



D2.4 Research Report

Protecting Places of Worship in Europe: Between Inclusivity, Integration, and Religious Freedom

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List of acronyms/abbreviations

PoW	Place of Worship
EU	European Union
Protone	(Name of Project) – Protect the Places of Worship Harmonizing Diversity
BME	Belgian Muslim Executive
CCOJB	The Coordination Committee of Jewish Organisations (in Belgium)
UCOII	Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations of Italy
UCEI	Union of Italian Jewish Communities
FCJE	Federación de Comunidades Judías de España
CIE	Spanish Islamic Commission

Glossary table

Belgian Muslim Executive	Belgium's official representative body for Muslims (now disbanded)
Deutsche Islamkonferenz (German Islam Conference)	Platform for Dialogue between the German state and Germany's Muslim community
Diyanet	The Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, a Turkish state institution, with activities across Europe
Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland	Germany's Main Body for the Protestant Church
Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken	Germany's Main Body for the Catholic Church

1. Executive Summary

This report summarizes the research findings of the Protone project conducted by Leiden University on the protection of places of worship (PoWs) in Europe. Using the cases of Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain, the research aims to centre religious PoWs in conversations on race, practice and performance of religious identity, and overall integration in society. With advances in protective security in PoWs, the project takes on a security perspective to identify security needs and assess the impact of the lack of security in PoWs or the unwanted introduction of security technology that affects the ways religion is practised and perceived in society. The project also integrates a spatial approach to understanding security in PoWs to identify how individuals use, move around, and generally relate to their PoWs and the security technology that is methodically being introduced to these spaces.

The research finds that:

1. With the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe, more state-sponsored initiatives are required to reduce hatred and division in society

In response to global events, specifically the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel and the months-long Israeli invasion of Gaza, Muslims and Jews in Europe are facing increased verbal, physical, and online attacks that have serious consequences on their safety and quality of life. Increased hatred has impacted these religious minorities' uses of their PoWs and heightened their sense of fear and discrimination in and around their PoWs.

2. Synagogues have high levels of protective security in place, whereas mosques fear that security technology could increase the securitization of Muslims

Synagogues receive high levels of protection both from state authorities and private security organisations. Jewish faith leaders and members of the community are well-trained on what to do in cases of an emergency. In contrast, mosques and churches generally have lower degrees of security. Bigger mosques welcome security cameras outside the building but refrain from introducing security cameras inside the prayer halls. Muslim communities are wary of introducing security technology into PoWs for fear of over-securitization and prejudicial targeting by authorities.

3. Individuals are free to practice all three Abrahamic religions. However, the lack of recognition of Islam as a religion in some EU countries has effects on feelings of belonging and one's status in society

The most notable example is that Islam is not recognized in Italy, which has a direct impact on the community's ability to access PoWs and other privileges enjoyed by religions that have signed agreements with the Italian state. In all four countries, Jews and Christians have clear representative bodies that are in communication with the respective states. However, Muslim communities are more fragmented and often lack a unified representative body that can liaise between the Muslim community and the state. In most countries, the Muslim community is not represented by a hierarchical organisation, but rather a network of organisations or cultural centres. This often creates cracks in the administrative system that prevent Muslim worshippers from accessing the same privileges as Christians and Jews in the management and upkeep of their PoWs.

4. Churches continue enjoying an open-door policy approach to newcomers, whereas synagogues and mosques are more careful about opening hours and outsiders

Most churches remain open to the public, despite documented increases in vandalism and theft. Most priests interviewed expressed that keeping churches open is a privilege and an important factor in practising Christianity comfortably. On the other hand, entrance to synagogues is regulated and newcomers need to be vetted by the community members. A new trend in mosques is closure during non-prayer hours to regulate the number of people who are visiting it.

5. Faith leaders feel responsible for the physical security of their congregants in places of worship, but cannot be held solely accountable; institutional frameworks supported by agencies of the state are more desired

Faith leaders feel responsible for the well-being of their congregants, which includes ensuring protective security at PoWs and learning security and safety protocols. However, faith leaders also expressed that they cannot be the sole providers of security and should engage with local authorities and the surrounding community on these matters. Furthermore, faith leaders expressed the need to receive security and safety training if they are to take on such responsibilities. At the same time, stakeholders expressed that institutional capacity-building and training are the most useful steps forward to ensure security at PoWs.

The Protone project examines the experiences of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities across four major European cities: Brussels, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid. Each city presents a unique religious landscape shaped by its historical, political, and social contexts.

In Brussels, the capital of Belgium, there is a stark contrast between officially recognized and unrecognized places of worship, particularly affecting the Muslim community. While there are 89 recognized mosques, over 200 remain unrecognized, limiting their access to state funding and support. The Belgian Muslim Executive's dissolution in 2022 has left Muslims without official representation, complicating their relationship with the state. Jewish communities in Brussels face rising anti-Semitism, leading to increased security measures at synagogues. Catholic churches, while still dominant, are experiencing declining attendance, especially among younger generations.

In Berlin, efforts to integrate the large Muslim population, mainly of Turkish origin, mark its religious landscape. The German Islam Conference, initiated in 2006, aims to bridge gaps between the state and Muslim communities. However, challenges persist in establishing mosques and cultural centres, with many Muslims relying on converted spaces for worship. Jewish communities in Berlin are hyper-vigilant about security, with strict protocols in place at synagogues. The city's efforts to commemorate Jewish life and history are significant, yet the community still faces anti-Semitic threats.

In Rome, the lack of official recognition of Islam as a religion creates significant challenges for Muslims. This impacts their ability to establish proper places of worship, with many relying on informal prayer spaces in warehouses or garages. A recent draft law aimed at limiting the conversion of such spaces into places of worship has raised concerns about religious freedom. The Jewish community in Rome, one of the oldest in Europe, maintains a strong presence but faces increasing security concerns. Catholic churches dominate the religious landscape but are also experiencing declining attendance.

