



GALCON 2026

*Freedom of Religion and Religious Practices: Combating Persecution
and Promoting Equal Rights for Religious Expression*



**Human Rights Committee
Research Report**

Definitions

Freedom of Religion or Belief: The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief which is a fundamental and universal human right articulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties.¹

Religious Persecution: Systematic oppression or harassment of individuals or groups based on their religious beliefs and practices.²

Religious Discrimination: Religious discrimination is when you are treated differently because of your religion or belief, or lack of religion or belief.³

Restrictions on Religion: Laws or government actions that limit how people can worship, express, teach, convert, or practice their faith.

Religious Minorities: Any group that does not belong to the dominant or majority religion in a country.⁴

Counter-Terrorism Laws: Legal frameworks that are meant to prevent or punish terrorism or criminal behavior.⁵

Religious Nationalism: When national identity becomes tied to one dominant religion, leading to exclusion and discrimination against minority religions.⁶

¹ <https://www.ippforb.com/toolkit/what-is-forb>

² <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/religion-and-society-religious-persecution>

³ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/religion-or-belief-discrimination>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/religious-minorities>

⁵ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/misuse-of-anti-terror-legislation-threatens-freedom-of-expression>

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/01/28/comparing-levels-of-religious-nationalism-around-the-world/>

Background

Religious persecution is the practice of persecution and discrimination against individuals and religious groups because of their religious beliefs. Historically, when observing the reasoning behind religious persecution; on the surface, it is usually linked to xenophobia (fear of others), as some dominant religious groups may view the beliefs or practices of religious minorities as a threat to social stability or national identity potentially leading to social exclusion. In addition, ideological clashes might occur when the core beliefs, values, or moral principles of religious groups differ from each other⁷. Nevertheless, the root cause is far more complex and elaborate; once researched, religious violence is frequently driven by political power struggles, state control, and the manipulation of religious identity by political or governing authorities.⁸

Examining history, religious persecution has been a consistent phenomenon in every century. However, a few critical and relevant events in our times all share similar motivation, xenophobia, ideological disputes, political power struggles, and state control. Some of these events are The Armenian Genocide, post 9/11 Islamophobia and, possibly most well-known and documented, The Holocaust.⁹ During the Nazi era, the rise of xenophobia and discrimination against Jews grew from social exclusion to a systematic religious persecution carried out by the state. The Nazis persecuted Jews because of their religion as well as their race. The Holocaust demonstrates how systematic discrimination can eventually lead to wider violations of all manners of human rights and become the basis of horrible atrocities.

In the past, religious persecution and genocides were often not visible to the international community until after they had occurred, and they received limited external response. Over time, with the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes article 18, awareness of these atrocities increased, and such acts became more difficult to carry out without facing international consequences.¹⁰

Social media, major TV stations or what we now know as globalization, have a major role in documenting human rights abuses including religious persecution, which helped put pressure on the countries to act accordingly and be more aware of cases around the world. Besides this, after international human rights laws were established, it got harder for countries to practice this occurrence, yet, these violent acts still happen to this day.

⁷<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/religion-and-society-religious-persecution>

⁸ https://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/20250217072317_small.pdf?

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/5/9-11-remembering-the>

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Treaties and Organizations

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights(1948)¹¹

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)¹²

No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981)¹³

All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960)¹⁴

The term “discrimination” includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education. (We can link that convention directly to children students of any religion- they should be respected, treated equally, and with dignity).

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

¹² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-all-forms-intolerance-and-discrimination>

¹⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-against-discrimination-education>

Current Situation

Freedom of religion and religious practices continue to face serious persecution globally in numerous forms. First, the global problem is the restrictions that are becoming more common, which include legal and social practices that limit a person's ability to practice, express, or belong to a religion freely.¹⁵ These include the actions of governments pushing laws that restrict converts, dress, education, or worship. Consequently, religious minorities are facing more discrimination because the majoritarian ideology leads to more social hostility. When the government or a society says that the majority religion is superior, minorities are portrayed as disloyal or dangerous and as a result of that, leading people who follow the majority religion to harass minorities, discriminate against them, shame them, threaten them or attack their places of worship, and socially exclude them. In addition, discrimination is increasingly taking digital forms.¹⁶ Online platforms are often used to spread hate speech, misinformation, and threats against specific religions or religious minorities. Governments fail to protect vulnerable minorities repeatedly, meaning police do not intervene during attacks, authorities fail to investigate perpetrators, governments have not implemented effective measures to regulate online platforms either. Even though some anti-discrimination laws exist, they are not enforced equally on minority religions and as a result, victims of attacks and discrimination are denied justice or protection.

At this time, according to the organisation "Church In Need" 2025 report, religious freedom is seriously violated in 62 countries, affecting almost 5.4 billion people worldwide. Out of these, 24 countries are facing severe persecution, while 38 are experiencing systemic discrimination (which means that the discrimination in these countries is built into the systems of a country not just individual hateful actions), with conditions worsening in 75% of persecution-classified states meaning countries where religious groups face severe persecution, and only two countries improved (Kazakhstan & Sri Lanka).¹⁷ Religious persecution is most severe in specific regions, including the persecution of Uyghur Muslims in China¹⁸, Christians in North Korea¹⁹, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar²⁰, and rising antisemitism²¹ and Islamophobia²² in parts of Europe.

