christian hate crime 2023 (OSCE): Poland (81) Bosnia and Herzegovina (Entire Country) (15) Georgia (13) Ukraine (8) Croatia (5)	**Top 5 Anti-Semitic hate crime 2023 (OSCE):** Poland (94) Russia (5) Serbia (4) Czech Republic (4) Bosnia Herzegovina (2)

Executive summary

- This report analyzes the status of religious freedom in 30 post-communist countries and territories in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, using 2023 data from Round 4 of the Religion and State Project. It evaluates religious freedom across four dimensions: separation of religion and state, government discrimination against religious minorities, regulation of religion (including majority faiths), and societal discrimination, including physical violence.
- State favoritism toward dominant religions, especially Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam, is widespread throughout the region. Legal and bureaucratic restrictions on minority religious communities remain entrenched, particularly in Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- Societal hostility—ranging from hate speech and negative media portrayals to vandalism and violent attacks—is intensifying in both authoritarian and democratic countries.
- Russia, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Tajikistan, and Poland stand out as countries with the most comprehensive systems of religious regulation or the highest levels of societal discrimination.
- Latvia and Slovenia exhibit relatively low levels of state interference and societal hostility and may serve as models for religious pluralism in the region.
- Orthodox-majority countries exhibit the highest levels of both government support and societal discrimination, reflecting strong church-state alliances and the use of Orthodoxy as a pillar of national identity.
- Other Christian groups (primarily Catholic and Protestant) tend to receive moderate government support and lower levels of both regulation and societal discrimination, especially in Central European states.
- Muslim communities, especially in Central Asia, face the highest levels of government regulation, including surveillance, restrictions on worship, and forced alignment with state-sanctioned interpretations of Islam.

1. Introduction

Since the collapse of communist regimes across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, countries in the region have experienced divergent paths in reconstructing their political institutions, national identities, and public spheres—including the role of religion in society. In some cases, formerly repressed religious institutions have regained public prominence and aligned with new political regimes. In others, authoritarian states have maintained strict control over religious life, repurposing the machinery of surveillance and regulation under new ideological frameworks. Amid this diversity, religious freedom remains a critical indicator of political pluralism, human rights, and social cohesion.

This report uses the newly released Round 4 data from the Religion and State Project to measure and compare levels of religious freedom across the PCEECA region, focusing on the year 2023 while tracking key developments since 1990. It examines how governments discriminate against or regulate religious groups, how societal actors reinforce religious hierarchies or intolerance, and how the relationship between religion and the state is shaped by historical legacies, national identity, and geopolitical pressures. In doing so, it highlights where religious freedom is most threatened—and where it may still be meaningfully protected or advanced.

2. Separation of religion and state

The post-communist transformation of Eastern Europe and Central Asia has witnessed not only political and economic shifts but also profound changes in the relationship between religion and the state. In many countries across the region, the collapse of communist regimes opened space for religious resurgence—but this resurgence has not been uniform. Instead, states have adopted a variety of approaches to managing religious affairs, ranging from full cooperation with dominant religious institutions to strict control and suppression. This section explores the spectrum of religion-state relations in the region as of 2023, analyzes which countries provide the highest levels of state support to religion, and traces how patterns of religious support have evolved from 1990 to the present. These findings shed light on how religion is being re-integrated into public life, often in ways that reflect broader political ideologies, nationalist projects, and concerns over social control.

Figure 1. Religion-state relations in PCEECA, 2023

Religion-State Relations	Majority religion		
	Orthodox Christian	Other Christian	Muslim
Preferred Religion: While the state does not officially endorse a religion, one religion serves unofficially as the state's religion	Armenia, Bulgaria Georgia, Moldova,		

receiving unique recognition or benefits. Minority religions all receive similar treatment to each other.			
Multi-Tiered Preferences 1: One religion is clearly preferred by state, receiving the most benefits, there exists one or more tiers of religions which receive less benefits than the preferred religion but more than some other religions.	Belarus North Macedonia, Rep. Srpska,* Romania Russia Serbia	Croatia Hungary Poland Slovakia	
Multi-Tiered Preferences 2: Two or more religions are clearly preferred by state, receiving the most benefits, there exists one or more tiers of religions which receive less benefits than the preferred religions but more than some other religions	Montenegro	Czech Rep. Latvia Lithuania	Albania Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Cooperation: The state falls short of endorsing a particular religion but certain religions benefit from state support more than others.		Czech Rep. Estonia Slovenia	Kosovo
Accommodation: Official separation of church and state and the state has a benevolent or neutral attitude toward religion in general.	Ukraine		
State Controlled Religion, Negative Attitude: The state controls all religious institutions and discourages religious expression outside of those institutions. This is part of the state's policy of maintaining social control or keeping religion in check rather than due to ideological support for religion.			Azerbaijan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan

** RAS4 divides Bosnia into its two parts Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina due to different religious majorities and different religion policies in these two regions.*

Figure 1 presents a typology of state-religion arrangements in post-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia (PCEECA), distinguishing between Orthodox, other Christian, and Muslim-majority contexts. A clear stratification emerges, with several Orthodox-majority states—such as Russia, Serbia, and Romania—falling into the "Preferred Religion" where one religion is preferred over all others and the "Multi-Tiered Preferences 1" category, where one religion receives

formal state favoritism while others are tolerated to varying degrees. This is consistent with observed patterns of preferential treatment toward dominant national churches, often framed as part of national identity or state-building strategies. Interestingly, while this preference for the countries' Orthodox churches is common, none of these countries takes the step of declaring their national Orthodox church as the state's official religion.

In contrast, Muslim-majority countries such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan exhibit "State-Controlled Religion with a Negative Attitude." This aligns with the region's legacy of Soviet-era suspicion toward organized religion and continued efforts to control Islamic expression through legal and administrative means. Notably, the only country classified under "Accommodation"—indicating a neutral, secular stance—is Ukraine. The overall landscape illustrates a sharp East-West divide in state-religion relations, with more state preference for a single religion or multiple religions in Orthodox-majority states, preferences at lower levels with perhaps some pluralism in the region's other Christian-majority states as well as the Muslim-majority states in the Balkans, and heavy state interference in Central Asia.

Figure 2. Top 10 religious support in PCEECA countries, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Russia	Russian Orthodox	14
2	Poland	Catholic	13
	Romania	Romanian Orthodox	13
	Serbia	Serbian Orthodox	13
5	Czech Republic	Western Christian	12
	Hungary	Catholic	12
	Slovakia	Catholic	12
	Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	12
9	Croatia	Catholic	11
	Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	11
	Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	11

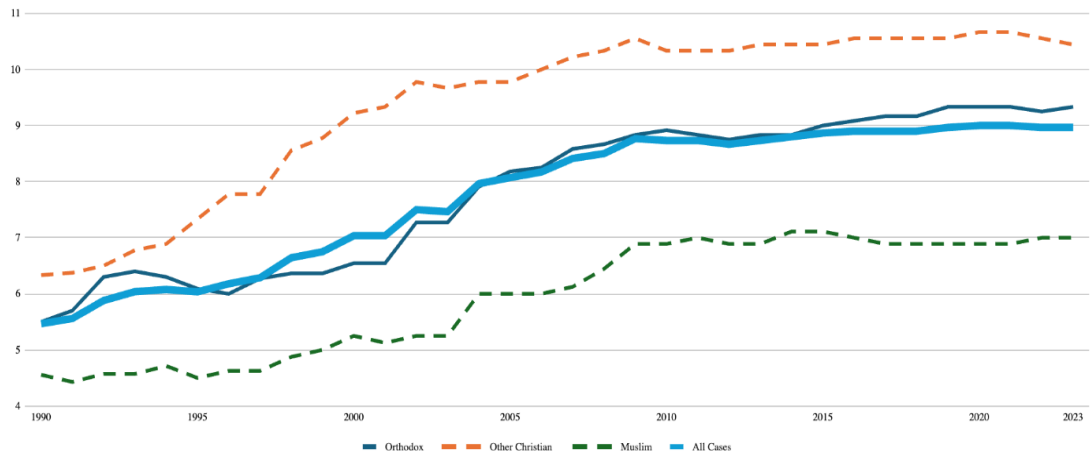
The Religious Support Index (Figure 2) highlights how state favoritism is deeply entrenched in certain national contexts. Russia ranks first with a score of 14, reflecting extensive state support for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), including financial assistance, preferential legal status, and integration into state functions such as education and military chaplaincy. In Russia, state support for the ROC extends beyond material resources to include the protection of its public image through censorship and legal enforcement. For example, in January 2015, journalists in Kamchatka were warned by a regional communications agency against publishing caricatures of religious figures or even linking to media that did so (The Moscow Times, 2015). This form of state-backed cen-

sorship illustrates how the Russian government safeguards the ROC from public criticism, effectively privileging its status in the public sphere while suppressing dissent or satire—reinforcing a close church-state alliance rooted in mutual legitimization.