Madrid presents a more recent history of religious pluralism, with agreements between the state and Jewish, Protestant, and Islamic communities established in 1992. However, Muslims still face challenges in finding suitable spaces for worship, often relying on cultural centres. The Jewish community, while small, has seen growth due to recent immigration from Latin America. Catholic churches remain prominent, but the city is also seeing a rise in evangelical Christian communities, particularly among immigrant populations.

Across all four cities, common themes emerge: the struggle for smaller religious communities to gain recognition and establish proper places of worship; the increasing security measures at Jewish synagogues, often leading to a sense of isolation; the challenges faced by Muslim communities in integrating their places of worship into urban environments; and the decline in traditional Catholic church attendance coupled with the growth of immigrant-led Christian communities.

The research highlights the delicate balance religious communities must strike between security and openness. While Jewish and Muslim communities often prioritise security due to rising hate crimes, this can sometimes hinder their integration with the broader community. Christian churches, particularly Catholic ones, generally maintain more open access but are also becoming more aware of security needs. The study also reveals generational differences in religious practice and the use of worship spaces. Younger generations often seek more inclusive and technologically adapted religious experiences, challenging traditional practices in all faith communities. Ultimately, the Protone project underscores the importance of religious freedom, security concerns, and social integration in contemporary European cities. It highlights the need for continued dialogue and engagement between religious communities, local authorities, and broader society to ensure the protection of religious freedoms while fostering social cohesion.

2. Introduction

Attacks on religious communities in Europe have been increasing in the past decade. Intolerance towards religious expression intersects with debates on race, immigration, rights to practice religion publicly, and rights to free speech and political expression. Recent critical events such as the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel and the ensuing Israeli invasion of Gaza, which led to increased Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in Europe, and the Southport riots in the UK where right-wing protestors targeting Muslims and Jews speak to a larger trend of violently targeting synagogues, mosques, and churches as part increased intolerance and division within society. In light of these developments, EU states are increasingly investing in security measures and training to prevent violent attacks and protect public spaces, including places of worship (PoWs). The Protone project aims to centre religious PoWs in debates on race, practice and performance of religious identity, and overall integration in society. With advances in security technology that are being introduced to public spaces and are recently featuring as protective security of PoWs, the project takes on a security perspective to identify security needs and assess the impact of the lack of security in PoWs or the unwanted introduction of security technology in PoWs, which disproportionately targets Europe's Muslim communities. The project also integrates a spatial approach to understanding security in PoWs to identify how individuals use, move around, and generally relate to their PoWs and the security technology that is methodically being introduced to these spaces. The Protone project focused on four specific countries: Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Government-led efforts to fight and prevent anti-religious crime vary significantly across European countries. In the aftermath of October 7, Muslims and Jews in Europe are targets of increased Islamophobia and anti-Semitism that is increasingly going underreported. In Italy, the ascent of Meloni's right-wing government gives licence to more open anti-immigration rhetoric that intensifies Islamophobia. At the same time, Spain and Italy, with a strong Catholic heritage have institutionally lagged behind countries such as Belgium and Germany where institutional religious pluralism has been shaped by decades of economic migration. Islam remains unrecognized in Italy, and the Muslim community continues to be left out of funding cycles and access to bureaucratic procedures that advance the status of Muslims in the country. Meanwhile, battling anti-Semitism is a top priority for governments in Brussels and Berlin and on the EU-level, culminating with the latest Strategy on Combating Anti-Semitism and Fostering of Jewish Life in 2021 that works in the fields of policy, education, and memorialization. In Germany specifically, the preservation of Jewish life and culture remains a top priority for government officials. Jews in Europe experience high levels of anti-Semitism, which have increased to up to 400% after October 7, 2023, according to the latest data.¹

Government-led initiatives have a direct impact on the usability of PoWs by religious communities in each of the four locations chosen for the Protone project. In Belgium, Abrahamic religious communities are recognized on federal levels. Recent developments, however, have impacted the Muslim Executive, Belgium's official representative body for Muslims. In 2022, ex-Minister of Justice Vincent Van Quickenborne removed the official recognition of the Executive, and the Grande Mosque of Brussels also lost its status as a recognized PoW in the midst of allegations of external interference and the propagation of extremist Muslim ideologies. Efforts to create a new Muslim Council of Belgium to replace the disbanded Executive are being met with claims of illegitimacy by Muslim communities. In Germany, the government's effort to centralise Germany's Muslim community under the German Islam Conference is facing similar issues. These developments complicate bureaucratic procedures with local authorities, which trickles down to direct effects on funding and provisions, including security protection for PoWs. European governments offer Jewish PoWs, schools, and other spaces protection, which has also increased in the period following October 7, 2023. However, Jewish communities have strong traditions of investing in and self-funding their security infrastructures, and there are several umbrella organisations around

¹ <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/experiences-and-perceptions-anti-Semitism-third-survey>

Europe that streamline and offer security technology and training to Jewish PoWs. The relationship of Christian communities with European governments remains amicable, and in countries like Italy, the predominance of the Catholic church in daily life and politics fares positively for the status of Christian PoWs. Non-Catholic Christian denominations, which are considered Christian minorities, especially in Italy and Spain and have been previously sidelined under dictatorship regimes in the 20th century, have in the past decades negotiated privileges (including tax benefits and social security) that advance their status in society.

Considering these developments, the report answers the following questions:

1) What are the institutional specificities of each of the three Abrahamic faiths and what impact does this have on religious communities and their use of PoWs?

Given the distinct institutional characteristics of each country in matters of organised religion, the report introduces the main factors that promote or complicate the practice of religious life more generally, and access to PoWs and availability of security technology more specifically.

2) What are the latest socio-cultural characteristics and perceptions of religious identity?

Taking into consideration data on anti-religious sentiments and the realities of everyday life as religious individuals in Europe, the study addresses how religious communities perceive themselves as either minorities or majorities in European society. These findings are then triangulated with migration and settlement patterns, levels of religiosity and other socio-cultural characteristics that affect the ways PoWs are being used by their congregants.

3) How do faith leaders and congregants use their PoWs, and what are their biggest challenges?