In addition, many governments make inappropriate use of "Counter-Terrorism"²³ laws against peaceful religious groups, under the guise of security concerns. Eventually these patterns are leading to a global recession in practicing religion freely in many regions of the world. Restrictions by governments, rising nationalism, misuse of counter-terrorism laws, and violence by extremist groups all reinforce one another. As a result, religious groups are facing discrimination globally which has become normalized, and governments justify oppressive and hostile practices in the name of national security.

¹⁵ <https://www.churchinneed.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Activity-Report-2025-rev.pdf>

¹⁶

<https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/76368/9781529229066.pdf?sequence=1#page=146>

¹⁷ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-10/acn-religious-freedom-report-more-than-5-billion-face-persecutio.html>

¹⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/23944811221085680>

¹⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/ChristianPersecutioninNK>

²⁰ <https://pjh.wum.edu.pk/index.php/ojs/article/view/22>

²¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/>

²² <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/islamophobia-europe>

²³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/misuse-of-anti-terror-legislation-threatens-freedom-of-expression>

These acts create the current situation and highlight the urgent need to address religious freedom today.

Critical Events and Timeline

1948 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁴ which includes Article 18

Established freedom of religion as a fundamental human right through Article 18 which includes the right to belief, worship, and religious expression.

1966 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)²⁵

Created legally international obligations for countries to protect freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination based on belief.

1981- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief²⁶

Established stronger global standards to condemn religious discrimination and urging countries to protect religious minorities.

1992 - Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities²⁷

Prioritizing a stronger protection of minority groups, including religious minorities from discrimination and persecution.

1998 - U.S. International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)²⁸

The establishment of international monitoring of religious freedom violations and to hold governments accountable for persecution.

2001 - Post-9/11 Discrimination and Global Counterterrorism Policies²⁹

After the 9/11 attacks, countries worldwide passed strict new security laws (Counterterrorism laws) that led to an increase in unfair treatment of Muslim and minority groups.

2011 - Arab Spring and Rise of Targeted Religious Persecution³⁰

Political instability in the Middle East and North Africa led to an increase in attacks on religious minorities, including Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims.

2014 - ISIS Genocide Against the Yazidis³¹

²⁴ https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights?utm_source

²⁵ https://www.uscirf.gov/international-human-rights-standards-selected-provisions-freedom-thought-conscience-and-religion-or?utm_source

²⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-all-forms-intolerance-and-discrimination>

²⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-rights-persons-belonging-national-or-ethnic>

²⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/105/plaws/publ292/PLAW-105publ292.pdf>

²⁹ <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.4/2003/66>

³⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/06/20/arab-spring-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>

³¹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf

GALILEE CONVENTION 2026

United Nations Human Rights Council Committee Research Report

Targeted mass killings, displacement, and torture of the Yazidi community in Iraq and Syria by ISIS

2017 - Rohingya Persecution in Myanmar³²

Myanmar military forces performed violent campaigns against Rohingya Muslims which included killings, village burnings, and mass displacement.

2018 - China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang³³

Surveillance, mass detention camps, and restrictions on Islamic practices targeting Uyghur Muslims made by the Chinese government.

2020 - India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and Religious Discrimination³⁴

India created a law that fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim refugees from neighboring countries.

2022 - Taliban Restrictions on Religious Minorities in Afghanistan³⁵

Severe restrictions were imposed on religious minorities, including attacks on Hazara Shia communities.

2023 - Spike in Global Antisemitic and Islamophobic Attacks³⁶

International conflicts and rising political division led to sharp increases in hate crimes and discrimination against Jewish and Muslim communities worldwide.

Questions to Consider

Has your country ever been accused of religious discrimination or persecution?

Which group faces the most restrictions or discrimination?

How does your government regulate religious practices, religious institutions, or faith-based organizations?

Does your country allow people to change their religion?

Are there any laws that limit certain religious practices?

How has religious persecution affected your country's security, economy, or migration?

What solutions would your country support inside the HRC?

What are the main religious groups in your country?

Do religious minorities in your country experience discrimination, pressure, or limitations on their practices?

