



Reports

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Global Religious Freedom Index 2024–2026: Western Democracies

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



International Institute
for Religious Freedom

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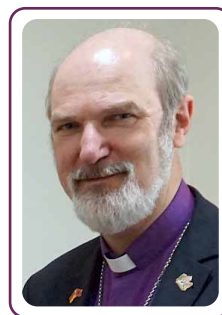
We understand Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental and interdependent human right as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In line with CCPR General Comment No. 22, we view FoRB as a broad and multidimensional concept that needs to be protected for all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



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Global Religious Freedom Index 2024–2026: Western Democracies

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Key facts

Most hostile religious policy 2023: France		
Top 5 government religious support 2023: 1. Denmark 2. Iceland 3. Sweden 4. United Kingdom 5. Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway		Mean government religious support 2023: 9.3 (maximum score 59) Increase government religious support 1990-2023: -2.7 %
Top 5 government discrimination against religious minorities 2023: 1. Germany 2. Greece 3. France 4. Austria 5. Denmark, Norway, Switzerland		Mean government discrimination against religious minorities 2023: 14.15 (maximum score 177) Increase government discrimination against religious minorities 1990–2023: 65 %
Top 5 government regulation of the majority religion 2023: 1. France 2. Denmark 3. Germany, Greece 4. United Kingdom		Mean government regulation of the majority religion 2023: 5.93 (maximum score 156) Increase government regulation of the majority religion 1990–2023: 20.3 %
Top 5 societal discrimination against religious minorities 2023: 1. France 2. Germany 3. Belgium 4. Austria, United States		Mean societal discrimination against religious minorities 2023: 12.48 (maximum score 102) Increase societal discrimination against religious minorities 1990–2023: 126.2 %
Top 5 Anti-Christian hate crime 2023 (OSCE): 1. Germany (104) 2. Spain (64) 3. Italy (52) 4. France (49) 5. United States (48)	Top 5 Anti-Muslim hate crime 2023 (OSCE): 1. Germany (95) 2. Austria (42) 3. France (21) 4. Netherlands (16) 5. Belgium (12)	Top 5 Anti-Semitic hate crime 2023 (OSCE): 1. United States (1466) 2. Netherlands (136) 3. Italy (31) 4. Switzerland (25) 5. Austria (21)

Executive summary

- This report analyzes the status of religious freedom in 27 Western democracies, using 2023 data from Round 4 of the Religion and State Project. It evaluates religious freedom across four core dimensions: the separation of religion and state, government discrimination against religious minorities, regulation of all religions (including majority faiths), and societal discrimination, including physical violence.
- While all Western democracies uphold constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion or belief, state favoritism toward historical majority churches (especially Catholic and Protestant traditions) remains widespread. These privileges are often symbolic but can influence state funding, education, and public representation.
- Government discrimination against religious minorities has increased steadily since 1990. Restrictions on religious symbols, faith-based education, and public expression have grown under the banner of neutrality or social cohesion.
- Regulation of religion has expanded in most Catholic-majority countries, reflecting a gradual shift toward more managed and bureaucratic oversight of religious institutions. Even when motivated by equality or security concerns, such regulation can limit religious autonomy.
- Societal discrimination has more than doubled since 1990, with notable spikes in antisemitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian sentiment. These hostilities occur across both highly secular and religious societies, suggesting that polarization, migration dynamics, and online hate speech now drive much of the intolerance.
- Physical violence related to religion remains relatively rare but persists at measurable levels in countries such as France, Germany, the United States, and Australia. These cases highlight that legal protection alone does not prevent the escalation of prejudice into aggression.
- France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and the United States stand out for combining robust secular traditions with relatively high levels of both governmental restriction and societal hostility—revealing a growing tension between legal neutrality and cultural exclusion.
- In contrast, Nordic countries and smaller Western European states (such as Iceland, Luxembourg, and Malta) demonstrate low levels of both state interference and societal discrimination, illustrating that sustained religious freedom is compatible with strong secular governance.
- Overall, the findings suggest that Western democracies are moving toward a model in which religion is increasingly regulated and socially contested. Safeguarding the future of religious freedom will depend on ensuring that state neutrality does not evolve into cultural marginalization, and that democratic societies remain capable of protecting both religious and non-religious beliefs equally.

1. Introduction

This report draws on the newly released Round 4 data from the Religion and State Project to assess the state of religious freedom in Western democracies in 2023, while tracing changes since 1990. It examines how governments structure their relationship with religion, how they discriminate against or regulate religious communities, and how societal actors express prejudice or hostility toward minorities. By integrating state-level and societal indicators, the analysis reveals the evolving dynamics of religious pluralism in contexts long considered secure and liberal.

The findings highlight that many Western democracies display signs of increasing regulation, selective discrimination, and mounting societal hostility. The boundaries between secularism and cultural religion are being renegotiated, and the meaning of neutrality is under strain. Understanding these trends is crucial not only for scholars and policymakers but also for civil society and faith communities seeking to sustain inclusive democracies. This report identifies where religious freedom is most resilient, where it is eroding, and what patterns suggest the future trajectory of pluralism in the democratic West.

2. Separation of religion and state

While Western democracies are often associated with secular governance and the liberal ideal of religious neutrality, the data reveal enduring institutional ties between governments and dominant religious traditions. In most cases, these arrangements reflect long-standing cultural and legal relationships. Understanding how states engage (or refrain from engaging) with religious institutions is essential for assessing the structural conditions under which religious freedom is exercised.

Figure 1. Religion-state relations in Western Democracies, 2023

Religion-State Relations	Majority religion		
	Catholic	Protestant Extended or General Christian	Other ¹
Official Religion			
State Controlled Religion, Positive Attitude: The state both supports a religion and substantially controls its institutions but has a positive attitude toward this religion		Denmark	Greece

¹ The other category for this region applies to Greece and Cyprus (TRNC) to refer to their Orthodox and Sunni majorities respectively.

Active State Religion: State actively supports religion but the religion is not mandatory and the state does not dominate the official religion's institutions.

Liechtenstein

Finland
Iceland
United Kingdom

No Official Religion

Preferred Religion: While the state does not officially endorse a religion, one religion serves unofficially as the state's religion receiving unique recognition or benefits. Minority religions all receive similar treatment to each other.

Andorra
Ireland
Malta,

Norway,
Sweden

Cyprus (TRNC)

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.

Italy
Portugal
Spain

Cyprus (ROC)

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

Austria

Germany
Switzerland

Cooperation: The state falls short of endorsing a particular religion but certain religions benefit from state support more than others.

Belgium
Luxembourg

Supportive: The state supports all religions more or less equally.

Luxembourg

New Zealand

<i>Accommodation</i> : Official separation of church and state and the state has a benevolent or neutral attitude toward religion in general.	Australia Canada Netherlands United States
<i>Separationist</i> : Official separation of Church and state and the state is slightly hostile toward religion.	France

The data in Figure 1 show that the majority of Western democracies continue to maintain some form of cooperation or preference toward specific religions, despite formal commitments to secular governance. Only a small number of countries (most notably France, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia) institutionalize a separationist or accommodationist model where the state refrains from privileging any religious institution. In contrast, most European states operate within systems of *established* or *cooperative* religion, where governments provide varying degrees of recognition, funding, or administrative partnership to specific faith traditions. This pattern reflects the historical entrenchment of religious institutions within national identity frameworks and welfare systems.