Delving further into how religious communities use their PoWs, the report assesses how these spaces factor into people's lives, how often they use them, and other spatial elements that facilitate or complicate how individuals practice their faith.

4) How are PoWs integrated into their surrounding communities?

This question delves into how PoWs interact with their surroundings, and whether there have been any new developments that hinder or encourage integration in the local community.

5) What are the main safety and security risks, and what security culture is developing around PoWs in light of increased tension against religious communities in Europe?

Zooming in on security, the report looks into safety and security risks that PoWs have faced in the past decade and inquires about what has been done on the level of individual PoWs for protection. The section also investigates how a security culture is developing inside PoWs, and how congregants and faith leaders are responding to these new developments.

6) How have local media responded to security concerns at PoWs?

Using case study analysis, the report investigates how local media reacted to security incidents and major political debates on PoWs in each of the four countries.

To answer these questions, researchers at Leiden University conducted fieldwork in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain over the period of October 2023 – March 2024 that included interviews with 43 faith leaders of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths, 12 expert interviews with security experts and researchers in the fields of terrorism and religious studies, and 5 focus groups with individuals who regularly attend PoWs. This was coupled

with ethnographic research activities such as guided visits, field observations and photo documentation in Brussels, Berlin, Rome, and Madrid to gather an informed picture of the state of PoWs for Abrahamic communities in these locations and the ways individuals assess their security and safety. To understand how local media portray the debates on issues related to PoWs, conceptual and relational case analyses were conducted for each of the four countries.

The October 7th attack by Hamas on Israel and the ensuing months-long invasion by Israel of the Palestinian Gaza strip has been one of the largest challenges in fieldwork. Several interviews with experts and professionals were put on hold as they committed to other pressing responsibilities. Muslim and Jewish faith leaders were careful about sharing their opinions on the ongoing violence, which often resulted in deliberate avoidance of topics of integration and political identity in Europe. Despite these challenges, the fieldwork successfully grasped the current state of protective security at PoWs in each of the four countries, along with developing trends in perceptions of and about Europe's Abrahamic religious communities and their relationships with PoWs.

The report is divided into four country profiles, each covering the findings from fieldwork and case study analyses, triangulated with secondary sources. After briefly discussing the institutional specifics of each country, the report delves into the socio-cultural characteristics and identity of religious communities, how PoWs are made available to these communities and how they are used by congregants and integrated into their surroundings. The sections then focus on security and safety concerns facing PoWs, followed by a discussion on the emerging security culture in PoWs. The fieldwork sections are followed by a case study analysis of a significant attack on PoW or a legislative change that impacts how PoWs are being used in each of the four countries.

3. Brussels, Belgium

3.I Introduction

Brussels, the capital of Belgium, is a multicultural, multi-linguistic and one of the most internationalized migrant cities in Europe. In Belgium, church and state operate independently and confessional groups enjoy official recognition. This includes cooperation and linkages with the state, representation in the public sphere, self-organisation, and access to state funds. A key foundation of this recognition is the presence of a representative or interlocutor for each religious confession.

As the capital of the EU, Brussels attracts a high number of high-skilled migrants. The city's diverse population is also partly driven by lax migration policies and favourable citizenship laws implemented in the latter half of the 20th century that attracted migrant workers, specifically Moroccan, Algerian and Turkish migrants that contribute to the city's current high Muslim population, one of the highest in Europe (along with France). According to a 2015 survey, 24.2 per cent of the population in Brussels is Muslim.²

Freedom of religion in Belgium is robustly protected under Articles 19 and 20 of the Belgian Constitution. These articles guarantee the right to worship and practice one's religious beliefs. Additionally, the right to publicly express religious beliefs is safeguarded under the freedom of expression, which is also covered in Article 19. Article 26 ensures the freedom of association, allowing practitioners to organize religious practices and events. It also protects against discrimination. Institutional arrangements such as proportional representation in Brussels promote the inclusion of minorities, which includes the holding of official posts (Zapata-Barrero and Gropas 2022).

The three Abrahamic religions are officially recognized in Belgium. Islam was recognized in 1974, and in 1999, the Belgian Muslim Executive was formed through a compromise among several Muslim national groups. The majority of Muslims in Belgium are Sunni, with a small Shiite minority. Over the past fifty years, the patterns of Muslim immigration have been evolving. Initially dominated by Moroccan, Turkish, and Algerian immigrants under bilateral agreements that concluded in 1970, more recent Muslim migrants include those from the Balkans, South Asia, and other Arabs (Torrekens 2024). Judaism was recognized in 1831 following Belgian independence but Jews were victims of Nazi persecution and anti-Jewish decrees during WWII (Fraser 2008). Today, Jews are represented by the Coordinating Committee of Belgian Jewish Organisations CCOJB (Comité de Coordination des Communautés Juives de Belgique), the Antwerp-based Forum der Joodse Organisaties, and the religious body at the federal level, the Consistoire.³ Jews in Brussels are generally considered less religious than their counterparts in Antwerp. A significant portion of Brussels' Jews identify as “just Jewish” (38%), engaging in cultural rather than religious practices (Staetsky and DellaPergola 2022). As a Catholic-majority country at 57.1%, Catholic symbols and places of worship are prevalent.⁴ Other Christian Belgians identify as 2.8 per cent other non-Orthodox Christian, 2.3 per cent Protestant, and 0.6 per cent Orthodox Christian.⁵

² <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belgium/>

³ <https://eurojewcong.org/communities/belgium/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

3.2 Institutional Specifics

The Belgian Muslim Executive (BME) was formed in 1999 after years of fragmented representation of Muslim communities. In 2022, Minister of Justice Vincent van Quickenborne dissolved the BME claiming mismanagement and external funding. Today, Muslims lack an official representative body. According to the BME, there are 89 recognized mosques in Belgium, and about 300 mosques in total, making the number of unrecognized mosques over 200.⁶ Being officially recognized as a place of worship comes with financial assistance from local authorities for upkeep, salaries of imams, subsidies, and other benefits. Places of worship obtain official recognition and approval from the Ministry of Justice on the condition of meeting specific criteria. These include legality and transparency of accounting, limits to foreign funding, up-to-date and functional safety protocols and certified ministers from the representative body. A large number of mosques do not meet these requirements, but they remain heavily in use. Another issue in Belgium is the lax regulation policies of imams (Loobuyck and Meier 2014), who have limited knowledge of local languages and are not accredited by the legal scholarly wing of the Muslim representative body. In interviews, imams of big mosques indicated that his lack of regulation causes several different interpretations of religion, and sometimes encourages an inward-looking Islam that supports identification with the country of origin, and restrictions on the use of French and Dutch languages in sermons. According to findings, most mosques are attributed to national communities, and sermons take place in the languages of the country of origin. In the Turkish community, the Belgian Diyanet Foundation has under its control 70 mosques in Belgium,⁷ and centralises the religious discourse.