Countries like Poland, Serbia, and Romania also score highly (13), reinforcing the pattern seen in Figure 1 where majority religions benefit from privileged partnerships with the state. The inclusion of Turkmenistan, a Muslim-majority authoritarian state, with a high support score of 12, is striking—it suggests that despite a general hostility to unregulated religion, the state may invest heavily in promoting and controlling official Islamic institutions. This use of support for religion as a means to control religious institutions is a common tactic, particularly in authoritarian states (Fox, 2015).

The Catholic-majority states of Central Europe—Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia—cluster near the top of the index, showing that religious support is not confined to Orthodox contexts. However, the nature of support may differ: in Catholic countries, it often takes the form of church-state concordats, religious instruction in public schools, and public funding for religious institutions. The inclusion of countries like the Czech Republic and Georgia (both scoring 11–12) shows that support levels vary even within traditions, likely reflecting divergent political trajectories and institutional arrangements.

Figure 3. Support for religion in PCEECA, 1990–2023



This longitudinal data set reveals a steady and significant increase in state support for religion across all traditions from 1990 to 2023. Orthodox countries have seen support rise from a modest average of 5.5 in 1990 to over 9.3 by 2023, paralleling the re-entrenchment of national Orthodox churches as cultural and moral authorities post-communism. Support for other Christian traditions—largely Catholic and Protestant—starts at a higher baseline (6.3 in 1990) and reaches 10.4 by 2023, driven largely by Central European states reintegrating with Western institutions and reaffirming Christian heritage as part of post-Soviet identity.

Muslim-majority states show a more modest increase, from 4.6 to 7.0, reflecting complex dynamics: while the Central Asian Muslim-majority states invest in controlled forms of Islamic expression, they remain wary of independent religious activity. The overall average for all cases rises from 5.5 to nearly 9.0, indicating a general post-Soviet shift away from strict secularism toward increasingly confessional or quasi-religious public orders. This trend is especially pronounced from 2000 onward, coinciding with democratic backsliding, nationalist rhetoric, and the instrumentalization of religion for regime legitimacy across much of the region.

The institutionalization of religious support in PCEECA is reflected in the widespread adoption of specific state policies and mechanisms. As of 2023, six forms of support for religion were present in over half of the countries surveyed. Among the most common were government funding for religious infrastructure—such as the building, maintenance, or repair of religious sites—present in 86.7 % of states. Additionally, 83.3 % of countries had a formal registration process for religious organizations distinct from other nonprofits, and an equal percentage maintained a government ministry or department specifically dedicated to religious affairs. These institutional structures suggest a high degree of administrative engagement with religious life, often channeling support to preferred or traditional religious communities.

Other notable forms of support included the provision of religious education in public schools, available in 56.7 % of countries, and the allocation of free air time on state-run media for religious organizations. The prevalence of these measures indicates a regional pattern in which states actively facilitate the visibility, operation, and integration of religious groups—albeit in structured and often hierarchical ways. The presence of these forms of support across a wide range of political and religious contexts—from secular-leaning Czech Republic to authoritarian Turkmenistan—underscores the strategic value that many governments place on religion, whether for nation-building, social cohesion, or ideological control.

In the Czech Republic, the government provides substantial financial and legal support to religious organizations through a 2012 restitution law that returns or compensates religious groups for property confiscated during the communist era, with approximately 79 % of funds allocated to the Catholic Church (U.S. Department of State, 2023). In contrast, Turkmenistan exhibits a form of religiously-influenced governance through restrictive social policies such as a 2022 law banning unrelated men from giving women rides, which aligns with conservative interpretations of gender norms (Najibullah, 2022).

3. Government discrimination against religious minorities

In post-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia (PCEECA), government discrimination against religious minorities remains a persistent and structurally embedded challenge. Unlike general support for dominant religious institutions,

which may coexist with pluralistic tolerance, discrimination involves active state policies that limit the rights, recognition, or operations of minority religious communities in a manner the majority religion is not limited. These measures include unequal registration procedures, bans on missionary activity, limitations on worship spaces, and biased application of laws. While these policies may be justified under the guise of national security, social harmony, or traditional values, they systematically restrict religious freedom for groups outside the dominant faith traditions. This section examines both the most severe country cases of such discrimination in 2023 and how these patterns have evolved since 1990, highlighting the disproportionate burden faced by minority religious communities, especially in Orthodox-majority and Muslim-majority states.

Figure 4. Top 10 religious discrimination in PCEECA, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	63
2	Russia	Russian Orthodox	62
3	Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	51
4	Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	43
	Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	43
6	Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	39
7	Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	35
8	Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	33
	Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	33
10	Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	30

Figure 4 reveals that religious discrimination by governments remains highly concentrated in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes where state identity is closely linked to a dominant religion. Belarus ranks highest in 2023 with a score of 63, reflecting systematic favoritism toward the Belarusian Orthodox Church and legal, administrative, and security-based suppression of minority religious groups, including Catholics, Protestants, and non-affiliated Orthodox communities. Russia follows closely with a score of 62, driven by its strategic alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church and expansive legal architecture—such as the Yarovaya laws—that criminalize unregistered religious activity and suppress "non-traditional" religious expressions. In both cases, discrimination is not incidental but structured into national governance and public life, used to reinforce ideological conformity and limit independent civil society.

Notably, several Muslim-majority Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—also appear in the top ranks. These countries impose high levels of control over both majority and minority religions through restrictive registration laws, surveillance, bans on unauthorized gatherings, and censorship of religious materials. In Armenia, Bulgaria, and Georgia, majoritarian

religious privilege often translates into unequal legal treatment for minorities—whether through access to worship spaces, recognition, or legal protections. Together, these cases underscore how religious discrimination is deeply tied to national identity politics, regime stability, and fears of religious plurality.