Within this spectrum, northern and western Europe exhibit the highest diversity of arrangements. Nordic countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Norway maintain official or semi-official Lutheran churches, while others, including Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, employ multi-tiered systems recognizing several Christian denominations. Southern and Mediterranean states (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Malta) preserve concordats or constitutional acknowledgments of Catholicism. Even when formal establishment has ended, historical church-state ties persist through financial and administrative channels. Secularization, in practice, does not necessarily imply institutional detachment but often coexistence between religious heritage and liberal democratic governance.

Figure 2. Top 10 religious support in Western Democracies, 2023

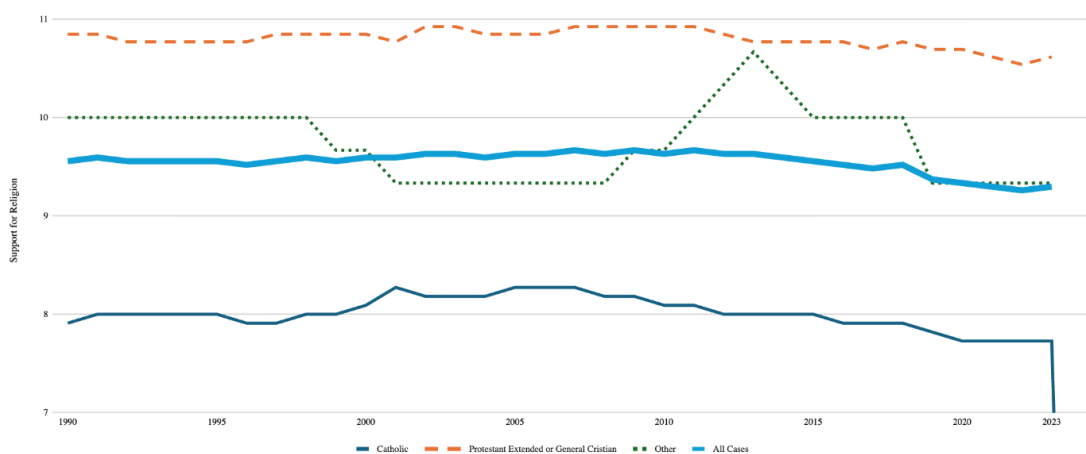
Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Denmark	Lutheran	17
2	Iceland	Lutheran	16
3	Sweden	Western Christian	15
4	United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	13
5	Finland	Lutheran	12
	Germany	Western Christian	12

	Greece	Greek Orthodox	12
	Italy	Catholic	12
	Norway	Lutheran	12
10	Spain	Catholic	10

The ranking of countries by government religious support (Figure 2) highlights the continued centrality of Lutheran and Catholic traditions in shaping state-religion relations. Denmark and Iceland top the list, each with highly institutionalized state churches receiving public funding and state oversight. The next tier (Sweden, the United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, and Spain) demonstrates that even where selective disestablishment has occurred, governments still engage religion through education, taxation mechanisms, and legal privileges. In these states, religious institutions often perform quasi-public functions such as marriage registration, moral education, and social assistance.

The data also suggest that scores of high religious support are not necessarily correlated with reduced pluralism or restricted freedom. Some of the top-ranking countries are liberal democracies with strong protections for minority religions. Rather than overt favoritism, state support typically takes the form of historical accommodation: financial subsidies, recognition of church tax systems, or participation in consultative bodies. Nevertheless, these arrangements can create symbolic hierarchies that reinforce majority religions' privileged status in public life. From a policy perspective, the persistence of state support structures invites ongoing scrutiny regarding transparency, equal access to benefits, and the secular legitimacy of public institutions.

Figure 3. Support for religion in Western Democracies, 1990-2023



As Figure 3 shows, over the past three decades, levels of government support for religion in most Western democracies have shown remarkable continuity. Average scores have remained close to 9.3 out of a possible 59, with only a marginal overall decline of around 2.7 % between 1990 and 2023. Protestant-majority countries have consistently registered the highest support levels (around 10.6), followed by states with “Other” religious majorities (approx-

mately 9.3)² and Catholic-majority countries (about 7.7). These figures suggest that most Western democracies continue to maintain enduring institutional relationships with religious organizations, often rooted in historical concordats, church tax systems, or religious education frameworks.

The slight downward trend is observable across all categories but remains modest, particularly among Protestant-majority states (–2.1 %) and Catholic-majority states (–2.3 %). The most noticeable reduction is found among countries classified under “Other” religions (–6.7 %), though this group represents a small subset of Western democracies. Such minor fluctuations point to incremental policy adjustments, such as diversifying state funding criteria or introducing more inclusive regulations for religious education.

Norway had the largest decrease among Protestant-majority countries. Evangelical Lutherans make up 67 % of the population, with Islam and Roman Catholic each comprising 3 %. The church of Norway, the Evangelical-Lutheran church, was the established church until a constitutional change in 2017 (International Lutheran Council, 2017). Some notable changes occurred in school related laws. In 2023 a law was passed that banned religious activity of all religions in public schools. Students must apply for an exemption to participate in religious activities at school (Daily Northern, 2024).

The Catholic majority state with the largest change was Ireland.³ Pubs were not allowed to open on Good Friday until 2018 and are still not able to open on Christmas day. The constitution was amended in 2018 to removed blasphemy as a punishable offence, though the law has not been applied since 1855 (Graham-Harrison, 2018). Abortion laws were changed in 2019 to allow the procedure until 12 weeks into pregnancy. The government’s approach to schooling changed in 2016 where primary schools not under patronage of religious groups could not discriminate admission based on religious grounds. This matches the existing law which prohibits discrimination in admissions based on religious beliefs in secondary schools.

In Greece, the Greek Orthodox church makes up the largest religious tradition with 81–90 % of the population. This church body has the status of “prevailing religion” in the constitution. While multiple attempts to create legal separation between church and state have repeatedly failed, the country has added protections through anti-discrimination and anti-hate speech laws. Greece also abolished blasphemy laws in 2019, providing greater freedom of expression (End Blasphemy Laws, 2019). The Greek Orthodox church retains its privileged status, though in 2018 the parliament passed legislation to gives greater freedom of applying Sharia law in the Western Thrace region (HUDOC, 2018).

² As mentioned in the previous footnote, Greece and Cyprus (TRNC) are the only countries in this category referring to the Orthodox Christian and Sunni Muslim traditions respectively.

³ All other Catholic-majority countries had no change except for Spain (second largest change) and Portugal (minimal change).

3. Government discrimination against religious minorities

Despite robust human rights frameworks and a strong commitment to pluralism, government discrimination against religious minorities remains a persistent feature in many Western democracies. Such discrimination typically takes indirect or administrative forms rather than overt repression. It includes restrictions on religious attire, limits on ritual practices, unequal access to public funding, or regulatory hurdles for minority organizations. While these measures are often justified on grounds of neutrality or security, they nonetheless reflect the enduring tension between secular governance and the public visibility of religion.