In Belgium, there is no mention of a strict separation of church from state, but since the formation of the Belgian republic in 1830, religious pluralism has been protected and encouraged. As long as a religion meets the criteria to be officially recognized, it has access to privileges from the state, including payment of salaries, funding of religious schools, and investments in cultural activities (Franken and Loobuyck 2013). However, the Catholic church retains its religious and cultural hegemony in public life, mainly due to Belgium's celebrated encouragement of religious pluralism that doesn't strictly separate between the state and church. National holidays and publicly celebrated rituals are predominantly Catholic, and the Catholic church has special privileges in acting as a mediator between religious communities and the state through its special status in inter-faith dialogue (Sealy and Modood 2019). Furthermore, findings from public funding expenditure reveal that public funds disproportionately go to the Catholic church.⁸

Jews in Belgium are represented mainly by the CCOJB (The Coordination Committee of Jewish Organisations), a central organisation that represents 40 Jewish organisations (and 19 Jewish religious communities) in Belgium and mediates between their religious and political differences. The Consistoire acts as the Jewish religious body on the federal level.

⁶<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/belgium/#:~:text=There%20were%2089%20recognized%20mosques,country%2C%20both%20recognized%20and%20unrecognized.>

⁷ <https://www.turkishminute.com/2024/03/19/ministry-suspended-official-recognition-of-diyanet-affiliated-mosque-in-belgium/>

⁸ The Catholic church receives above 80% of public funding. <https://www.thebulletin.be/taxpayers-belgium-support-religion-tune-eu415-million-year>

3.3 Socio-cultural Characteristics and Identity

A large factor to consider is age and level of integration, which is directly linked to the length and history of immigration patterns. For the Muslim community, Torrekens identifies a schism between second-generation Muslims who are active in political participation and work on assimilating themselves into Belgian society and Muslims who take a more hardline conservative approach and actively detach themselves from a society that they perceive as too secular (Torrekens 2024). Within the Muslim community, the perceptions of the integration of Muslims vary. According to one interviewed imam, “Turks are Turks, and for them, when the Turkish citizen likes something they do a version of it that is Turkish. They don’t need integration. Even with the new generation. Some of them even go back to work in Turkey. But for the Moroccan diaspora, this is not the case. They are always faced with issues of integration, and when they are denied integration or are rejected, they feel targeted as Muslims. They feel hated.”⁹

For Muslim conservative hardliners, this extends to a refusal of participation in politics by a few Muslim groups and a parallel political current aimed at creating a Sharia state. Hardline Muslim groups have also been linked to a rise in recruitment to extremist groups. Belgium was the highest exporter of jihadis to Iraq and Syria, which caused a severe political and cultural backlash against Muslims in Belgium by the public. According to interviews, faith leaders are identifying a decline in the Salafi current, especially after the implementation of security measures against Muslim groups in the last ten years. The Salafi current also impacted the daily lives of Muslims, where finances, mortgages, and marriages were subjected to strict Sharia laws, alienating Muslims even further from society.¹⁰ Most imams interviewed believe that more young Muslims are feeling discrimination at the hands of the general public which is causing them to turn inwards to online communities and other platforms that may result in further radicalization. In general, recognized imams tread carefully about political issues which often leads members of the Muslim community to feel alienated and pushes them to find support outside the mosque and official religious groups. An example of this occurred in the aftermath of October 7, when the lack of public statements by imams in high positions caused frustration from Muslims. In general, moderate imams identified Salafism as their biggest threat. According to one imam, “We are still in the crisis. It is ongoing. The internal crisis is strong. But there is an anti-jihadi current.”¹¹ This translates to habits in attending PoW sermons. In the focus group conducted, one Muslim participant expressed that discourses may be radical, if not, then the tone is provocative.¹² Another interviewee expressed that they are not attending prayer in a mosque where they don’t understand the language, but the tone is more peaceful, and they feel more at ease.¹³

Furthermore, a series of specific events impacted the Muslim community’s identity in the last few years. In 2022, the Belgian Muslim Executive was dissolved by the Ministry of Justice after a series of administrative issues linked to foreign funding. Although racked with infighting since its inception in 1999, the Muslim Executive provided the Muslim community with a moderate state-accepted interlocuter that managed Muslim-state relations. It was also responsible for promoting a culture of dialogue and interaction that matched progressive Muslims’ take on a pluralistic society. The 2016 attacks on Brussels airport and metro stations also resulted in a disproportionately negative backlash against Belgian Muslims, which included social ostracization and open identification with terror

⁹ Interview with Brussels Imam 3 on 19.10.2023

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Focus group participant in Brussels on 09.10.2023

¹³ Interview with Brussels Imam 3 on 19.10.2023

groups.¹⁴ Today, Islamophobia is steadily rising in Belgium, with the majority of Islamophobic attacks being against women, specifically women wearing the hijab.¹⁵

Another main issue for Muslims in Brussels is the internal political divisions between Muslim groups that determine how Muslims feel welcome in certain mosques. Some of these divisions are fuelled by political conflicts taking place in their countries of origin. One focus group participant expressed that he does not feel welcome in one of the Turkish mosques because of his political background.¹⁶ One of the biggest attacks on a mosque in the last 15 years was on a Shiite mosque, fuelled by the political conflict in Syria, where the imam was killed.¹⁷ However, mosques are also spaces for political alliances. According to one interview with an imam, some Moroccan mosques are proponents of the Turkish president Erdoğan (by extension, Diyanet), because of discourses that are familiar and empowering to Muslims. He expressed that Erdoğan is careful about tweeting differently in English, in Arabic, and in Turkish, appealing to different audiences. According to him, Erdoğan is also a symbol of Muslim power that has a bargaining position in Europe. There is an idolization of the Turkish community in North African settings, and a certain cultural supremacy (through telenovelas, and other soft power techniques).

