



GLOBAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
DATA SPECTRUM

2021 REPORT

LOEB INSTITUTE FOR
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

21WILBERFORCE
SPEAK
FREEDOM



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide



Global Religious Freedom Data Spectrum: 2021 Report

Project Overview

What is religious freedom and why does data on it matter?

Freedom of religion, belief, and conscience (commonly abbreviated as FoRB) is a fundamental human right independent of ideology, faith system, political or personal identity.

Over the years, various organizations have collected, analyzed, and published statistical data and anecdotal information—related to the degrees of freedom and suppression of these freedoms in various countries—in data tables, geocoded map renderings, infographics, rankings, and other analytical formats.

Individual and organizational perspectives and interpretations of issues and events related to FoRB, however, are inherently seen through interpretative lenses limited by subjective biases and the quality and representational distribution of sources and data.

As a result, people generally are shown or choose to see only one side of the issue, accept perspectives and data from sources that they feel comfortable with, or draw conclusions or make decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate data.

What is the Data Spectrum Project?

The Global Religious Freedom (GRF) Data Spectrum project is a new initiative by 21Wilberforce to provide the IRF community, analysts, and political decision makers with a comparative framework for viewing geospatial data and analytical perspectives from a wide range of politically and socially diverse organizations that evaluate and rank countries according to criteria related to freedoms and restrictions. The GRF Data Spectrum project maps these diverse perspectives in a compelling way and provides a report analyzing the indicators to help people understand the opportunities and gaps in Global Religious Freedom data.

We provide insight into this diversity of perspectives by collecting, curating, and mapping various indicators, indexes, rankings, and poll numbers together in a single common place. The project shows the breadth of ideologies that are represented by those working on Freedom of Religion and Belief based rights, while also showing the gaps. By visualizing and understanding the spectrum of perspectives and interpretations of diverse human rights, advocacy, and stakeholder representatives, viewers are equipped to make more effective and informed decisions.



How is the GRF Data Spectrum project different to existing FoRB reports?

The GRF Data Spectrum project provides visibility and a comparative framework for viewing a wide range of data and perspectives on this issue. It maps the data in a compelling way and provides a report that analyzes these data indicators to help people understand the opportunities and gaps in Global Religious Freedom data. The data is provided in a visually understandable way to both new users and to those who may have only seen some or part of the data from certain perspectives.

Rather than creating a new data set or research project, the GRF Data Spectrum follows best practices of convening other data that may not have been fully leveraged by untapped user bases. Landscaping the information helps identify a richer, ideologically broader look at each country in the world, validating and/or challenging assumptions and ideas as new trends and issues that can be identified within various belief frameworks and seen to be aligned or distinct from other frameworks.

Why is this project important?

Today there is no single place or framework for viewing and comparing global freedom/restrictions-related county rankings and supporting data that are prepared and published by socially and politically diverse groups. With the development of its online Freedom Center, 21Wilberforce provides this framework as a useful analytical and decision support tool.

Connected and diverse data can inform decisions, demonstrate that the issues of persecution and religious freedom are not issues exclusive to select groups, elevate the work of organizations that have been limited to ideologically niche audiences, and empower policy advocates and decision makers who work on this issue.

Data illiteracy remains a challenging issue within the religious freedom sector. With low quality information and increased polarization in identity politics and political messaging, it is vital that an issue such as religious freedom maintain its multi-worldview salience and be seen more accurately through an interpretative lens that provides visibility into a richer and more realistically nuanced context. This is as important for left-of-center and secular groups, who may not consider the importance of the issue to the communities and sectors they work in, as it is for right-of-center and faith-based groups that may think religious freedom is a faith-only issue. A lack of knowledge in this regard limits the development and efficacy of coalitions and initiatives, while also engendering an inflexibility that hampers efforts to tailor solutions in specific country contexts.

Methodology

How was data collected

The program is housed within the 21Wilberforce Global Freedom Center. To collect the data, the team combed through various organizations information, data, and codebooks. They then identified and coded data sets that focused exclusively or primarily with the issue of religious freedom or on data sets in which the issue was among multiple components. The team then reviewed that coding, noted any



discrepancies between the coding and the source material, and then adjudicated between any discrepancies.

Organizations and Data Sets

There are thirteen data sets from a total of eleven organizations included in the project. All reports met the selection criteria that they present a numerical or qualitative ranking of freedom of religion or belief in a set of countries or contain a variable within the report that specifically pertains to freedom of religion or belief. Some data sets only reported on specific regions or country sets, while several reports covered all world countries. Because of specific occupied status or contested sovereignty issues some source data reports on sub-regions as well.