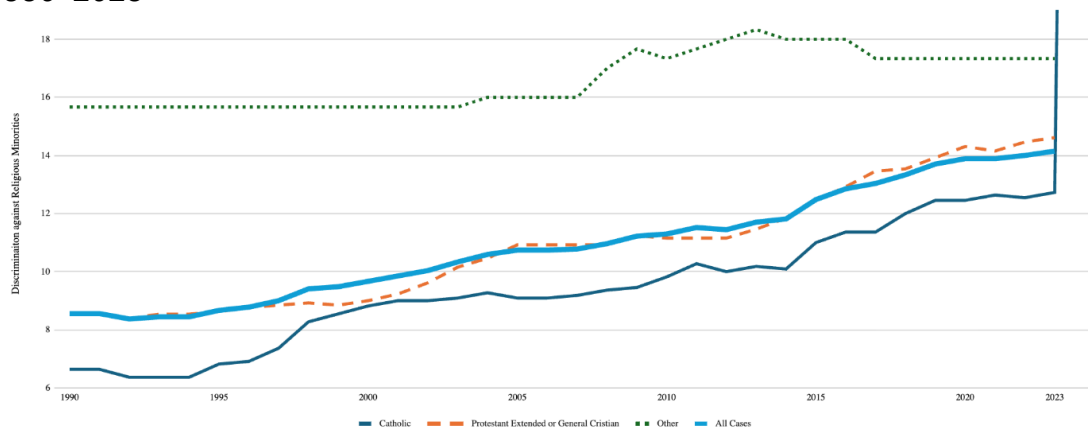
Figure 4. Top 10 religious discrimination against minorities in Western Democracies, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	Germany	Western Christian	37
2	Greece	Greek Orthodox	28
3	France	Catholic	26
4	Austria	Catholic	22
	Denmark	Lutheran	22
	Norway	Lutheran	22
	Switzerland	Western Christian	22
8	Belgium	Catholic	21
9	Finland	Lutheran	20
10	Italy	Catholic	17

In 2023, the countries displaying the highest levels of government discrimination were Germany, Greece, France, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, and Italy (Figure 4). Their elevated scores point mainly to institutionalized forms of unequal treatment embedded in administrative practice. Examples include restrictions on ritual slaughter and religious attire (notably in France, Belgium, and Denmark), limitations on proselytism or public funding for minority groups, and differential treatment of clergy or burial practices.

A closer look at these countries reveals that discrimination tends to occur where state secularism intersects with national identity politics. In France and Belgium, for example, *laïcité* has been interpreted as requiring the exclusion of overt religious expression from public institutions, particularly schools and civil service positions. In others, such as Greece or Denmark, constitutional recognition of a majority religion indirectly disadvantages minority groups through preferential funding, ceremonial privileges, or access to state media.

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



The longitudinal data in Figure 5 confirm a clear upward trend in government discrimination across the region. The mean score for all Western democracies rose from 8.6 in 1990 to 14.2 in 2023—an increase of roughly 65 percent. Catholic-majority countries recorded an average rise from 6.6 to 12.7, and Protestant or broadly Christian states from 8.5 to 14.6. The most pronounced levels are consistently found among states categorized under “Other” majority religions (around 17 points), though this subgroup is small. This overall escalation suggests that, despite stable church-state structures, governments have become progressively more interventionist in regulating religious expression, often in response to migration, terrorism, and social integration challenges since the early 2000s. This might also be due to the increased politicization of religious identities.

These trends highlight a paradox: Western democracies have expanded legal protections for equality and human rights while simultaneously introducing more restrictive regulations on religion. Policy debates over secularism, national security, and social cohesion have produced laws that, though seemingly neutral, disproportionately affect Muslim, Jewish, and smaller Christian minorities. It seems the state increasingly defines acceptable boundaries of religious practice.

France remains majority Catholic, though they only make up 48 % of the population. Catholics are followed by Muslims 4 %, Protestants, 3 %, Buddhists 2 % and Jesus at 1 %. The French perspective on separating church and state, going back to 1905, is slightly hostile towards religion. The law guarantees freedom to practice religion but allows restrictions for public order. Muslim minorities largely come from formerly colonized countries. While *laïcité* applies to all religions, cultural expressions of the Catholic tradition dominate public spaces, including the reconstruction of Notre Dame. Changes toward minority religions are connected to rising violence and Islamic extremism. Many of these changes happened in 2021 with the passing of a comprehensive law that increased oversight of religious associations, implemented stricter controls on homeschooling, and enhanced measures against online hate speech (Catholic News Agency, 2021). That same year another law was passed to explicitly combat Islamic extremism (Foreign Policy, 2021).

The largest religious affiliation by population in Germany is Catholic at 25 % followed by Protestant at 23 %. A state church is prohibited while any registered religious group has the right to receive public subsidies. Contributions from the government have gone to Roman Catholic and Protestant churches with no other group receiving state subsidies. Jews and Muslims groups have received state funding and support for cemeteries, places of worship, and schools. Religious dress has been restricted in public space for Muslim head scarves and veils (Foreign Policy, 2021). Some Muslim groups have been regulated to restrict Islamic extremism (Reuters, 2021).

Switzerland presents as a strong Christian majority mostly between Catholics (41 % of the population) and Protestants (30 %). Church and state regulation from the 199 constitution defers religion and state relationships to the internal Cantons, though the wider confederation of Cantons may take steps to preserve public peace between different religious communities. More recent restrictions are on Muslims (6 %). The construction of minarets was prohibited in 2009 (U.S. Department of State, 2024). In 2021 the country prohibited face coverings in public and forcing a gender to cover their face on the grounds of their sex (AP News, 2023). Exceptions can be made but are restricted to health, safety, weather conditions, and local custom. The federal government has also sought to support religious minorities through funding awareness programs for Jewish and Muslim communities and other minority religious institutions.

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

Western democracies also regulate the activities of religious organizations through legal, administrative, and financial frameworks. These regulations typically aim to safeguard transparency, equality, or public order rather than to suppress religious life. Nevertheless, they delineate the boundaries of acceptable religious activity and can significantly influence the autonomy of faith communities. Measuring such regulation provides insight into how far the state intervenes in religious affairs, whether to control, protect, or standardize them.