48% of Jews in Belgium report experiencing anti-Semitic harassment (Staetsky and DellaPergola 2022) with the number increasing following October 7, 2023. The Jewish community lives in constant fear of anti-Semitic attacks and is hyper-vigilant about rising anti-Semitism in Europe. According to representatives of the Jewish communities interviewed, fear is rooted due to a build-up of terror events locally and internationally that make Jewish people feel unsafe and unwelcome on local and national levels. These political situations and expectations of constant attacks led to one rabbi expressing, “So all these things mean it's an ongoing thing that you spend time trying to heal the soul of people who feel uncomfortable, feel scared, and that's a long run thing, that's where it gets most difficult.”¹⁸ There are significant religious and social differences between Jewish religious communities, namely Orthodox and liberal Jews, the latter who accept conversions and are openly supportive of the LGBTQ community. In an interview with a liberal rabbi, he indicated that their openness to the LGBTQ community and their acceptance of paternally transmitted Jews has attracted new members to the synagogue and lowered the ages of congregants, a positive direction for the Jewish community.

Although Belgians predominantly identify as Catholic, Belgium has one of the lower rates of attendance of Catholic religious services among its youth (Bullivant 2018). According to a Brussels-based expert on religion, the social pressures of attending church have decreased significantly in the new generation, whereas they were a key factor in maintaining high attendance rates in the past.¹⁹ In addition, most Catholic churches did not retrieve their pre-pandemic congregation sizes.

Despite a decline in Catholic churchgoers, Brussels as the capital is a hub for growing migrant Christian communities that attend Pentecostal churches and Evangelicals that seek out Christian PoWs for community building. According to the expert, these spaces are vital for migrant communities, who do not necessarily choose one church but visit several churches to widen their social networks – thereby increasing the frequency of visits

¹⁴ Interview with Expert 1 in Brussels/online on 20.10.2023 and Brussels Imam 3 (Ibid)

¹⁵ https://ccib-ctib.be/wp-content/uploads/CCIB_PUBLIC_PDF_RapportChiffresCCIB/RAPPORT_CHIFFRES_CIIB_2021.pdf

¹⁶ Focus group participant in Brussels on 19.10.2023

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17346927>

¹⁸ Interview with Brussels Rabbi 2 on 30.10.2023

¹⁹ Interview with Expert 2 in Brussels on 19.10.2023

in churches in general. Other Christian minorities include the Eastern churches such as Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic, Copts, and others. According to one priest, these churches cater to migrant communities (for example, the Assyrian church for Syrians, the Maronite church for Lebanese, Caledonian church for Iraqis) where issues related to internal politics and nationalist outlooks tend to keep these communities separated from each other.

3.4 Places of Worship: Space and Practice

Data on unrecognized mosques is scarce, but according to the BME, across Belgium, there are at least 200 unrecognized mosques. To receive official recognition, mosques should meet public safety standards that include fire exits, available emergency parking spaces and well-equipped interiors that can sustain a large number of congregants. Most mosques do not meet these standards, and, instead, remain what most interlocutors termed “quartier mosques” – small spaces in the neighbourhoods, usually street-level shops and garages that open during prayer time. Quartier mosques serve congregants in the neighbourhood who attend prayers and leave. There is very little space and opportunity to convert these spaces into meeting places for events, classes, and extra activities.

This is not the case for big mosques in Brussels, such as the Grand Mosque of Brussels in the Parc du Cinquantenaire or the Al-Khalil mosque. These mosques are used for prayer but also a range of other activities such as conferences, cultural events, educational courses, language teaching, and other social activities. For big mosques, meeting correct criteria such as providing enough space and access for congregants is vital to retaining their status as officially recognized. Big mosques may also lose recognition if they do not meet certain spatial criteria. For example, a Turkish mosque was stripped of its recognition due to the lack of publicly accessible prayer spaces.²⁰ Mosques are subjected to extra scrutiny over these technical issues. However, political issues related to external influence often constitute the actual drivers of tensions between mosques and local authorities.

For some Muslims, the securitization of mosques, combined with the internal political tensions between different Muslim communities create an atmosphere where the mosque loses its congregational capacity. One focus group participant indicated that the demographic hit most by not having a welcoming place of worship are children and the older generation, who are used to networking and having social gatherings that take place before and after prayers.

Belgium has 45 synagogues, 10 of them in Brussels include two Reform and three Sephardic synagogues while the rest are Orthodox.²¹ Brussel’s main synagogue, the Great Synagogue of Europe, is supported by the government. Smaller synagogues also receive support from the government but rely on membership and donor fees for funding.²² The Jewish community is very careful about admittance and activities around the synagogue are determined by security measures in place. For reform Jewish congregations, the synagogue is a place to gather for non-ceremonial activities such as conversion courses and other activities. Some Orthodox synagogues have services daily and are often limited to men. In an interview with a rabbi of a liberal synagogue, he said that their synagogue only holds services on weekends and expects men and women to participate. The reform synagogue is also open to using technological aids to grow the community, specifically holding services online. In this case, they ask for people to open their cameras to ensure an atmosphere of trust and inclusion. In Judaism, a service cannot proceed if there are not 10 members present, which rabbis ensure is met during online services. These

²⁰ <https://www.turkishminute.com/2024/03/19/ministry-suspended-official-recognition-of-diyaret-affiliated-mosque-in-belgium/>

²¹ <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/BE#community-life>

²² Interview with Brussels Rabbi 2 on 30.10.2023

measures were more common during the Covid-19 pandemic, but still remain in place for members who live far from the synagogue, or older members who have mobility difficulties. Reform (liberal) synagogues offer conversion classes. According to one rabbi, these conversion classes do not begin before the non-Jewish member attends activities and services in the synagogue for a full year. This is then followed by rigorous education courses that last for up to two years.²³

Churches in Brussels occupy central positions and are generally open to the public. Their open-door policies are vital to their Christian identities, and many churches are also tourist sites that attract high foot traffic. In interviews with priests in Brussels, the issue of regulating opening hours due to security concerns is not a matter of priority. In addition, churches use their spaces as “cultural spaces” for non-religious events open to the public, which is not the case for most mosques and synagogues that lack the capacity (and space), or keep their doors closed for religious privacy and security reasons.