The organizations producing the data sets range from the government entity USCIRF to a wide range of NGOs and research organizations. The reporting organizations also represent a diversity of religion or belief backgrounds, including Humanist, Christian, and Jewish community focused data sets. While every effort was made to ensure the selected data sets represent the full spectrum of data set rankings of freedom of religion or belief available, the research team recognizes that there may be additional sources not mentioned in the project.

Please see below for short summaries and links for further information on each organization and the methodologies for their reports.

Aid to the Church in Need: Religious Freedom Report

Organization Summary

“... Aid to the Church in Need provides pastoral and humanitarian assistance to the persecuted Church around the world. For more than 74 years, our donors have reached out to the suffering, the distressed and the poorest of the poor in over 145 countries...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

“For this Report, we understand a violation to FoRB as a process, where we distinguish four stages. The definitions and what constitutes the passage to the next stage are described below to the best of our capacity. Exceptions, of course, will occur so, please contact the Editor for any queries. A grid listing manifestations of each type of violation appears at the end of this document, and is assembled from the different sources...” ([Read more](#))

Anti-Defamation League: Global 100 Index

Organization Summary

“ADL is a leading anti-hate organization that was founded in 1913 in response to an escalating climate of antisemitism and bigotry. Today, ADL is the first call when acts of antisemitism occur and continues



to fight all forms of hate. A global leader in exposing extremism, delivering anti-bias education...”
([Read more](#))

Methodology

“ADL commissioned First International Resources to research attitudes and opinions toward Jews in over 100 countries around the world. Fieldwork and data collection for this global public opinion project were conducted and coordinated by Anzalone Liszt Grove Research. All interviews were conducted between July 2013 and February 2014...” ([Read more](#))

Association of Religion Data Archives: Religious Regulations Index & Religious Minorities Discrimination Index

Organization Summary

“The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) strives to democratize access to the best data on religion. Founded as the American Religion Data Archive in 1997 and going online in 1998, the initial archive was targeted at researchers interested in American religion. The targeted audience and the data collection have both greatly expanded since 1998, now including American and international collections and developing features for educators, journalists, religious congregations, and researchers.”
([Read more](#))

Methodology

“Data for nations and regions are collected from 17 reliable and widely-used resources and were assembled by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) under the supervision of Davis Brown, Dane Mataic, Christopher Bader, and Roger Finke, with the financial support of the John Templeton Foundation and the Penn State University...” ([Read more](#))

Cato Institute: Human Freedom Index – Religious Freedom Indicator

Organization Summary

“For more than 40 years, Cato has led the charge for liberty in our nation and around the world. The Cato Institute is a public policy research organization—or think tank—that creates a presence for and promotes libertarian ideas in policy debates. Our mission is to originate, disseminate, and advance solutions...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

This indicator specifies the extent to which individuals and groups have the right to choose a religion, change their religion, and practice that religion in private or in public as well as to proselytize peacefully without...” ([Read more](#))



Foundation for the Advancement of Liberty: World Index of Moral Freedom – Religion Indicators

Organization Summary

“The Foundation for the Advancement of Liberty, or Fundalib, is a libertarian think tank based in Madrid, Spain. It aims at furthering the cause of both personal and economic freedom. To do so, Fundalib organizes events, conferences and campaigns, publishes books and audiovisual material, and conducts its own research, mainly through indices that compare specific aspects of freedom. These include the World Electoral Freedom Index, this World Index of Moral Freedom and...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

“In this category we measure how free is the state from any religious bias, and, on the other hand, how free is the individual to practice any religion, or to not practice any. Roughly half of the points available go to each of these matters. 37,5% of the weight is allocated to...” ([Read more](#))

Freedom House

Organization Summary

“Freedom House is founded on the core conviction that freedom flourishes in democratic nations where governments are accountable to their people; the rule of law prevails; and freedoms of expression, association, and belief, as well as respect for the rights of women, minority communities, and historically marginalized groups, are guaranteed.

We speak out against the main threats to democracy and empower citizens to exercise their fundamental rights through a unique combination of...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

“Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties, composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country and a select group of territories. The 2021 edition covers developments in 195 countries and 15 territories from January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020. The report’s methodology is derived in large measure from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by...” ([Read more](#))

Humanists International: Freedom of Thought Index

Organization Summary

“We are the global representative body of the humanist movement, uniting a diversity of non-religious organisations and individuals. We want everyone to live a life of dignity in a world where universal human rights are respected and protected, and where states uphold secularism.”