Figure 6. Top 10 religious regulation in Western Democracies, 2023

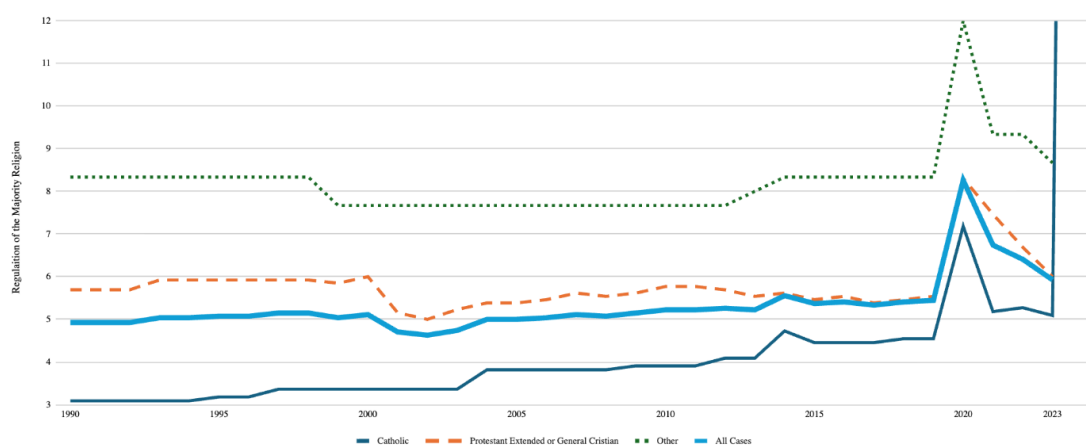
Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	France	Catholic	18
2	Denmark	Lutheran	16
3	Germany	Western Christian	12
	Greece	Greek Orthodox	12
5	United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	10
6	Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC)	Sunni Muslim	9
	Portugal	Catholic	9

8	Luxembourg	Catholic	7
9	Belgium	Catholic	6
	Finland	Lutheran	6
	Sweden	Western Christian	6
	Switzerland	Western Christian	6
10	Cyprus, ROC (Greek)	Church of Cyprus	5
	Norway	Lutheran	5

In 2023, France, Denmark, Germany, Greece, the United Kingdom, and the Turkish Cypriot jurisdiction recorded the highest levels of government regulation of religion (Figure 6). This pattern reflects the coexistence of contrasting models. In France, the state restricts public religious expression in the name of neutrality. In northern and central Europe, the state formally cooperates with churches through registration, tax collection, or oversight mechanisms. The data indicate that even highly secular democracies, such as France and the Netherlands, exercise notable control over the conditions under which religious organizations may operate, including registration requirements, funding eligibility, and religious education standards.

The prevalence of regulation across diverse governance models suggests that state oversight has become an intrinsic feature of religious governance in Western democracies. While such regulation is often framed as guaranteeing equality or accountability, it can inadvertently constrain religious pluralism. For example, requiring official approval for clerical appointments or restricting foreign religious funding may protect national security but also limit transnational religious connections. Thus, state regulation operates as a double-edged sword—balancing legitimate public interests with potential encroachments on religious autonomy.

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



The longitudinal data (Figure 7) show that overall regulation of religion has increased by roughly 20 percent between 1990 and 2023, with the average score for all Western democracies rising from 4.9 to 5.9. The growth is especially notable in Catholic-majority countries, where regulation levels expanded by nearly 65 percent, from 3.1 to 5.1. Protestant or broadly Christian countries saw a much smaller increase (from 5.7 to 6.0), while countries categorized under “Other” religions remain the most regulated, averaging 8.7. These patterns indicate that even in societies historically protective of religious liberty, governments have progressively introduced new oversight mechanisms—often in response to the diversification of their religious landscapes and emerging concerns about extremism and social cohesion.

However, the upward trend has not been linear. After relatively stable scores through the 1990s and 2000s, regulation rose sharply after 2015, reflecting new laws addressing hate speech, religious education standards, and foreign influence in religious institutions. This acceleration aligns with broader debates over radicalization, online hate, and the transparency of faith-based organizations. The clear spike of regulation of religion around 2020 came from government responses to the covid-19 pandemic which limited the size of groups and events.

We have previously discussed regulations of religious dress and symbols due to France’s *laïcité*. Like many other countries, in 2020 many religious services were closed during the pandemic. France has had the largest increase of religious regulation in this region with more than triple the increase of the next country. The restriction of home school education, the promotion of secularism in public settings, and limits on places of worship contribute to France’s high score (Foltzenlogel, 2023). Given the state’s declaration of ownership over all religious buildings constructed before 1905, many Catholic churches and Cathedrals are protected. The same is not true for places of worship constructed after this date, largely impacting minority religions. This scrutiny led to 21 mosques being closed in 2021 and increased regulation on religious associations aimed to prevent foreign influence (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Germany is second only to France in the increase of regulations of religion. Religious symbols and dress have been targeted by law enforcement. Much of this regulation happens at the regional level which facilitates religious groups being registered and recognized. Increased scrutiny around the ISIS phenomenon led to raids on mosques in different parts of the country on charges of radicalizing and collecting funds for terrorist activities (DW, 2015). The state government monitors several transnational Islamic groups with bans or restrictions on Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ansaar International and Hezbollah.

There are several countries that have decreased government regulation of religion. Decreases are evident in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden which are all have citizens with Protestant majority religious affiliation. These changes largely stem from laws and regulations creating distance from state churches and extending recognition and monetary to religious minorities.

5. Societal discrimination against religious minorities (general)

While government policies shape the formal boundaries of religious freedom, societal discrimination encompasses prejudice, exclusion, and hostility that originate within civil society rather than the state. It reflects the degree to which citizens tolerate religious diversity, as expressed in interpersonal relations, media discourse, and local community behavior. Tracking these trends provides insight into how effectively legal protections translate into social acceptance.

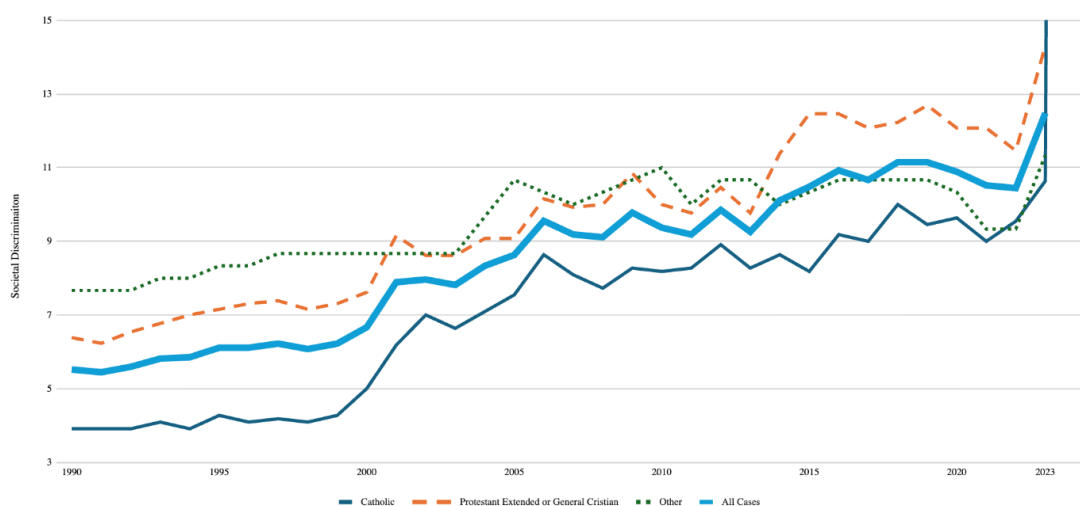
Figure 8. Top 10 societal discrimination in Western Democracies, 2023

Rank	Country	Specific Majority Religion	2023
1	France	Catholic	29
2	Germany	Western Christian	26
3	Belgium	Catholic	23
4	Austria	Catholic	21
	United States	Extended Protestant	21
6	Canada	Western Christian	20
	United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	20
8	Australia	Western Christian	19
9	Greece	Greek Orthodox	17
10	Switzerland	Western Christian	15

In 2023, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Greece, and Switzerland reported the highest levels of societal discrimination against religious minorities (Figure 8). These are among the most economically advanced and politically liberal countries in the world, yet they exhibit significant levels of social exclusion and prejudice. In most cases, discrimination takes the form of harassment, vandalism, and verbal hostility rather than organized violence. The data suggest that societal intolerance is not confined to a few outlier cases but remains a structural feature across the Western democratic spectrum.