Figure 5. Discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA, 1990–2023

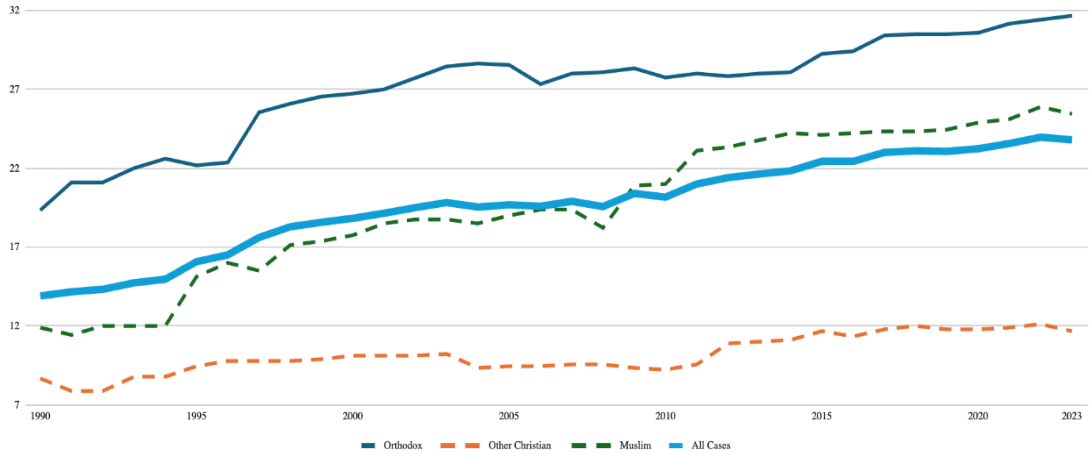


Figure 5 tracks changes in government discrimination across religious traditions from 1990 to 2023. The data show a steady and troubling rise in overall discrimination scores, especially for Orthodox-majority countries, where the average score rose from 19.3 in 1990 to 31.7 in 2023. Muslim-majority countries also saw a significant increase—from 11.9 to 25.4—likely driven by growing authoritarianism and heightened control over Islamic practice in Central Asia. In contrast, countries with non-Orthodox Christian majorities (such as Catholics and Protestants) saw only a modest rise, with average scores hovering around 11–12 by 2023. These trends suggest that religious minorities in Orthodox and Muslim contexts face increasingly institutionalized forms of exclusion, often codified through differential treatment in registration, taxation, and public visibility. The growing gap between majority and minority treatment in these states reveals not just passive neglect but active structures of religious inequality.

Government discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA often manifests through targeted restrictions that inhibit the daily functioning and public presence of minority faith communities. Among the most common forms of discrimination are constraints on religious infrastructure and unequal access to state institutions. In 2023, restrictions on building, repairing, and maintaining places of worship were the most prevalent, present in 86.7 % of countries. These restrictions range from excessive bureaucratic hurdles to outright prohibitions on construction or renovation, disproportionately affecting minority groups such as Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims. For example, countries like Kyrgyzstan, Romania, and Slovenia have been reported to enforce severe restrictions, which can prevent minority communities from

establishing permanent worship spaces and thereby limit their visibility and religious continuity.

Closely related are restrictions on access to existing places of worship, found in 63.3 % of states. This form of discrimination includes denying minority communities the ability to use or visit religious sites—whether due to zoning limitations, surveillance, or selective closures. Countries like Belarus, Romania, and Russia have imposed such restrictions, which often serve to delegitimize minority groups by physically separating them from spaces of communal religious expression. Similarly, discriminatory access to public institutions is widespread. In 60 % of countries, minority clergy face restrictions when attempting to minister in jails or prisons, and the same percentage experience unequal access to military bases. These barriers prevent minority religious leaders from providing pastoral care to their adherents in critical life situations, reinforcing the dominant religion's monopoly over institutional legitimacy and moral authority.

Another systemic issue is the restricted access of minority clergy to hospitals and public facilities, noted in half the countries surveyed. This inequality marginalizes minority faiths from public life and often leads to the exclusion of their adherents during times of illness or crisis. Lastly, over half of PCEECA states (53.3 %) engage in anti-minority religious propaganda through official or semi-official channels. States like Belarus, Russia, and Azerbaijan have used government-controlled media and statements by officials to portray minority religions as foreign, subversive, or cult-like. In Belarus, state suppression intersects with both religious expression and civil society activism: in July 2023, Greek Catholic human rights defender Boris Khamaida was jailed for 15 days after being detained en route to a Catholic pilgrimage, illustrating how the state uses minor legal pretexts to obstruct public religious activities (Forum 18, 2023). This not only legitimizes discriminatory policies but also fuels societal prejudice, making institutional discrimination both a cause and consequence of broader exclusionary narratives.

Government discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA often manifests through legal, bureaucratic, and judicial mechanisms that restrict or delegitimize minority faiths. Kazakhstan presents a more bureaucratic form of exclusion; since 2013, the government has refused to register the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, claiming the group's beliefs disqualify it from Islamic classification and therefore barring it from operating legally (Rabwah Times, 2013).

4. Regulation of all religions and/or the majority religion

While religious discrimination often targets minority groups, regulation affects the majority religion and often all religions by imposing state control over religious institutions, leadership, practices, and spaces. In the PCEECA region, this regulation takes various forms: mandatory registration, restrictions on religious education, state approval for clergy appointments, censorship of religious materials, and limitations on worship activities. While some of these measures may

appear neutral, they often serve political purposes such as controlling dissent, asserting ideological conformity, or managing religious influence in public life. Notably, regulation is most severe in Muslim-majority Central Asian states but is also present—albeit in milder forms—in all countries in the region. This section explores where religious regulation is most intense and how the extent of state control has evolved from 1990 through 2023.

Figure 6. Top 10 religious regulation in PCEECA, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	78
2	Tajikistan	Sunni Muslim	72
3	Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	66
	Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	66
5	Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	45
6	Kyrgyzstan	Sunni Muslim	43
7	Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	32
8	Russia	Russian Orthodox	23
9	Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	19
10	Latvia	Christian (general)	15
	North Macedonia	Macedonian Orthodox	15

Figure 6 shows that the highest levels of religious regulation in 2023 are concentrated in Central Asia. Azerbaijan ranks first with a score of 78, followed closely by Tajikistan (72), Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (66 each), and Kazakhstan (45). These countries maintain tight governmental control over all religious expression—both minority and majority traditions. For example, Muslim communities often require state authorization for public worship, publication of religious texts, and foreign religious education. This model of regulation is not about privileging Islam but about constraining its independence from the state, often to suppress perceived threats to regime stability. By contrast, Orthodox-majority countries such as Belarus (32) and Russia (23) exhibit more selective forms of regulation, typically focused on marginalizing non-traditional groups while maintaining state-aligned relationships with national churches. The relatively lower scores of Bulgaria, Latvia, and North Macedonia indicate moderate control mechanisms that still impact religious life but are less expansive than those in authoritarian contexts.

Figure 7. Regulation of all religions and/or the majority religion in PCEECA, 1990–2023

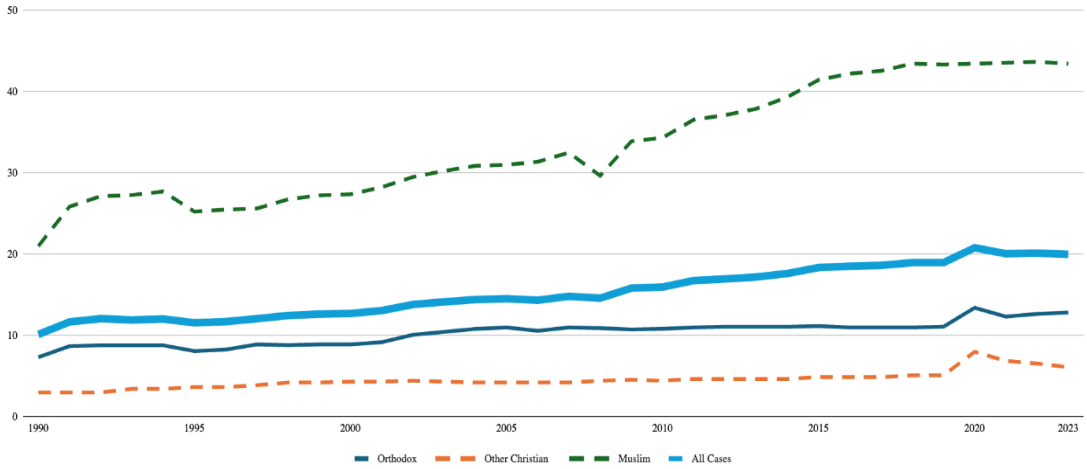


Figure 7 reveals a dramatic increase in religious regulation across the PCEECA region over the last three decades—especially in Muslim-majority states. In 1990, the average regulation score for Muslim countries was 21.00, but by 2023 it had more than doubled to 43.44. This reflects the institutionalization of legal frameworks designed to monitor, license, and restrict religious organizations post-independence. Orthodox-majority states also saw a steady increase, from 7.33 in 1990 to 12.83 in 2023, while regulation among other Christian traditions also doubled, this rise from 3.00 to 6.11 represents overall low levels of regulation. These trends point to a broader regional pattern in which religious freedom has not expanded with democratization but has instead been restructured under systems of formalized state oversight. Even when not aimed directly at suppression, regulatory policies often entrench religious hierarchies and favor politically compliant institutions, reducing pluralism and autonomy in religious life.