3.5 Integration of PoWs and Relationships with the Surrounding Community

For Jewish communities, heightened security measures prevent opening the synagogue to the surrounding environment and involving the neighbourhood in their cultural, social, or religious activities. Furthermore, changes in the demographic fabric affect the integration levels between Jews and their surrounding environment. According to one rabbi, the area around his synagogue is now full of new migrants while Jewish populations that were around the synagogue have left to live elsewhere. This has created a lack of interaction with the neighbouring community and a fear of misunderstanding.

The integration of mosques with their surrounding environment heavily depends on the status of the mosque itself. Recognized mosques are located in central areas where there is frequent foot traffic and are open to the public. Quartier mosques are very integrated in the neighbourhoods as they serve the local populations, and are self-funded, mostly by congregants from the neighbourhood itself. Although not necessarily used for social and educational activities, the smaller mosques and prayer halls have high acceptance in their locations and are considered vital spaces for the community. In the past, the Grand Mosque of Brussels presented an opportunity to open up Islam to outsiders and served as a cultural hub.²⁴ The mosque organized group tours, was regularly open to the public, and conducted Friday sermons in French which welcomed non-Arab Muslims and other interested individuals. According to the imam, the closure of the Grand Mosque closed the opportunity for positive integration and education about moderate Islam in Brussels.

Another finding in Brussels is that due to the high number of international workers, several churches and synagogues are pan-European, with congregants coming from all over the EU. These “EU-level” churches are located in busy, administrative areas and not heavily populated areas out of the centre of the EU institutions. In more popular areas where there is an influx of migrant populations, churches serve Christian and non-Christian people in need. According to one priest, this work is supported by older churchgoers who see charity as an important pillar of their faith. In these neighbourhoods, the church plays a key role in society and is perceived as a space that encourages integration and inter-faith connections.²⁵

²³ Interview with Brussels Rabbi 1 on 25.10.2023

²⁴ Interview with Brussels Imam 1 on 12.10.2023

²⁵ Interview with Brussels Priest 3 on 22.10.2023

3.6 Security and Safety Risks

Jewish and Muslim communities in Brussels face anti-Semitism and Islamophobia respectively, which has been rising for both communities since October 7, 2023. One of the key moments that changed the security landscape for Jews in Belgium was the 2014 shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. Jewish communities were protected by the military in Belgium, but following the 2014 attack, security measures included protection by the police force. As of today, it is only the police who are protecting synagogues and other Jewish spaces such as museums and schools, although the Jewish community is asking for more protection. At the federal level, there are initiatives being taken to increase security, but members of the Jewish community express that they will self-fund protective measures to reach a maximum level of security protection. One rabbi mentioned concrete anti-Semitic actions such as graffiti sprayed outside the synagogue and an attack on the front door with a Molotov cocktail that took place in his synagogue before he was appointed as its rabbi. Other interviewees expressed that anti-Semitism is less visible, characterized by a “general atmosphere” where Jews do not feel safe.

Muslims regularly report death threats and consistent verbal harassment.²⁶ Mosques receive threatening anonymous letters. In the recent past, the biggest violent attack against a mosque in Brussels was the Shiite Reda mosque firebombing in 2012 that killed its imam. The mosque had been put under police protection in the past due to threats from Salafist groups. The other major incident was the 1989 assassination of the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Brussels.

Threats to Belgian churches predominantly consist of fire attacks. In 2016, perpetrators set fire to a 16th-century church in Mont-Sainte-Genevieve that resulted in considerable damage.²⁷

3.7 Security Culture: Trends and Effects on Practicing Religious Population

The Jewish community prioritizes security and considers it foundational to their ability to continue existing as a religious community. In general, it is very difficult to obtain access to a synagogue. First, the individual needs to be properly identified by others and then submitted to a rigorous security process. Walk-ins are not permitted. The security check involves submitting ID cards in advance, and sometimes criminal records to validate that they have no criminal past. The synagogue itself is equipped with security cameras inside and outside with a view of the street and double doors. One of the needs of synagogues is increasing the number of security personnel. Even though the cost of hiring security guards is partially subsidized by the state, the community itself needs to finance extra security measures. This, in coordination with the police presence, is a high priority for the Jewish communities, which requires large financial support. It is often local authorities that increase security protection for the Jewish community. For example, one rabbi shared the example of a yearly celebration that they held in a park outside of their synagogue that had been shut down by local authorities for fear of escalation. For events taking place outside synagogues, such as the Hanukkah celebrations that take place in public squares, the atmosphere and costs of security are very high preventing Jewish members from comfortably celebrating in public. However, in general, Jewish participants indicated that security is the cornerstone of Jewish presence in Brussels and that more is needed to protect them, despite the isolation this creates from interacting freely with the public. According to one rabbi, “They (worshippers) don't like the idea that there are armed police outside the synagogue when they arrive. But they also feel protected. So I don't think it keeps people away. The only people that will keep away are those who are unwilling to submit themselves to a security check. Or who find it too intrusive. But

²⁶ <https://hatecrime.osce.org/belgium>

²⁷ <https://www.ncregister.com/news/vandals-attack-churches-in-france-and-belgium>

to be honest with you, I've never experienced that yet. And from time to time the security check does raise issues with certain people and they're not admitted to the synagogue.”²⁸

3.8 Case study: The Grand Mosque of Brussels

The case analysed for Belgium is the case of The Grand Mosque of Brussels following allegations of mismanagement of funds and connections to external foreign powers. The Grand Mosque of Brussels was originally built as part of an oriental exhibition in 1880, but the building fell into disrepair in the 20th century due to a lack of maintenance. In 1967 the building was ceded to the Muslim community of Belgium. It was later renovated and turned into a functional mosque, with the support of King Faisal ibn Abd al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia in 1978 and made the headquarters of the Belgian Muslim Executive.