A closer look reveals that patterns of societal discrimination often mirror broader political and cultural debates. In France and Belgium, tensions surrounding Islam, secularism, and national identity have amplified public suspicion of visible religious symbols. In Germany and Austria, the persistence of antisemitic and anti-Muslim sentiment has been fueled by migration dynamics and political polarization. Even in Anglophone democracies such as the United States and Canada, rising online hate speech and identity-based polarization have reinforced social boundaries between religious communities. Figure 8 thus points to an enduring challenge: democratic societies that are formally inclusive may still undermine practical equality.

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



The long-term trend shown in Figure 9 indicates a dramatic increase in societal discrimination over the past three decades. The mean score for all Western democracies rose from about 5.5 in 1990 to 12.5 in 2023—an overall increase of 126 percent. The rise is especially steep among Catholic-majority countries (from 3.9 to 10.6, or 172 percent) and Protestant or generally Christian countries (from 6.4 to 14.3, or 124 percent). Even states with other majority religions experienced a substantial though smaller increase of 48 percent. This escalation demonstrates that social intolerance has expanded even as legal frameworks for equality have strengthened, suggesting that institutional reforms have not fully altered underlying public attitudes toward religious minorities.

Several factors appear to drive this growth. The post-9/11 security environment, increased migration from non-Christian regions, and the visibility of religious symbols in public spaces have all contributed to societal anxiety about religious diversity. Economic insecurity and political populism have further intensified the framing of minority religions as cultural threats. As a result, societal discrimination now represents one of the most significant obstacles to genuine religious freedom in the West.

Belgium was the country with the single largest increase from 1990 to 2023. Two of the three countries with the largest increase have a majority Catholic religious affiliation with 61 % of the population in Belgium. While the scoring of government discrimination and regulation was not as high as other examples, this country remained in the top 10 of the previous two categories. A large number of lawsuits and court cases involve issues of religious freedom which might carry over into societal unrest. Muslims were the main victims for societal unrest with regular increases of events beginning in 2015 (Easat-Daas, 2016), followed by Jews (Impact News Service, 2024). This societal unrest was undoubtedly spurred on by anti-religious minority rhetoric by political parties.

Italy tied with Norway for the second largest increase in societal discrimination. Catholic adherents have a supermajority comprising 78 % of the population.

Muslims are second at 5 % and Eastern Orthodox at 2 %. All others, including Christian Protestants and Jews are less than 1 %. Much of the societal discrimination was against the Jewish and Muslim population. This included public calls for boycotting of businesses, vandalism against religious property, anti-religious graffiti, and individual harassment.

Australia's score for societal discrimination increased by 10. The communities that received the most societal discrimination were Muslims and Jews at 3 % and 0.5 % of the population respectively. Anti-Islam pressure ranged from demonstrations and resistance to building mosques to harassment due to head scarfs. There were also a number of incidents of physical violence publicly justified by countering Islamic extremism and the war in Gaza (BBC News, 2019). Anti-Jewish pressure took the form of vandalism of Synagogues, holocaust denial, and antisemitic rhetoric.

6. Societal discrimination involving physical violence

Physical violence connected to religion remains relatively limited in Western democracies but represents the most visible form of societal hostility. While overt acts of aggression are uncommon, they reveal the persistence of tension and intolerance beneath otherwise stable democratic environments. In 2023, the data show that violent discrimination was concentrated in a small group of countries, while most others experienced either isolated incidents or none at all.

The highest levels of societal discrimination in the previous category were observed in France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, where religious minorities faced multiple forms of harassment and aggression at nontrivial intensity. Other countries followed closely, registering moderate levels of violence, typically in the form of vandalism, threats, or assaults against minority communities and their institutions. A second group of countries (including Greece, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Spain, and Sweden) showed lower but still notable degrees of tension, suggesting that religious hostility persists even in highly secularized societies.

In most smaller Western democracies (such as Andorra, the Cypriot jurisdictions, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, and New Zealand) there were no significant reports of violence involving religion in 2023. The absence of serious incidents in these countries reflects both their smaller, less diverse populations and relatively strong traditions of social cohesion. Nonetheless, low recorded levels of violence should not be equated with the absence of discrimination; in several of these societies, minorities continue to face subtle forms of exclusion and social pressure that do not manifest in physical harm.

In the United States there have been a number of violent attacks against religious minorities. The Jewish community has experienced shootings and attacks on houses of worship almost every year during the reporting period (Anti-Defamation League, 2024). This situation has been increasingly polarized after the ongoing war in Gaza and the Trump administrations public conflict with several

universities (Stripling, 2023). Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses have largely had their churches attacked or vandalized. Muslims have experienced the most violent encounters as they have been shot, and their mosques have been bombed (MPR News, 2018).

Christians have a strong majority, though Muslims have the second highest percentage of adherents in Austria. As detailed in figure 10 of the table below, Muslims receive a large number of the hate crime incidents. Austria recognized Islam as an official religion as early as 1912 but amended this law to restrict international funding of Islamic groups in 2015 to reduce Islamic radicalism (BBC News, 2015).

Much of the violence against religious minorities in the Netherlands target Muslims and Jews. This is also clear from figure 10 in the table below. A number of attacks against Muslims and Mosques were recorded in the last several years ranging from harassment and removing of religious headscarves to throwing bricks through windows and lighting mosques on fire. The disproportionate number of anti-Semitic hate crimes listed in figure 10 is most likely due to a special Dutch NGO that tracks and publishes an annual report on antisemitism each year. Some of their five major categories include physical violence like real life, vandalism, and incidents in the immediate vicinity. Other categories are aligned with social pressure like written expression and social domain. While all hate crimes put pressure on minorities, the raw numbers can be misleading. For instance, in 2023 there were 3 incidents of violence, but 52 incidents of swearing at someone or sending an insult via text message (CIDI, 2015–2023).

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

Rank	Country	Anti-Christian hate crime	Anti-Muslim hate crime	Anti-Semitic hate crime	Grand Total
1	United States of America	48	5	1466	1519
2	Germany	104	95	9	208
3	Netherlands	5	16	136	157
4	Spain	64	8	19	91
5	Austria	22	42	21	85
6	Italy	52		31	83
7	France	49	21		70
8	Switzerland	6	7	25	38
9	United Kingdom	16	1	6	23
10	Belgium	7	12	1	20

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. Because the data are drawn from official state submissions, they also reflect the strength and transparency of each country's monitoring systems, which vary considerably across the region.