Methodology

“Every country in this report is assessed against a range of “boundary conditions“. The boundary conditions are statements which may or may not apply to each country. Each boundary condition is associated with one of four thematic strands (these are the vertical columns in the table below). Also, each boundary condition is placed at a given level of severity...” ([Read more](#))

Open Doors: World Watch List

Organization Summary

“It is more than 60 years later, and Open Doors continues the work started by Brother Andrew, by continuing to deliver Bibles and Christian literature, training thousands of pastors and church leaders and providing spiritual and legal support for Christian prisoners. We also provide economic relief...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

“The Open Doors World Watch List is the annual survey of the religious liberty conditions of Christians around the world. It is independently audited by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) making the information gathered and calculation process more transparent...” ([Read more](#))

Pew Research Center: Government Restrictions Index & Social Hostilities Index

Organization Summary

“Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

This is the 11th time Pew Research Center has measured restrictions on religion around the globe. This report, which includes data for the year ending Dec. 31, 2018, generally follows the same methodology as previous reports. Pew Research Center uses two 10-point indexes...” ([Read more](#))

USCIRF: Countries of Particular Concern and Special Watch List

Organization Summary

“USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) that monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF uses international standards...” ([Read more](#))



Methodology

“The report’s primary focus is on two groups of countries: first, those that USCIRF recommends the State Department should designate as “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs, under IRFA, and second, those that USCIRF recommends the State Department should place on its Special Watch List (SWL). The report also includes...” ([Read more](#))

Varieties of Democracy: Freedom of Religion Indicator

Organization Summary

“The V-Dem Institute is an independent research institute and the Headquarters of the project based at the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The Institute was founded by Professor Staffan I. Lindberg in 2014. The V-Dem Institute is in charge of most operations relating to data collection and the V-Dem dataset, but is also becoming increasingly active on the policy arena. The Institute is regularly hosting prominent visiting researchers, among these are the V-Dem Regional Managers, Project Managers, and other internationally-recognized scholars. During their stay, they hold public lectures and are able to meet and work with...” ([Read more](#))

Methodology

“This document outlines the methodological considerations, choices, and procedures guiding the development of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. Part I sets forth the conceptual scheme. Part II discusses the process of data collection. Part III describes the measurement model along with efforts to identify and correct errors. We continually review our methodology—and occasionally adjust it—with the goal of improving the quality of V-Dem indicators and indices. We therefore issue a new version of this document with...” ([Read more](#))

Future Opportunities

While there are a wide range of perspectives represented in this project, there are several opportunities for expanding the gaps in perspectives in global religious freedom and belief data.

The only current country data rankings from an official government source in the project come from the U.S. government. There is an opportunity for other countries or multilateral institutions to conduct similar research and provide additional global perspectives on freedom of religion or belief.

Additionally, there are opportunities to expand the religious or belief perspectives of the global data sets. A majority of the data sets, seven of the thirteen, were collected by organizations without a stated sectarian religious or belief background. The most represented religious or belief group were Christians with four of the data sets produced by Christian organizations and/or focused on the persecution of Christians. Humanist and Jewish organizations each produced one data set in the project. A potential area of expansion for global perspectives on freedom of religion or belief would be for more religious or belief communities to produce reports. A more detailed perspective from a Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or



other communities could add valuable data to the overall picture of global freedom of religion or belief data.

The researchers also acknowledged that there may be additional sources not found in this project and welcome the suggestion of additional data sets to be included in future iterations.

Project Contributors

Organizational Partners

21Wilberforce

The 21Wilberforce Global Freedom Center (21Wilberforce) is a Christian human rights nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing the growing global need to protect and advance the fundamental and universal right to freedom of religion, belief, and conscience (FoRB). Its vision translates into three strategic goals: 1) Defend and assist the persecuted and vulnerable; 2) Mobilize and equip individuals and groups to effectively lead change for dignity-affirming freedom and justice for all people; and 3) Inform critical understanding and decision making. Toward this third goal, 21Wilberforce uses strategic platforms and products to communicate with multiple external audiences for critical awareness and informed decision making.

Loeb Institute, George Washington University

Founded in 2016, the Loeb Institute is an organization run within the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences at George Washington University that is committed to “promoting freedom of religious belief and observance, the equality of all law-abiding religions, and separation of church and state in the United States and around the world.” The Institute seeks to help establish and discuss the nuances of religious liberty and its implications for government, religious institutions, and the evolving needs of our modern-day society.

Genocide Watch

Genocide Watch exists to predict, prevent, stop, and punish genocide and other forms of mass murder. They seek to raise awareness and influence public policy concerning potential and actual genocide. Their purpose is to build an international movement to prevent and stop genocide.

Genocide Watch addresses genocide as it is defined in the Genocide Convention: “the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such.” They also address political mass murder, mass rape, and other genocide-like crimes. Genocide Watch is the coordinating organization of The Alliance Against Genocide (AAG), an international coalition of organizations. The AAG aims to educate the general public and policymakers about the causes, processes, and warning signs of genocide; to create the institutions and political will to prevent and stop genocide; and to bring perpetrators of genocide to justice.



Contributing Project Team

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