Religious regulation in some PCEECA countries involves not just administrative oversight but criminal penalties and systematic repression of basic religious activities. In Uzbekistan, even private expressions of faith are harshly punished; in 2020 and 2021, multiple Muslim men were sentenced to up to six years in prison or labor camps simply for gathering to pray, learning how to pray, or discussing peaceful Islamic teachings such as fasting and good deeds (Forum 18, 2021a). Similarly, Azerbaijan enforces a deeply repressive legal framework that requires state approval for the appointment of all non-Islamic religious leaders and the periodic re-accreditation of Muslim clerics by the government. Religious meetings without permission and distribution of uncensored religious literature are criminalized, and violations lead to fines or imprisonment (Forum 18, 2021b). Tajikistan adds a punitive legal dimension to its religious regulation: under its Administrative Offenses Code, individuals can be fined for “offending religious feelings” or desecrating religious symbols—even without evidence of criminal intent—making this a vague and easily politicized tool for suppressing dissenting or minority religious expressions (BWC Implementation, 1998).

Among the most prevalent forms of religious regulation in PCEECA are laws and practices that restrict the political influence of religious actors. Restrictions on religious political parties were present in 36.7 % of countries, largely in Central Asia and some Eastern European states. In countries such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan, such restrictions are often legally codified and serve to eliminate religion as a legitimate base for political organization—reflecting secular authoritarian fears of religious mobilization. These restrictions may not only ban the formation of explicitly religious parties but also block religiously motivated platforms within broader political movements. Similarly, 40 % of countries restrict clergy or religious organizations from engaging in political speech or activities, including Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These policies are used to depoliticize religious voices that could challenge the state, but they often include vague or broad definitions of "political activity," allowing selective enforcement against disfavored groups or dissenting clerics.

Another key form of regulation targets religious actors outside the state-recognized framework, even when they belong to the majority religion. This occurred in 40 % of PCEECA states, including Russia, Belarus, and Serbia, where Orthodox clergy not aligned with the official church or government policy can face harassment or legal obstacles. This reflects an internal policing of orthodoxy—both theological and political—within dominant religious traditions. In addition, restrictions on access to places of worship affected 46.7 % of countries, including both authoritarian states like Azerbaijan and more democratic states such as Slovakia and Ukraine. Such restrictions are a direct barrier to the exercise of religious freedom and can involve zoning laws, administrative delays, or outright closures. Finally, restrictions on religious-based hate speech, present in a striking 90 % of countries, occupy a unique space: while often framed as protective, these laws can be misused to silence religious critique, minority advocacy, or even theological dissent, depending on how hate speech is defined and applied.

5. Societal discrimination against religious minorities (general)

While state-driven restrictions are often the most visible forms of religious repression, societal discrimination plays an equally significant role in shaping the religious landscape in PCEECA. Societal discrimination refers to prejudice, hostility, or exclusion perpetrated by individuals, communities, or non-governmental institutions against religious minorities. This form of discrimination includes social ostracism, harassment, public defamation, denial of services, and symbolic exclusion from the national identity. Although it may not always be codified in law, societal discrimination reinforces and amplifies formal restrictions by stigmatizing non-majority religious practices and beliefs. It is often driven by ethno-religious nationalism, misinformation, or deeply rooted historical prejudices, particularly in societies where religion and national identity are closely entwined.

Figure 8. Top 10 societal discrimination in PCEECA, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Russia	Russian Orthodox	26
2	Ukraine	Ukrainian Orthodox	23
3	Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	21
	Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	21
5	Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	18
	Kosovo	Sunni Muslim	18
	Romania	Romanian Orthodox	18
8	Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	17
9	Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Serbian Orthodox	14
	Hungary	Catholic	14

Figure 8 shows that the highest levels of societal discrimination in 2023 are found in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Georgia—all Orthodox-majority countries. In fact, all of these top ten countries other than Kosovo are Orthodox-majority. In Russia, societal hostility toward minority religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals, and independent Muslims is widespread and often fueled by state-aligned media and the dominant Russian Orthodox Church. Similarly, Ukraine has seen increasing societal tensions between the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and communities aligned with the Moscow Patriarchate, alongside ongoing hostility toward smaller groups such as Baptists and Muslims. In Bulgaria and Georgia, ethnic and religious majoritarianism contributes to frequent social exclusion of Muslims, Protestants, and new religious movements. Notably, even countries with a Muslim majority or strong secular traditions, such as Kosovo and Armenia, appear on the list—suggesting that societal discrimination can stem from complex intercommunal dynamics, not just majority-minority dichotomies.

Figure 9. Societal Discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA, 1990–2023

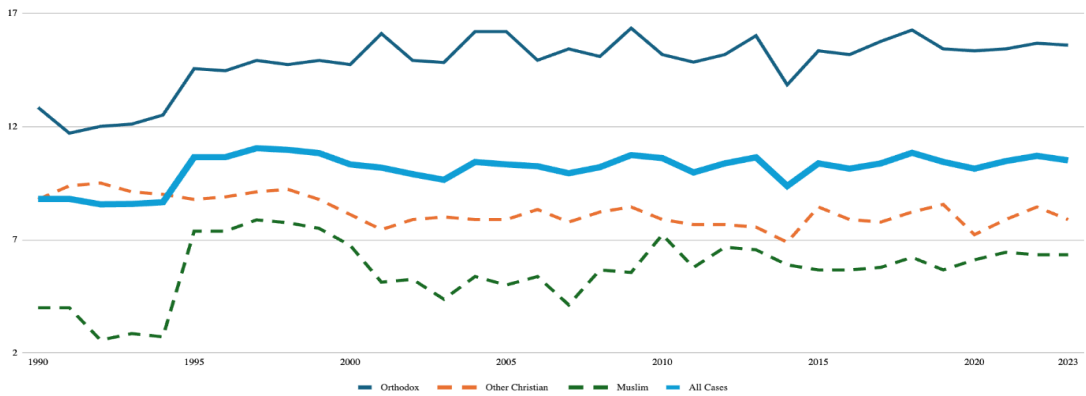


Figure 9 illustrates the long-term trajectory of societal discrimination from 1990 to 2023. Orthodox-majority countries have consistently shown the highest levels of societal discrimination, rising from an average score of 12.8 in 1990 to 15.6 in 2023. By contrast, discrimination in Muslim-majority countries started lower (4.0 in 1990) but has gradually increased to 6.3 by 2023, likely reflecting the rise of ethno-religious nationalism and authoritarian political cultures in parts of Central Asia. Other Christian-majority contexts (e.g., Catholic or Protestant) have remained comparatively stable, with modest increases. The persistence of these trends points to deeply entrenched societal norms and attitudes that are slow to change, even as political institutions evolve. This suggests that addressing religious freedom in the region requires not only legal reforms but also long-term efforts in public education, media accountability, and interfaith dialogue to reduce societal hostility and normalize religious pluralism.

Societal discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA is reinforced by widespread negative messaging and cultural stigmatization, often broadcast through mainstream institutions. One of the most prevalent indicators is anti-religious minority propaganda in private media, reported in 66.7 % of countries. This includes hostile statements, biased news coverage, and entertainment that mocks or delegitimizes religious minorities. Countries such as Russia, Hungary, Armenia, and Kazakhstan are among those where minority faiths—especially Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelicals, and Muslims—are portrayed as dangerous, foreign, or socially corrosive. This propaganda fosters a social climate where discrimination becomes normalized. Similarly, anti-religious rhetoric from clergy in the majority religion is present in 40 % of countries, including Poland, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine, where religious leaders have publicly denounced other faiths in sermons or public appearances. These messages not only stigmatize minorities but also lend theological legitimacy to social exclusion, often reinforcing nationalist or state-centric religious ideologies.