According to the 2023 findings, the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands registered the highest total numbers of reported hate crime incidents involving religion, followed by Spain, Austria, Italy, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. The United States stands out sharply, with over 1,500 reported incidents, most of them antisemitic attacks, while Germany reported more than 200 cases, and the Netherlands 157. In Southern and Central Europe, incidents were more evenly distributed across anti-Christian and anti-Muslim categories, whereas in Western Europe, antisemitic offenses dominated. These variations reflect distinct national histories of interreligious tension, the salience of migration, and the visibility of religious minorities in public life.

Across all reporting countries, antisemitic hate crimes remain the most frequent, followed by anti-Christian and anti-Muslim acts. This pattern underscores that older forms of religious prejudice persist alongside newer forms of hostility tied to contemporary migration and identity debates. Importantly, the OSCE's reliance on official reporting mechanisms means that underreporting remains a serious limitation, especially in smaller or non-EU states with less developed hate crime monitoring systems. Consequently, the actual prevalence of religiously motivated violence is likely higher than the data suggest.

7. Conclusions

The 2023 analysis of religious freedom in Western democracies reveals a nuanced picture of coexistence between strong institutional protections and persistent structural inequalities. While these societies are globally recognized for their legal guarantees of freedom of religion or belief, the data show that many continue to maintain privileged relationships with historical majority religions, particularly within Catholic and Lutheran traditions. These arrangements, often embedded in national identity and welfare systems, do not necessarily violate religious liberty but perpetuate symbolic hierarchies that shape public life and influence how minority faiths are perceived and treated.

Across the region, government discrimination against religious minorities has grown steadily since 1990, reflecting a shift from passive accommodation to more assertive management of religious diversity. Restrictions on religious symbols, ritual practices, and the activities of minority clergy have increased, particularly in countries balancing secularism with multiculturalism. Regulation of religious activity has also expanded, especially in Catholic-majority states, where governments now exercise closer oversight of education, funding, and hate speech. These measures often aim to promote neutrality and social cohesion but can unintentionally narrow the space for authentic pluralism.

Societal indicators reveal an even more troubling trajectory. Since 1990, societal discrimination has more than doubled, indicating that intolerance persists despite inclusive legal frameworks. Antisemitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents remain common in the most secular and diverse democracies alike, suggesting that prejudice is fueled less by religious doctrine than by broader social anxieties linked to migration, identity, and polarization. Although physical violence remains relatively limited, data on harassment, vandalism, and hate crimes demonstrate that social hostility toward religion—especially visible minorities—remains deeply entrenched.

By tracing these long-term patterns, the Global Religious Freedom Index provides an evidence-based foundation for evaluating how democratic institutions interact with religion. The Western democracies examined here remain among the world's freest environments for belief and expression, yet the steady growth of discrimination and societal hostility highlights that no country is immune to complacency.

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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 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-Saharan Africa the number of minorities included individually increased from 160 to 243. Minorities too small to be included for minority-level coding are still included in the country-level coding.

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).⁴

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.

⁴ A full list of the variables is available at ras.thearda.com.

Appendix 2: data tables

1. Religious support index

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

Country	Specific Majority Religion	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Andorra	Catholic	6	6	6	6	6
Australia	Western Christian	6	6	7	8	7
Austria	Catholic	6	6	6	6	6
Belgium	Catholic	7	7	7	7	7
Canada	Western Christian	5	4	4	4	5
Cyprus, ROC (Greek)	Church of Cyprus	9	8	8	8	8
Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC)	Sunni Muslim	7	7	7	8	8
Denmark	Lutheran	16	16	16	16	17
Finland	Lutheran	12	12	12	13	12
France	Catholic	6	6	6	6	6
Germany	Western Christian	11	11	11	12	12
Greece	Greek Orthodox	14	14	14	12	12
Iceland	Lutheran	17	18	18	16	16
Ireland	Catholic	12	11	11	9	9
Italy	Catholic	11	12	12	12	12
Liechtenstein	Catholic	6	6	6	6	6
Luxembourg	Catholic	5	6	6	6	6
Malta	Catholic	9	10	10	9	9
Netherlands	Lutheran	8	8	8	8	8
New Zealand	Western Christian	8	8	8	7	6
Norway	Lutheran	15	15	15	12	12
Portugal	Catholic	7	7	8	8	8
Spain	Catholic	12	12	11	10	10
Sweden	Western Christian	17	17	15	15	15
Switzerland	Western Christian	10	10	9	9	9
United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	13	13	13	13	13
United States	Extended Protestant	3	3	6	6	6

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Catholic	Protestant Extended or General Christian	Other	All Cases
1990	7.91	10.85	10.00	9.56
	8.00	10.85	10.00	9.59
	8.00	10.77	10.00	9.56
	8.00	10.77	10.00	9.56
	8.00	10.77	10.00	9.56
1995	8.00	10.77	10.00	9.56
	7.91	10.77	10.00	9.52
	7.91	10.85	10.00	9.56
	8.00	10.85	10.00	9.59
	8.00	10.85	9.67	9.56
2000	8.09	10.85	9.67	9.59
	8.27	10.77	9.33	9.59
	8.18	10.92	9.33	9.63
	8.18	10.92	9.33	9.63
	8.18	10.85	9.33	9.59
2005	8.27	10.85	9.33	9.63
	8.27	10.85	9.33	9.63
	8.27	10.92	9.33	9.67
	8.18	10.92	9.33	9.63
	8.18	10.92	9.67	9.67
2010	8.09	10.92	9.67	9.63
	8.09	10.92	10.00	9.67
	8.00	10.85	10.33	9.63
	8.00	10.77	10.67	9.63
	8.00	10.77	10.33	9.59
2015	8.00	10.77	10.00	9.56
	7.91	10.77	10.00	9.52
	7.91	10.69	10.00	9.48
	7.91	10.77	10.00	9.52
	7.82	10.69	9.33	9.37
2020	7.73	10.69	9.33	9.33

	7.73	10.62	9.33	9.30
	7.73	10.54	9.33	9.26
2023	7.73	10.62	9.33	9.30
increase in % 1990–2023	-2.30	-2.13	-6.67	-2.71

Most common variables (2023)

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

Variable	Countries
Government funding of religious primary/secondary schools or religious education programs in non-public schools (66.67 %)	Australia; Austria; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Italy; Luxembourg; Malta; New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; United States
Official government positions, salaries, or other funding for clergy (excluding teacher salaries) (70.37 %)	Belgium; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Finland; France; Greece; Iceland; Ireland; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; United Kingdom; United States
Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites (62.96 %)	Australia; Belgium; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Italy; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; United Kingdom
Religious education present in public schools (85.19 %)	Andorra; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Denmark; Finland; Germany; Greece; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Liechtenstein; Malta; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; United Kingdom
Registration process for religious organizations different from other nonprofits (55.56 %)	Austria; Belgium; Denmark; Finland; France; Greece; Iceland; Italy; Netherlands; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; United States