The data used in this case study are drawn from local and international sources. The local sources are some of the largest news outlets in Belgium that including De Standaard, Brussels Express, De Morgen, The Brussels Times and VRT. De Morgen is considered a left-leaning or centre-left media outlet. It tends to focus on social justice issues but has a wide variety of viewpoints. Both the VRT and the Brussels Express provide a diverse range of perspectives. VRT, a public broadcaster in Flanders, tends to lean towards impartiality. Both De Standaard and The Brussels Times are centre-right leaning. Three articles from The Brussels Times were included because out of all the media outlets they had a plethora of similar coverage of the events. The international sources are drawn from neighbouring and close European countries and some external countries outside Europe and include The Guardian, De Telegraaf and The Times of Israel. The Guardian is a left-leaning to centre-left news source known for a progressive stance towards social issues and critical coverage of conservative government policies. It often relies on the reporting of other more local news outlets. De Telegraaf is a right-leaning Dutch news outlet. The Times of Israel has a focus on Middle Eastern politics and can at times have the right-leaning, this source was chosen to include a more diverse range of Western sentiment, potentially allowing us to draw some distinctions. On average the sources consist of more right-leaning than left-leaning or impartial sources. This mix of data gives us some valuable insights into the level of reporting uniformity.

Data from articles produced by the previously mentioned outlets are analysed by noting the frequency of certain keywords and phrases. This is followed by a relational analysis that shows how certain concepts are discussed in the articles regarding what information gets conveyed to the public, emotions and provocation/solution-oriented use of words. The concepts chosen relate to the securitization of the mosque and its congregants.

Content analysis

Key words	Frequency Across Outlets
Salafism	20
Terrorism	6
Security	11
Extremism	8
Radicalism	11
Spy/spying	4
Islamophobia	0
Fear	3

²⁸ Interview with Brussels Rabbi I on 25.10.2023

Immigration	1
Islamist	2

The content analysis shows that none of the right-leaning articles mentioned the word 'security', whereas the left-leaning and impartial sources all mention 'security', often multiple times. The term 'terrorism' is not mentioned by either of the left-leaning articles but is mentioned by almost all others. The terms 'immigration', 'fear' and 'Islamism' are only mentioned by two of the sources, that is the International Guardian and Times of Israel. 'Salafism' is the only real throughline when it comes to this content analysis. All but one of the articles mention it.

Relational analysis

In the relational analysis, attention is paid to how the media discusses and presents specific themes related to the case study.

Concepts	Analysis
Description of external influence	<p>Saudi/foreign control:</p> <p><i>"In de Grote Moskee van de Belgische hoofdstad maakten salafisten jarenlang de dienst uit, aangestuurd vanuit Saudi-Arabië[...]. Maar sindsdien is de moskee in de greep van Marokko, hebben de inlichtingendiensten volgens de minister vastgesteld.."</i></p> <p><i>- De Telegraaf</i></p> <p>"In the Grand Mosque of the Belgian capital, Salafists have been in charge for years, directed by Saudi Arabia[...]. But since then, the mosque has been under the control of Morocco, according to the minister."</p> <p><i>- De Telegraaf</i></p> <p>This communication is shared across these outlets: VRT, The Brussels Times, De Standaard.</p>
Links to Wahhabi Salafism	<p>Hub for Wahhabi Salafism:</p> <p>"For as long as it existed, the Great Mosque was run by the [...], which was financed by Saudi Arabia. However, after the terror attacks in 2016, it was decided, following an investigation, that [...] was no longer allowed to operate the mosque. The Parliamentary Investigation Commission on the Brussels attacks, which considered that the [...] spread Wahhabi Salafism, a trend that can play a determining role in the radicalism and violent radicalism," it said."</p> <p><i>- The Brussels Times.</i> This communication is shared across these other outlets: <i>The Times of Israel</i>, <i>De Standaard</i>.</p> <p>Neutral: "It was run by the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL), a missionary society mainly</p>

	funded by Saudi Arabia. The MWL denies it espouses violence.” - <i>The Guardian</i> .
Links between mosques and potential threats	<p>Linking mosques to threat: “After the 2016 attacks by Muslim extremists, the government, fearful of radicalization, decided that this had to end and forced a change of management in the mosque.” – <i>De Telegraaf</i></p> <p>Neutral reporting: “It is alleged that three employees at the mosque, including a director, are agents of Moroccan intelligence services.” - <i>The Guardian</i>. This is communicated across these other outlets: <i>De Morgen</i>.</p>
Description of teachings at the Mosque	<p>Extremist: “There was a consensus among them to say that the Islam promoted [...] is from the Wahhabi-Salafist current with a strong influence of the worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood. The doctrine of the Wahhabi-Salafists is literalist in its interpretation of the sacred texts, extremely normative culturally and exclusivist concerning other visions of Islam,” he said. “Their conception of Islam refuses any compromise and claims total engagement of their adherents. It rejects “the others” who do not share it and creates a ghetto mentality”. - <i>Brussels Express</i>. This is communicated across these other outlets: <i>De Telegraaf</i>, <i>The Brussels Times</i>, <i>The Israel Times</i>, <i>De Standaard</i>.</p> <p>Moderate: “Ik ben een gematigde moslim. Ik ben drie jaar geleden zelfs door extremisten in België beschuldigd van afvalligheid, omdat ik te tolerant zou zijn ” - <i>De Morgen</i>. “I am a moderate Muslim. Three years ago, I was even accused of apostasy by extremists in Belgium because they believed I was too tolerant.” - <i>De Morgen</i>. This is communicated across these other outlets: <i>VRT</i>.</p>
Use of Quotes by religious and government officials	<p>Inflammatory: “All organs of the Muslim Executive must be restaffed with Muslims who mean well to our country.” - <i>The Guardian</i>. This is communicated across these other outlets: <i>VRT</i>, <i>De Telegraaf</i>, <i>The Brussels Times</i>, <i>Brussels Express</i>, <i>De Standaard</i>.</p> <p>De-escalation: “De imam van de Grote Moskee in Brussel is “een gevaar voor de samenleving”. Dat zei staatssecretaris Theo Francken (N-VA) over [...]. <i>VRT NWS</i> interviewde de man. “Ik weet niet waar die informatie vandaan komt”, zegt hij. “Ik ben geen gevaarlijke salafist.” Vandaag raakte bekend dat de</p>