Political elites also contribute to societal discrimination. In 43.3 % of countries, anti-religious rhetoric is present in political campaigns or party propaganda, especially in states like Poland, Romania, and North Macedonia. Such rhetoric often portrays religious minorities as threats to national identity, public order, or traditional values. This political discourse intertwines with physical manifestations of hostility: vandalism against religious property occurs in 60 % of countries and includes attacks on places of worship, cemeteries, and community centers—frequently targeting Jews, Muslims, and non-traditional Christian groups. Additionally, anti-religious graffiti is documented in 46.7 % of states and functions as a public display of religious intolerance, especially in Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine. Finally, non-violent harassment of religious minorities, including verbal abuse, workplace discrimination, and community-level ostracization, is reported in half the countries analyzed. This pervasive societal pressure, evident from Turkmenistan to Bosnia, deepens religious marginalization and contributes to an environment where formal equality is undermined by everyday prejudice.

Societal discrimination against religious minorities in PCEECA countries often manifests through acts of vandalism, arson, and public demonstrations fueled

by religious or nationalist sentiment. In Romania, the Fabric Synagogue in Timișoara was defaced with swastikas and antisemitic messages in September 2022, reflecting persistent undercurrents of antisemitism despite state-level commitments to tolerance (Jewish Heritage Europe, 2024). In Ukraine, the Nativity of the Theotokos Church—affiliated with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC)—was set on fire and severely damaged in 2018, illustrating how inter-Orthodox tensions and regional instability contribute to religiously motivated vandalism (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Meanwhile, Poland has seen instances of public hostility toward Muslims; during football matches in 2015, fans from major clubs in Poznań and Warsaw unfurled anti-Islamic banners and invoked Christian supremacist themes, demonstrating how religious bias can be embedded in nationalist and populist public displays (Lane, 2015). These incidents underscore the normalization of religious intolerance in public discourse and spaces across the region.

6. Societal discrimination involving physical violence

In analyzing societal discrimination involving physical violence in the PCEECA region, several distinct patterns emerge based on the direction and nature of the violence. First, the most common and widespread form is violence by members of the majority religion against minority groups, reported in 18 countries in 2023, including Russia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia (both entities), Czech Republic, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia. These cases typically involve attacks on religious minorities' places of worship, threats, or physical assaults during public or community events.

Second, there are notable instances of violence by religious minorities against majority religious communities, reported in five countries: Russia, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Ukraine. These incidents often arise in contested religious or political environments, where minority groups either retaliate or assert themselves in response to perceived marginalization.

Third, violence by minority religious groups against other minority groups occurred in four countries: Russia, Ukraine, Kosovo, and Montenegro. These cases typically involve sectarian or inter-communal conflict, often driven by competition over religious authority or influence.

Fourth, a rare but serious dynamic involves intra-minority violence, where religious organizations from a minority group attack other members of the same group, reported only in Russia. This reflects internal power struggles or doctrinal splits within marginalized communities.

Finally, intra-majority violence—that is, violence by actors affiliated with the majority religion against co-religionists—was recorded in five countries: Russia, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Ukraine. This form of violence is often political or doctrinal, highlighting divisions within dominant religious institutions themselves, particularly when factions align with different political or national agendas.

To measure these patterns, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Hate Crime Report provides valuable, cross-nationally comparable data (Figure 10). Although hate crimes are not limited to physical violence, the OSCE report prioritizes serious incidents, including violent attacks, threats or harassment, and damage to property—offering a reliable proxy for assessing societal religious violence. In 2023, Poland led the region with 177 total religious hate crimes, including 94 anti-Semitic and 81 anti-Christian incidents, highlighting its volatile climate despite its EU membership. Other notable cases include Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina combined) (38 incidents), where both Christian-Muslim tensions and post-war divisions persist, and Georgia (14 incidents), reflecting struggles over minority religious expression. Countries like Ukraine, Croatia, and Russia also reported non-trivial levels of religiously motivated violence. However, Kosovo is notably absent from OSCE data, as it is not a member country—despite other sources confirming significant interreligious conflict within its borders. This underscores the importance of triangulating OSCE data with local and NGO reporting to capture the full spectrum of religiously motivated violence in the region.

Figure 10. Top 10 number of hate crime incidents in PCEECA, 2023 (OSCE OHDIR Hate Crime Report)

Rank	Country	Anti-Christian hate crime	Anti-Muslim hate crime	Anti-Semitic hate crime	Total
1	Poland	81	2	94	**177**
2	Bosnia and Herzegovina (Entire Country)	15	21	2	**38**
3	Georgia	13	1	0	**14**
4	Ukraine	8		2	**10**
5	Croatia	5	1	0	**6**
	Russian Federation		1	5	**6**
7	Serbia	1	0	4	**5**
8	Czech Republic	0	0	4	**4**
	Hungary	4	0	0	**4**
	Kazakhstan	3	0	1	**4**
	North Macedonia	1	1	2	**4**

7. Conclusions

This analysis of religious freedom in post-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia (PCEECA) from 2023 reveals a complex landscape marked by state favoritism, systemic discrimination, and growing societal hostility—often grounded in national identity and geopolitical instability. While some states have embraced pluralism and reduced legal barriers to religious practice, many others continue to privilege dominant religions—particularly Orthodox Christianity or Sunni Islam—while marginalizing minority groups through legal, administrative, and societal means. The most heavily discriminatory and regulatory environments are found in Central Asia (e.g., Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan) and authoritarian-leaning Orthodox-majority states (e.g., Russia, Belarus), where religious policy is often a tool of political control and ideological alignment.

The region also demonstrates a clear divide between formal state practices and grassroots societal attitudes. Even in democracies or EU member states like Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, widespread societal discrimination—ranging from propaganda and vandalism to hate crimes and violence—reveals that legal protections alone are insufficient to secure religious freedom. Notably, societal hostility is not limited to majority-on-minority dynamics; inter-minority and intra-faith conflicts (as seen in Russia, Kosovo, and Ukraine) further complicate efforts to promote inclusive religious coexistence. This underscores the need for multi-layered strategies that go beyond law reform to address media bias, education, and the role of religious and political leaders in either fueling or mitigating prejudice.

The rising levels of regulation, especially in Muslim-majority states, and the continued use of anti-minority rhetoric in politics and religious institutions suggest that religious freedom in the region is stagnating—or, in some cases, backsliding. As religious affiliation remains deeply entangled with national identity, sovereignty, and regime legitimacy, efforts to monitor and improve religious freedom will require attention not only to legal indicators, but to the broader sociopolitical context. Long-term improvements will depend on strengthening independent civil society, promoting interfaith dialogue, and enforcing equal treatment in both law and practice. This index-based analysis provides a foundation for these efforts by identifying the structural patterns and actors most responsible for ongoing religious exclusion in the region.

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Appendix 1: data collection methods

The Global Religious Freedom Index is an initiative of the International Institute for Religious Freedom. It draws on data from the Religion and State round 4 (RAS) Project directed by Prof. Jonathan Fox and Dr. Ariel Zellman at Bar-Ilan University (Israel).

The RAS Project has been used in over 250 peer-reviewed publications including books, academic articles, doctoral dissertations and MA theses and is the most used database on religious freedom and religion-state relations in academic writings. However, it has not as of yet had a significant footprint in advocacy and policy circles. Its advantages over current data used for advocacy and policy is that it is far more accurate and detailed. RAS has established methods to collect this data using a wider array of sources than any other project. It is also the only academic (or non-academic) project that can provide cross-country standardized data on discrimination against religious minorities. Unlike other projects which give a general country score or focus on a single religious minority (e.g. Christians), the RAS scores minorities in each country separately and includes all minorities which are a minimum of 0.2 % of a country's population, as well as Jews, Muslim and Christian minorities that are smaller than 0.2 % but at least several hundred people. Round 3 of RAS included 771 such minorities in 183 countries and territories. Round 4 is adding more minorities primarily by providing more fine-tuned distinctions between different denominations of Christians and identifying small minorities missed previously. For example, in Sub-Sharan Africa the number of minorities included individually increased from 160 to 243. Minorities too small to be included for minority-level codings are still included in the country-level codings.