³² <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>

³³ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>

³⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/15/india-activates-discriminatory-citizenship-law>

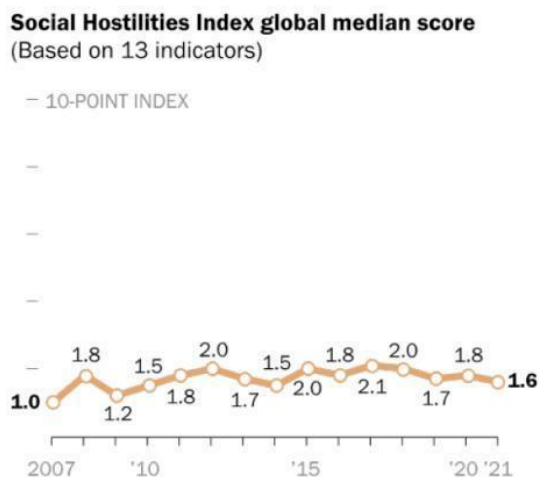
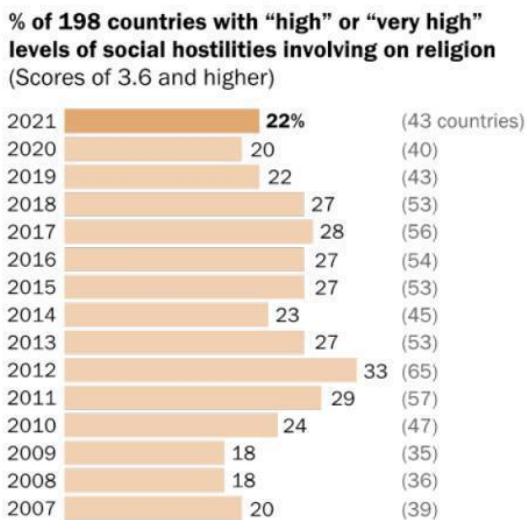
³⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/20/religious-freedom-afghanistan-three-years-after-taliban-takeover>

³⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/interview-antisemitism-and-islamophobia-spike-europe>

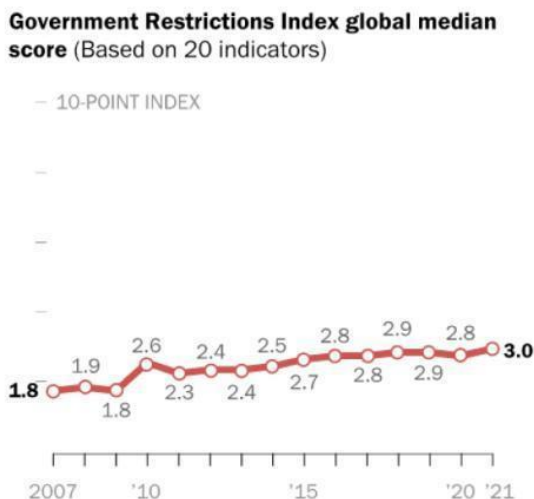
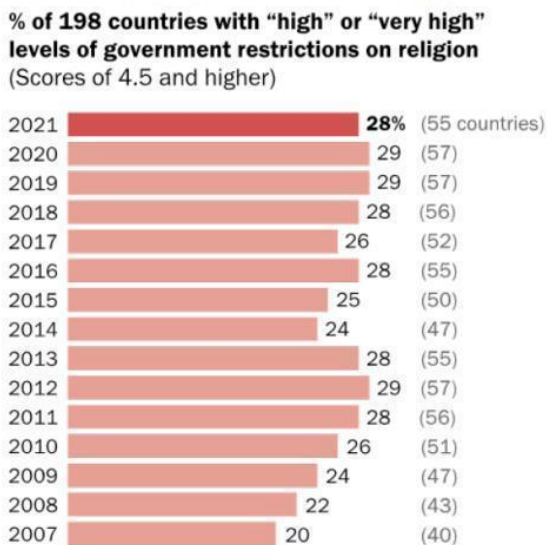
Which international agreements on freedom of religion is your country a part of, and does your country follow them in practice?

Relevant Media

Number of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ social hostilities involving religion rose in 2021, while global median level of social hostilities decreased



Number of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ government restrictions involving religion went down in 2021, as global median level of government restrictions rose



Note: The number of countries and territories increased in 2011, from 197 to 198, with the addition of South Sudan.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.
“Globally, Government Restrictions on Religion Reached Peak Levels in 2021, While Social Hostilities Went Down”

Chart 2 and 3: [Source](#)

Helpful Resources

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/religion-and-society-religious-persecution>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvCBVri-TAQ>

<https://missioneurasia.org/faith-under-fire-understanding-and-responding-to-religious-persecution/>

<https://youtu.be/wh2zUzkPfT4>

<https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/GCSE%20-%20Lesson%20Plan%201.pdf>

Bibliography

<https://www.ippforb.com/toolkit/what-is-forb>

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/religion-and-society-religious-persecution>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_discrimination

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/religious-minorities>

<https://share.google/ZbsVFc586QMI27wDs>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/01/28/comparing-levels-of-religious-nationalism-around-the-world/>

https://www.lexisnexis.com/documents/20250217072317_small.pdf

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/9/5/9-11-remembering-the>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-10/acn-religious-freedom-report-more-than-5-billion-face-persecutio.html>

<https://www.churchinneed.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Activity-Report-2025-rev.pdf>

<https://share.google/ZbsVFc586QMI27wDs>[https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2025-](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf)

[03/2025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/2025%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report.pdf)<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf><https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/RapporteursDigestFreedomReligionBelief.pdf>