2. Religious discrimination index

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

Country	Specific Majority Religion	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Andorra	Catholic	7	7	7	8	8
Australia	Western Christian	1	1	2	2	3
Austria	Catholic	7	16	17	25	22
Belgium	Catholic	8	13	13	22	21
Canada	Western Christian	1	1	1	8	7
Cyprus, ROC (Greek)	Church of Cyprus	11	11	13	11	11
Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC)	Sunni Muslim	10	10	12	13	13
Denmark	Lutheran	6	6	10	22	22
Finland	Lutheran	16	17	18	20	20
France	Catholic	11	18	19	19	26
Germany	Western Christian	26	26	31	37	37
Greece	Greek Orthodox	26	26	27	28	28
Iceland	Lutheran	7	8	8	8	8
Ireland	Catholic	5	5	5	6	6
Italy	Catholic	8	13	17	17	17
Liechtenstein	Catholic	3	3	6	7	7
Luxembourg	Catholic	0	0	0	6	6
Malta	Catholic	7	7	9	9	9
Netherlands	Lutheran	0	0	2	7	8
New Zealand	Western Christian	0	1	1	3	3
Norway	Lutheran	17	19	19	22	22
Portugal	Catholic	6	6	6	6	6
Spain	Catholic	11	9	9	12	12
Sweden	Western Christian	10	10	12	13	16
Switzerland	Western Christian	12	13	18	22	22
United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	13	13	17	15	15
United States	Extended Protestant	2	2	6	7	7

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Catholic	Protestant Extended or General Christian	Other	All Cases
1990	6.64	8.54	15.67	8.56
	6.64	8.54	15.67	8.56
	6.36	8.38	15.67	8.37
	6.36	8.54	15.67	8.44
	6.36	8.54	15.67	8.44
1995	6.82	8.62	15.67	8.67
	6.91	8.77	15.67	8.78
	7.36	8.85	15.67	9.00
	8.27	8.92	15.67	9.41
	8.55	8.85	15.67	9.48
2000	8.82	9.00	15.67	9.67
	9.00	9.23	15.67	9.85
	9.00	9.62	15.67	10.04
	9.09	10.15	15.67	10.33
	9.27	10.46	16.00	10.59
2005	9.09	10.92	16.00	10.74
	9.09	10.92	16.00	10.74
	9.18	10.92	16.00	10.78
	9.36	10.92	17.00	10.96
	9.45	11.23	17.67	11.22
2010	9.82	11.15	17.33	11.30
	10.27	11.15	17.67	11.52
	10.00	11.15	18.00	11.44
	10.18	11.46	18.33	11.70
	10.09	11.85	18.00	11.81
2015	11.00	12.46	18.00	12.48
	11.36	12.92	18.00	12.85
	11.36	13.46	17.33	13.04
	12.00	13.54	17.33	13.33
	12.45	13.92	17.33	13.70
2020	12.45	14.31	17.33	13.89
	12.64	14.15	17.33	13.89

	12.55	14.46	17.33	14.00
2023	12.73	14.62	17.33	14.15
	91.78	71.17	10.64	65.37

Most common variables (2023)

The following 7 types of discrimination were present in at least 40 % of countries.

Restrictions on ritual slaughter (48.15 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Andorra; Germany; New Zealand
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Belgium; Denmark; Finland; Luxembourg; Malta; Sweden; Switzerland
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	Iceland; Liechtenstein; Norway

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Restrictions on observance of religious laws concerning burial (40.74 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Belgium; Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; Finland; Germany; Greece; Liechtenstein; Switzerland
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Andorra; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Malta

Restrictions on wearing religious symbols/clothing by public employees or in schools (44.44 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Canada; Denmark; Ireland; Malta; Spain; Sweden; United Kingdom
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Belgium; France; Germany; Luxembourg; Norway

Restrictions on building, repairing and/or maintaining places of worship (66.67 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Australia; Belgium; Canada; Finland; France; Germany; Iceland; Malta; Spain
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Austria; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; Greece; Italy; Switzerland; United States
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	Andorra

Restricted access of minority clergy to military bases compared to the majority religion (40.74 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Italy; Spain; Sweden; United Kingdom; United States
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Germany; Greece; Portugal; Switzerland
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	Finland; Norway

Restrictions on proselytizing by foreign clergy or missionaries (48.15 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Andorra; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Germany; Italy; Liechtenstein
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Austria; Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; France; Greece; Iceland; Switzerland; United Kingdom

Anti-religious propaganda in official/semi-official government publications (47.74 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Finland; Italy; Sweden
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Denmark; France; Germany; Switzerland

3. Religious regulation index

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

Country	Specific Majority Religion	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Andorra	Catholic	2	2	2	6	4
Australia	Western Christian	1	1	1	5	3
Austria	Catholic	2	2	2	6	2
Belgium	Catholic	3	3	4	8	6
Canada	Western Christian	3	3	3	9	5
Cyprus, ROC (Greek)	Church of Cyprus	5	5	5	9	5
Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC)	Sunni Muslim	9	9	9	12	9
Denmark	Lutheran	15	15	16	16	16
Finland	Lutheran	9	9	7	6	6
France	Catholic	5	5	10	17	18
Germany	Western Christian	8	8	10	14	12
Greece	Greek Orthodox	11	9	9	15	12
Iceland	Lutheran	7	6	4	8	4
Ireland	Catholic	1	1	1	6	2
Italy	Catholic	1	1	1	5	1
Liechtenstein	Catholic	4	4	4	4	4
Luxembourg	Catholic	5	7	7	11	7
Malta	Catholic	2	2	2	2	2
Netherlands	Lutheran	1	3	3	2	2
New Zealand	Western Christian	1	1	1	5	1
Norway	Lutheran	6	7	9	6	5
Portugal	Catholic	9	9	9	13	9
Spain	Catholic	0	1	1	1	1
Sweden	Western Christian	9	11	6	6	6
Switzerland	Western Christian	7	7	5	10	6
United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	6	6	9	15	10
United States	Extended Protestant	1	1	1	6	2

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Catholic	Protestant Extended or General Christian	Other	All Cases
1990	3.09	5.69	8.33	4.93
	3.09	5.69	8.33	4.93
	3.09	5.69	8.33	4.93
	3.09	5.92	8.33	5.04
	3.09	5.92	8.33	5.04
1995	3.18	5.92	8.33	5.07
	3.18	5.92	8.33	5.07
	3.36	5.92	8.33	5.15
	3.36	5.92	8.33	5.15
	3.36	5.85	7.67	5.04
2000	3.36	6.00	7.67	5.11
	3.36	5.15	7.67	4.70
	3.36	5.00	7.67	4.63
	3.36	5.23	7.67	4.74
	3.82	5.38	7.67	5.00
2005	3.82	5.38	7.67	5.00
	3.82	5.46	7.67	5.04
	3.82	5.62	7.67	5.11
	3.82	5.54	7.67	5.07
	3.91	5.62	7.67	5.15
2010	3.91	5.77	7.67	5.22
	3.91	5.77	7.67	5.22
	4.09	5.69	7.67	5.26
	4.09	5.54	8.00	5.22
	4.73	5.62	8.33	5.56
2015	4.45	5.46	8.33	5.37
	4.45	5.54	8.33	5.41
	4.45	5.38	8.33	5.33
	4.55	5.46	8.33	5.41
	4.55	5.54	8.33	5.44
2020	7.18	8.31	12.00	8.26

	5.18	7.46	9.33	6.74
	5.27	6.69	9.33	6.41
2023	5.09	6.00	8.67	5.93
increase in % 1990–2023	64.71	5.41	4.00	20.30

Most common variables (2023)

Only 3 variables were present in 20 % of countries or more.