The most recent RAS round 4 (RAS4) data covers 1990 to 2023, with each year measured separately to track changes over time. It describes government involvement in religion through 171 variables describing Official Religion, Religious Support, Religious Restrictions, Religious Discrimination, as well as other topics. Additional variables measure specific religious policies including religious education, the registration of religious organizations, restrictions on abortion, restrictions on proselytizing, and religious requirements for holding public office or citizenship. RAS also measures 34 ways in which societal actors restrict or attack religious minorities including economic discrimination, property crimes, and violence, among other types of discrimination (Fox, Finke & Mataic, 2018).[1]

Even though the RAS Project collects data on the intersection between religion and politics broadly, when analyzed together, its indicators can be taken to describe many of the dimensions of religious freedom.

[1] A full list of the variables is available at https://ras.thearda.com.

Appendix 2: data tables

1. Religious support index

Country scores (1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023)

Country	Specific Majority Religion	Christian/ Muslim/ Mixed or Other	First year	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Albania	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	2	2	1	4	4	4
Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	Orthodox	4		4	8	9	9
Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	Muslim	4		5	5	6	6
Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	6		5	7	6	7
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	3		4	10	10	10
Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	4		5	10	10	10
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	Orthodox	6	6	7	7	8	8
Croatia	Catholic	Other Christian	2		9	11	11	11
Czech Republic	Western Christian	Other Christian	9	9	10	11	12	12
Estonia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	3		7	7	7	7
Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	Orthodox	3		4	11	11	11
Hungary	Catholic	Other Christian	5	5	8	11	12	12
Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	2		4	5	4	4
Kosovo	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	7			7	8	8

Kyrgyzstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	2		4	5	4	4
Latvia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	6		9	9	10	8
Lithuania	Catholic	Other Christian	9		9	10	10	10
Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	11		11	10	11	11
Montenegro	Montene-grin Orthodox	Orthodox	7			7	9	8
North Macedonia	Macedo-nian Orthodox	Orthodox	3		3	4	4	4
Poland	Catholic	Other Christian	7	7	13	13	13	13
Romania	Romanian Orthodox	Orthodox	10	10	11	13	13	13
Russia	Russian Orthodox	Orthodox	8	8	11	13	13	14
Serbia	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	2	2	8	13	13	13
Slovakia	Catholic	Other Christian	8		10	12	12	12
Slovenia	Catholic	Other Christian	8		8	9	9	9
Tajikistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	4		4	7	6	6
Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	11		11	11	11	12
Ukraine	Ukrainian Orthodox	Orthodox	2		3	4	5	4
Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	6		9	8	9	9

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Orthodox	**Other Christian**	**Muslim**	**All Cases**
1990	5.50	6.33	4.56	5.47
	5.70	6.38	4.43	5.56

	6.30	6.50	4.57	5.88
	6.40	6.78	4.57	6.04
	6.30	6.89	4.71	6.08
1995	6.09	7.33	4.50	6.04
	6.00	7.78	4.63	6.18
	6.27	7.78	4.63	6.29
	6.36	8.56	4.88	6.64
	6.36	8.78	5.00	6.75
2000	6.55	9.22	5.25	7.04
	6.55	9.33	5.13	7.04
	7.27	9.78	5.25	7.50
	7.27	9.67	5.25	7.46
	7.91	9.78	6.00	7.96
2005	8.18	9.78	6.00	8.07
	8.25	10.00	6.00	8.17
	8.58	10.22	6.13	8.41
	8.67	10.33	6.44	8.50
	8.83	10.56	6.89	8.77
2010	8.92	10.33	6.89	8.73
	8.83	10.33	7.00	8.73
	8.75	10.33	6.89	8.67
	8.83	10.44	6.89	8.73
	8.83	10.44	7.11	8.80
2015	9.00	10.44	7.11	8.87
	9.08	10.56	7.00	8.90
	9.17	10.56	6.89	8.90
	9.17	10.56	6.89	8.90
	9.33	10.56	6.89	8.97
2020	9.33	10.67	6.89	9.00
	9.33	10.67	6.89	9.00
	9.25	10.56	7.00	8.97
2023	9.33	10.44	7.00	8.97
Increase in % 1990–2023	69.70	64.91	53.66	64.02

Most common variables (2023)

Six types of support were present in at least 50 % of countries (all coded 0 or 1).

Direct general grants to religious organizations	**Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites (86.7 %)**	**Free airtime on television/ radio is provided to rel. orgs. on government channels or by gvt. decree**	**Presence of an official government ministry or department dealing with religious affairs (83.3 %)**	**Religious education is present in public schools (56.7 %)**	**A registration process for rel. organizations exists which is in different from other nonprofits (83.3 %)**
Belarus	Albania	Armenia	Albania	Armenia	Armenia
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Armenia	Belarus	Armenia	Belarus	Azerbaijan
Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Azerbaijan	Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Azerbaijan	Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Belarus
Bulgaria	Belarus	Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Belarus	Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Bosnia: Republika Srpska
Croatia	Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Czech Republic	Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Croatia	Croatia	Czech Republic	Croatia
Estonia	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Czech Republic	Estonia	Czech Republic
Georgia	Croatia	Georgia	Estonia	Georgia	Estonia
Hungary	Czech Republic	Hungary	Georgia	Hungary	Hungary
Latvia	Estonia	Kosovo	Hungary	Latvia	Kazakhstan
Lithuania	Georgia	Latvia	Kazakhstan	Lithuania	Kyrgyzstan
Montenegro	Hungary	Montenegro	Kosovo	Moldova	Latvia
Poland	Kosovo	Poland	Kyrgyzstan	North Macedonia	Lithuania
Romania	Lithuania	Romania	Latvia	Poland	Moldova
Serbia	Moldova	Russia	Lithuania	Romania	Montenegro
Slovakia	Montenegro	Serbia	North Macedonia	Russia	North Macedonia
Slovenia	North Macedonia	Slovakia	Romania	Serbia	Poland
	Poland		Russia		Romania
	Romania		Serbia		Russia
	Russia		Slovakia		Serbia
	Serbia		Slovenia		Slovenia
	Slovakia		Tajikistan		Tajikistan
	Slovenia		Turkmenistan		Turkmenistan
	Turkmenistan		Ukraine		Ukraine
	Ukraine		Uzbekistan		Uzbekistan
	Uzbekistan				

2. Religious discrimination index

Scores by country (1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023)

Country	Specific Majority Religion	Christian/ Muslim/ Mixed or Other	First year	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Albania	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	1	1	2	3	5	5
Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	Orthodox	41		42	44	50	51
Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	Muslim	19		23	27	34	33
Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	49		51	58	61	63
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	18		17	14	14	14
Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	17		17	16	16	16
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	Orthodox	15	15	27	30	35	35
Croatia	Catholic	Other Christian	16		19	14	13	12
Czech Republic	Western Christian	Other Christian	9	9	9	10	10	10
Estonia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	0		0	1	1	1
Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	Orthodox	21		27	31	30	30
Hungary	Catholic	Other Christian	1	1	3	3	19	19
Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	17		14	21	43	43
Kosovo	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	9			9	9	9
Kyrgyzstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	3		4	23	24	24

Latvia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	9		15	13	15	16
Lithuania	Catholic	Other Christian	19		19	16	16	16
Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	29		30	32	33	33
Montenegro	Montene-grin Orthodox	Orthodox	6			6	13	9
North Macedonia	Macedo-nian Orthodox	Orthodox	8		11	11	12	13
Poland	Catholic	Other Christian	2	2	3	3	5	3
Romania	Romanian Orthodox	Orthodox	22	22	25	25	26	26
Russia	Russian Orthodox	Orthodox	5	5	44	51	58	62
Serbia	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	13	13	13	19	18	18
Slovakia	Catholic	Other Christian	16		16	17	17	17
Slovenia	Catholic	Other Christian	6		7	6	10	11
Tajikistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	4		5	13	13	19
Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	14		42	43	43	43
Ukraine	Ukrainian Orthodox	Orthodox	9		11	13	18	27
Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	22		35	36	39	39

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Orthodox	**Other Christian**	**Muslim**	**All Cases**
1990	19.33	8.67	11.89	13.90
	21.10	7.88	11.43	14.16
	21.10	7.88	12.00	14.32
	22.00	8.78	12.00	14.73

	22.60	8.78	12.00	14.96
1995	22.18	9.44	15.13	16.07
	22.36	9.78	16.00	16.50
	25.55	9.78	15.50	17.61
	26.09	9.78	17.13	18.29
	26.55	9.89	17.38	18.57
2000	26.73	10.11	17.75	18.82
	27.00	10.11	18.50	19.14
	27.73	10.11	18.75	19.50
	28.45	10.22	18.75	19.82
	28.64	9.33	18.50	19.54
2005	28.55	9.44	19.00	19.68
	27.33	9.44	19.38	19.59
	28.00	9.56	19.38	19.90
	28.08	9.56	18.22	19.57
	28.33	9.33	20.89	20.40
2010	27.75	9.22	21.00	20.17
	28.00	9.56	23.11	21.00
	27.83	10.89	23.33	21.40
	28.00	11.00	23.78	21.63
	28.08	11.11	24.22	21.83
2015	29.25	11.67	24.11	22.43
	29.42	11.33	24.22	22.43
	30.42	11.78	24.33	23.00
	30.50	12.00	24.33	23.10
	30.50	11.78	24.44	23.07
2020	30.58	11.78	24.89	23.23
	31.17	11.89	25.11	23.57
	31.42	12.11	25.89	23.97
2023	31.67	11.67	25.44	23.80
in-crease in % 1990–2023	63.79	34.62	114.02	71.22

Most common variables (2023)

The following 5 types of discrimination were present in at least 50 % of countries.

Restrictions on building, repairing and/or maintaining places of worship (86.7 %)

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Kyrgyzstan Montenegro Romania Slovenia	Armenia Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Czech Republic Georgia Hungary Kazakhstan Kosovo Latvia Lithuania Moldova Serbia Slovakia Tajikistan Turkmenistan Ukraine Uzbekistan	Azerbaijan North Macedonia Russia

Restrictions on access to existing places of worship 63.3 %

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Albania Croatia Lithuania Poland Slovakia Slovenia	Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Georgia Kazakhstan Kosovo North Macedonia Romania Russia Ukraine	Azerbaijan Moldova

Restricted access of minority clergy to jails compared to the majority religion (60 %)

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Croatia Czech Republic	Armenia Bulgaria Hungary Lithuania Moldova	Belarus Russia

Georgia Kazakhstan Latvia North Macedonia Turkmenistan	Slovakia Uzbekistan	

Restricted access of minority clergy to military bases compared to the majority religion (60 %)

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Croatia Latvia Serbia Slovenia	Armenia Czech Republic Hungary Lithuania Romania Slovakia Ukraine	Belarus Bulgaria Georgia Moldova Russia

Restricted access of min. clergy to hospitals & other public facilities compared to maj. religion (50 %)

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bulgaria	Armenia Lithuania Moldova	Belarus Georgia Russia

Croatia Czech Republic Hungary Kazakhstan Latvia Slovenia	Slovakia	

Anti-minority religious propaganda in official/semi-official gvt. publications or gvt. officials (53.3 %)

Score		
1 The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	2 The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice or the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them.	3 The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.
Albania Armenia Croatia Kazakhstan North Macedonia Romania Ukraine	Azerbaijan Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Georgia Moldova Uzbekistan	Russia

3. Religious regulation index

Scores by country (1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023)

Country	**Specific Majority Religion**	**Christian/ Muslim/ Mixed or Other**	**First year**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**2020**	**2023**
Albania	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	8	8	7	4	5	5
Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	Orthodox	5		5	4	8	4

Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	Muslim	29		36	58	74	78
Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	6		8	18	22	32
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	4		4	8	13	11
Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	1		1	6	11	8
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	Orthodox	15	15	16	18	19	19
Croatia	Catholic	Other Christian	2		2	4	7	4
Czech Republic	Western Christian	Other Christian	3	3	3	5	8	5
Estonia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	2		6	6	11	8
Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	Orthodox	3		2	5	12	6
Hungary	Catholic	Other Christian	2	2	2	3	9	5
Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	19		22	27	49	45
Kosovo	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	2			3	5	5
Kyrgyzstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	10		11	38	43	43
Latvia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	7		10	8	11	15
Lithuania	Catholic	Other Christian	2		4	2	5	5
Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	5		8	12	18	14
Montenegro	Montene-grin Orthodox	Orthodox	2			4	6	5
North Macedonia	Macedo-nian Orthodox	Orthodox	21		23	15	17	15

Poland	Catholic	Other Christian	3	3	6	6	8	6
Romania	Romanian Orthodox	Orthodox	3	3	3	5	7	5
Russia	Russian Orthodox	Orthodox	4	4	12	19	20	23
Serbia	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	9	9	9	13	12	12
Slovakia	Catholic	Other Christian	3		3	3	6	3
Slovenia	Catholic	Other Christian	3		3	3	7	4
Tajikistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	25		25	55	72	72
Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	50		55	57	66	66
Ukraine	Ukrainian Orthodox	Orthodox	14		11	11	9	11
Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	42		59	59	64	66

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Orthodox	**Other Christian**	**Muslim**	**All Cases**
1990	7.33	3.00	21.00	10.13
	8.70	3.00	25.86	11.68
	8.80	3.00	27.14	12.08
	8.80	3.44	27.29	11.92
	8.80	3.44	27.71	12.04
1995	8.09	3.67	25.25	11.57
	8.27	3.67	25.50	11.71
	8.91	3.89	25.63	12.07
	8.82	4.22	26.75	12.46
	8.91	4.22	27.25	12.64
2000	8.91	4.33	27.38	12.71
	9.18	4.33	28.25	13.07
	10.09	4.44	29.50	13.82
	10.45	4.33	30.25	14.14
	10.82	4.22	30.88	14.43

2005	11.00	4.22	31.00	14.54
	10.58	4.22	31.38	14.34
	11.00	4.22	32.50	14.83
	10.92	4.44	29.67	14.60
	10.75	4.56	33.89	15.83
2010	10.83	4.44	34.33	15.97
	11.00	4.67	36.56	16.77
	11.08	4.67	37.11	16.97
	11.08	4.67	37.89	17.20
	11.08	4.67	39.33	17.63
2015	11.17	4.89	41.44	18.37
	11.00	4.89	42.22	18.53
	11.00	4.89	42.56	18.63
	11.00	5.11	43.44	18.97
	11.08	5.11	43.33	18.97
2020	13.42	8.00	43.44	20.80
	12.33	6.89	43.56	20.07
	12.67	6.56	43.67	20.13
2023	12.83	6.11	43.44	20.00
increase in % 1990–2023	75.00	103.70	106.88	97.37

Most common variables (2023)

Only 5 variables were present in 35 % of countries or more.