The government appoints (code as 3) or must approve (code as 2) clerical appointments or somehow takes part in the appointment process (code as 1) (22.22 %)

Score	Description	Countries
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish); Denmark; France; Luxembourg; United Kingdom
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	Greece

Restrictions on religious-based hate speech (81.48 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Australia; Austria; Italy; Netherlands; New Zealand; Spain
2	The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice. The activity may also be sharply restricted for some, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for some minorities.	Andorra; Belgium; Canada; Denmark; Finland; Greece; Iceland; Malta; Norway; Switzerland
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	France; Germany; Liechtenstein; Portugal; Sweden; United Kingdom

Government controls/influences the instructors or content of rel. education in public schools (25.93 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.	Finland; Liechtenstein; Norway; Switzerland
3	The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this practice for most or all minorities.	Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Denmark; Greece

4. Societal discrimination index*Country scores (1990, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023)*

Country	Specific Majority Religion	1990	2000	2010	2020	2023
Andorra	Catholic	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	Western Christian	9	9	10	12	19
Austria	Catholic	15	17	19	19	21
Belgium	Catholic	5	7	20	21	23
Canada	Western Christian	10	14	14	17	20
Cyprus, ROC (Greek)	Church of Cyprus	5	6	11	8	10
Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC)	Sunni Muslim	6	6	6	6	7
Denmark	Lutheran	4	4	6	11	11
Finland	Lutheran	1	5	8	6	8
France	Catholic	19	20	23	26	29
Germany	Western Christian	20	24	24	23	26
Greece	Greek Orthodox	12	14	16	17	17
Iceland	Lutheran	0	0	0	3	2
Ireland	Catholic	0	0	1	2	3
Italy	Catholic	0	5	10	9	13
Liechtenstein	Catholic	1	1	5	5	5
Luxembourg	Catholic	0	0	1	5	4
Malta	Catholic	0	2	2	2	2
Netherlands	Lutheran	6	6	8	11	10

New Zealand	Western Christian	1	1	1	3	7
Norway	Lutheran	1	1	5	10	14
Portugal	Catholic	1	1	1	4	5
Spain	Catholic	2	2	8	13	12
Sweden	Western Christian	4	5	11	16	13
Switzerland	Western Christian	5	6	10	14	15
United Kingdom	Extended Protestant	10	12	16	16	20
United States	Extended Protestant	12	12	17	15	21

Means by year (1990–2023)

	Catholic	Protestant Extended or General Christian	Other	All Cases
1990	3.91	6.38	7.67	5.52
	3.91	6.23	7.67	5.44
	3.91	6.54	7.67	5.59
	4.09	6.77	8.00	5.81
	3.91	7.00	8.00	5.85
1995	4.27	7.15	8.33	6.11
	4.09	7.31	8.33	6.11
	4.18	7.38	8.67	6.22
	4.09	7.15	8.67	6.07
	4.27	7.31	8.67	6.22
2000	5.00	7.62	8.67	6.67
	6.18	9.15	8.67	7.89
	7.00	8.62	8.67	7.96
	6.64	8.62	8.67	7.81
	7.09	9.08	9.67	8.33
2005	7.55	9.08	10.67	8.63
	8.64	10.15	10.33	9.56
	8.09	9.92	10.00	9.19
	7.73	10.00	10.33	9.11
	8.27	10.85	10.67	9.78
2010	8.18	10.00	11.00	9.37
	8.27	9.77	10.00	9.19

	8.91	10.46	10.67	9.85
	8.27	9.77	10.67	9.26
	8.64	11.38	10.00	10.11
2015	8.18	12.46	10.33	10.48
	9.18	12.46	10.67	10.93
	9.00	12.08	10.67	10.67
	10.00	12.23	10.67	11.15
	9.45	12.69	10.67	11.15
2020	9.64	12.08	10.33	10.89
	9.00	12.08	9.33	10.52
	9.55	11.46	9.33	10.44
2023	10.64	14.31	11.33	12.48
increase in % 1990–2023	172.09	124.10	47.83	126.17

Most common variables (2023)

Variables present in 60 % or more of cases.

Instances of societal economic discrimination against minority religions in the workplace (74.07 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	Austria; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Denmark; Finland; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Portugal; Spain; Switzerland; United Kingdom
2	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of one or a few minorities but not most, or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	Belgium; France; Germany; Sweden; United States

Vandalism against religious property including places of worship, community centers, schools, and cemeteries (62.96 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	Finland; Netherlands; New Zealand; Portugal; Spain; Switzerland
2	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of one or a few minorities but not most, or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Denmark; France; Germany; Greece; United Kingdom; United States
3	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.	Cyprus (TRNC, Turkish)

Antireligious graffiti (70.37 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	Australia; Finland; Ireland; Italy; Liechtenstein; Netherlands; New Zealand; Portugal; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland
2	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of one or a few minorities but not most, or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	Austria; Belgium; Canada; France; Greece; Norway; United Kingdom; United States

Harassment of other members of religious minorities which does not reach the level of violence (77.78 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	Finland; Greece; Ireland; Italy; Liechtenstein; Luxembourg; Malta; Switzerland
2	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of one or a few minorities but not most, or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	Austria; Belgium; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Denmark; France; Germany; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Sweden; United Kingdom; United States

Organized demonstrations and public protests against religious minorities (62.96 %)

Score	Description	Countries
1	This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.	Austria; Finland; France; Greece; Ireland; Italy; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Spain
2	This action occurs on a substantial level to members of one or a few minorities but not most, or on a minor level to all or most minorities.	Australia; Canada; Cyprus (ROC, Greek); Germany; Norway; Sweden; United Kingdom; United States

5. Physical violence involving religion

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

Rank	Country	Anti-Christian hate crime	Anti-Muslim hate crime	Anti-Semitic hate crime	Grand Total
1	United States of America	48	5	1466	1519
2	Germany	104	95	9	208
3	Netherlands	5	16	136	157
4	Spain	64	8	19	91
5	Austria	22	42	21	85
6	Italy	52		31	83
7	France	49	21		70
8	Switzerland	6	7	25	38
9	United Kingdom	16	1	6	23
10	Belgium	7	12	1	20
11	Denmark	9			9
	Greece	1	2	6	9
	Norway	9			9
14	Portugal	3	1	1	5
15	Finland	4			4
	Ireland	4			4
	Sweden	4			4
18	Malta		1		1

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

Note 2: New Zealand, Australia, Andorra and Cyprus, Turkish (TRNC) not included (not OSCE member countries).

Note 3: No data for Canada, Cyprus (ROC), Iceland, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg.

Note 4: Empty cells mean no data is available.

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