Restrictions on religious political parties (36.7 %)

Score		
1 Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.	2 Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.	3 The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.
none	Azerbaijan Georgia	Belarus Bulgaria

		Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Moldova Russia Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan

Restrictions on clergy/religious organizations engaging in political speech/propaganda/activity (40 %)

Score		
1 Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.	2 Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.	3 The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.
Belarus Estonia	Russia Turkmenistan Ukraine	Azerbaijan Bulgaria Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Moldova Tajikistan Uzbekistan

Restrict/harass maj. rel. members/organizations Not part of the state recognized framework (40 %)

Score		
1 Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.	2 Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.	3 The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.
Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bulgaria Russia Serbia	Montenegro	Azerbaijan Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan

Restrictions on access to places of worship (46.7 %)

Score		
1 Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.	2 Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.	3 The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.
Albania Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Czech Republic North Macedonia Serbia Slovakia Ukraine	none	Azerbaijan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan

Restrictions on religious-based hate speech (90 %)

Score		
1 Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.	2 Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.	3 The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.
Armenia Azerbaijan	Belarus Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Georgia Kosovo Kyrgyzstan Moldova Montenegro North Macedonia Romania Serbia Slovakia	Croatia Czech Republic Estonia Hungary Kazakhstan Latvia Lithuania Poland Slovenia Uzbekistan

	Tajikistan Ukraine	

4. Societal discrimination index

Country scores (1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023)

Country	Specific Majority Religion	Christian/ Muslim/ Mixed or Other	First year	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Albania	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	1	1	1	0	1	1
Armenia	Armenian Apostolic	Orthodox	0		2	13	13	18
Azerbaijan	Shia Muslim	Muslim	18		9	8	11	11
Belarus	Belarusian Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	13		19	13	13	13
Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	40		29	9	5	6
Bosnia: Republika Srpska	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	38		29	14	14	14
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Orthodox	Orthodox	18	18	20	24	21	21
Croatia	Catholic	Other Christian	33		24	12	10	9
Czech Republic	Western Christian	Other Christian	9	9	11	13	12	12
Estonia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	1		0	1	0	1
Georgia	Georgian Orthodox	Orthodox	14		15	19	23	21
Hungary	Catholic	Other Christian	11	11	11	12	14	14
Kazakhstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	3		3	4	7	8
Kosovo	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	18			21	19	18

Kyrgyzstan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	4		6	20	8	8
Latvia	Christian (general)	Other Christian	0		0	2	0	0
Lithuania	Catholic	Other Christian	5		5	6	6	8
Moldova	Moldovan Orthodox (Russian)	Orthodox	16		17	17	20	17
Montenegro	Montene-grin Orthodox	Orthodox	4			8	5	4
North Macedonia	Macedo-nian Orthodox	Orthodox	1		2	3	1	2
Poland	Catholic	Other Christian	11	11	13	16	12	13
Romania	Romanian Orthodox	Orthodox	10	10	12	19	19	18
Russia	Russian Orthodox	Orthodox	23	23	24	29	29	26
Serbia	Serbian Orthodox	Orthodox	5	5	9	8	7	10
Slovakia	Catholic	Other Christian	5		5	5	6	8
Slovenia	Catholic	Other Christian	4		4	4	5	6
Tajikistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	1		4	1	1	1
Turkmenistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	1		1	1	2	2
Ukraine	Ukrainian Orthodox	Orthodox	12		13	15	19	23
Uzbekistan	Sunni Muslim	Muslim	1		1	1	1	2

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Orthodox	**Other Christian**	**Muslim**	**All Cases**
1990	12.83	8.78	4.00	8.80
	11.70	9.38	4.00	8.80
	12.00	9.50	2.57	8.56

	12.10	9.11	2.86	8.58
	12.50	9.00	2.71	8.65
1995	14.55	8.78	7.38	10.64
	14.45	8.89	7.38	10.64
	14.91	9.11	7.88	11.04
	14.73	9.22	7.75	10.96
	14.91	8.78	7.50	10.82
2000	14.73	8.11	6.75	10.32
	16.09	7.44	5.13	10.18
	14.91	7.89	5.25	9.89
	14.82	8.00	4.38	9.64
	16.18	7.89	5.38	10.43
2005	16.18	7.89	5.00	10.32
	14.92	8.33	5.38	10.24
	15.42	7.78	4.13	9.93
	15.08	8.22	5.67	10.20
	16.33	8.44	5.56	10.73
2010	15.17	7.89	7.22	10.60
	14.83	7.67	5.78	9.97
	15.17	7.67	6.67	10.37
	16.00	7.56	6.56	10.63
	13.83	6.89	5.89	9.37
2015	15.33	8.44	5.67	10.37
	15.17	7.89	5.67	10.13
	15.75	7.78	5.78	10.37
	16.25	8.22	6.22	10.83
	15.42	8.56	5.67	10.43
2020	15.33	7.22	6.11	10.13
	15.42	7.89	6.44	10.47
	15.67	8.44	6.33	10.70
2023	15.58	7.89	6.33	10.50
in-crease in % 1990–2023	21.43	-10.13	58.33	19.32

Most common variables (2023)

Variables present in 40 % or more of cases.

Anti-religious minority propaganda, statements, articles, or shows in mainstream private media (66.7 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Albania Croatia Moldova Montenegro Poland Slovenia	Armenia Azerbaijan Belarus Bulgaria Czech Republic Georgia Hungary Kazakhstan Kosovo Lithuania Romania Russia Serbia Ukraine	none

Overt anti-religious minority rhetoric from members of the majority religion's clergy (40 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Azerbaijan Belarus Kosovo Poland Tajikistan Ukraine	Armenia Bulgaria Georgia Moldova Romania Russia	none

Presence of anti-religious rhetoric in political campaigns or political party propaganda (43.3 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Bosnia: Republika Srpska Croatia Kosovo Lithuania North Macedonia Poland Romania Slovakia	Bulgaria Georgia Hungary Russia	none

Vandalism against rel. property. Eg. places of worship, community centers, schools, cemeteries (60 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Azerbaijan Croatia Slovenia	Armenia Belarus Bosnia: Republika Srpska Bulgaria Czech Republic Georgia Hungary Kosovo Lithuania Moldova Poland Romania Russia Slovakia Ukraine	none

Anti-religious graffiti (46.7 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Czech Republic Lithuania Moldova North Macedonia Romania Slovakia	Belarus Bulgaria Georgia Hungary Kosovo Poland Russia Ukraine	none

Harassment of other members of religious minorities which does not reach the level of violence (50 %)

Score		
1 This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	2 This action occurs on a substantial level to members one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	3 This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.
Azerbaijan Bosnia: Republika Srpska Kazakhstan Slovakia Turkmenistan Ukraine	Bosnia: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bulgaria Czech Republic Georgia Hungary Moldova Poland Romania Russia	none

5. Physical violence involving religion

Number of hate crime incidents in PCEECA, 2023 (OSCE OHDIR Hate Crime Report)

Rank	Country	Anti-Christian hate crime	Anti-Muslim hate crime	Anti-Semitic hate crime	Total
1	Poland	81	2	94	**177**
2	Bosnia and Herzegovina	15	21	2	**38**
3	Georgia	13	1	0	**14**
4	Ukraine	8		2	**10**
5	Croatia	5	1	0	**6**
	Russian Federation		1	5	**6**
7	Serbia	1	0	4	**5**
8	Czech Republic	0	0	4	**4**
	Hungary	4	0	0	**4**
	Kazakhstan	3	0	1	**4**
	North Macedonia	1	1	2	**4**
12	Latvia	3	0	0	**3**
	Lithuania	2	0	1	**3**
	Slovakia	1	2	0	**3**
15	Armenia	2	0	0	**2**
16	Belarus	1	0	0	**1**
	Estonia	1	0	0	**1**
	Romania	1	0	0	**1**
	Tajikistan	1	0	0	**1**
	Uzbekistan	1	0	0	**1**
21	Albania	0	0	0	**0**
	Azerbaijan	0	0	0	**0**
	Bulgaria	0	0	0	**0**
	Kyrgyzstan	0	0	0	**0**
	Moldova	0	0	0	**0**
	Montenegro	0	0	0	**0**

	Slovenia	0	0	0	**0**
	Turkmenistan	0	0	0	**0**

Note 1: Forms of hate crime considered: attacks against property; threats/harassment; violent attacks

Note 2: Kosovo not included (not an OSCE member country).

Note 3: Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises both Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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