	<p><i>moskee officieel erkend wil worden door de Belgische staat." - De Morgen</i></p> <p>"The imam of the Grand Mosque in Brussels is 'a danger to society.' That's what Secretary of State Theo Francken (N-VA) said about [...]. VRT NWS interviewed the imam. 'I don't know where that information comes from,' he says. 'I'm not a dangerous Salafist.' Today it was announced that the mosque wants to be officially recognized by the Belgian state."</p> <p>- <i>De Morgen</i>. This sentiment is shared across these other outlets: Brussels Express.</p>
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In general, the conclusion can be drawn that the Grand Mosque of Brussels is securitized as harbouring extremist attitudes and teachings that are being imported by a foreign government. This content is conveyed to the audience in all outlets regardless of political bias (De Morgen 2017; Flanders News 2020; The Brussels Times 2020a; De Standaard 2020; Staff 2018). However, some reports in the media conflate Muslim Belgian citizens, rather than a few individuals in management, with a security threat in the eyes of the state, where congregants have plausibly been radicalized by attending the 'Salafist' mosque. In the media, they are portrayed as Belgian citizens who 'do not mean well to the country of Belgium' (Banks 2017). Similarly, Moroccan spies were noted by all sides of the political spectrum as being involved with the goings on of the Mosque in some capacity (De Standaard 2020; Flanders News 2020; Boffey & Jones 2020). Another point to note is that multiple articles referred to the same appeal by the Belgian Minister of Justice that called on all Muslims to let themselves be heard in society and to openly reject Salafism. This plays into the idea that the default perception of Muslims by the government is a potential threat and that Muslim organisations that are not Salafi should make this fact known (De Standaard 2020; The Brussels Times 2020a). It is noteworthy that the use of de-escalatory quotes by religious or government officials was only observed among left-leaning and impartial sources (De Morgen 2017; Banks 2017). However, sources from all sides of the political spectrum used inflammatory quotes, including the left and centre (Boffey & Jones 2020; Flanders News 2020; De Telegraaf 2020). For example, Brussels Express made use of both inflammatory and de-escalatory quotes (Banks 2017).

The issue of a potential terrorist threat was only mentioned by right-leaning and impartial news outlets. Neither of the left-leaning outlets used the word at all (The Brussels Times 2020a; De Standaard 2020; Banks 2017). What can be concluded is that to some extent all reporting regardless of political leaning plays into the securitization of the Grand Mosque of Brussels and its congregants. Most outlets report on the risk of Salafism inside the mosque. However, there is a noticeable difference between the different outlets individually and there are broad content differences between reporting on the left and right, where the left introduces neutral and moderate remarks to de-escalate the content being communicated.

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4. Berlin, Germany

4.1 Introduction

Berlin, the capital of Germany is one of the most diverse cities in Europe. With its strong economy, Berlin has for decades attracted migrant workers, and more recent immigration includes economic and political refugees fleeing civil conflict, such as the Syrian civil war. Regulation of religious affairs is not centralized, and there is a degree of variability between Germany's sixteen federal states. In addition, federal states have the right to identify non-traditional religious groups as sects and offer public warnings about their activities.²⁹ Countering anti-Semitism is a top priority for the German government, and in 2022 it released the "National Strategy against Anti-Semitism and for Jewish life" which serves as an educational foundation to prevent anti-Semitism and applies mechanisms for prevention and reporting

The Christian community has comprised Germany's largest share of religious adherents in the decades following the end of World War II. Recent data on the German population exhibit that 20.9 Germans identify as Catholics, while Germany is home to 19.2 million Protestants (Eurydice 2024). Although there exists no German state church and Germany considers itself a secular state, Christianity has historically played a vital role in national and local society. The 47.4% of the German population identifying as Christian make it the most popular religion and the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) is among the most important political parties in federal and regional politics (Cremer 2023; García-Pelegrín 2023). Although Christian institutions have been targeted for terrorist activities, expression of overt racism has been absent to date. An explanation for racism not surfacing could relate to its position as the most popular religion in Germany as well as the Christian institutions' positive relations with the authorities (Cremer 2023).

Islam is the second biggest religion in Germany, after Christianity (Eurydice 2024). It is estimated that Germany is home to roughly 5.5 million Muslims, while approximately 2.5 million Muslims in Germany have a Turkish background, comprising 45% of the national Muslim demographic (Pfündel et al. 2021). Although Muslims of Turkish origin do not make up the predominant portion of Muslims in Germany, they remain the main demographic within the German Islamic community by a comfortable margin (Pfündel et al. 2021). Germany's Muslim community has suffered from Islamophobia extensively over the years, with hundreds of politically motivated attacks annually against Islamic institutions and Muslims (Freedom House n.d.; Kinkartz 2023).

According to estimates shortly before the start of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, Germany is currently home to approximately 125,000 Jewish citizens, forming roughly 0.15% of the national population and making Germany one of the highest-ranking countries in terms of Jewish presence (Eurydice 2024). The highest concentration of Jewish civilians in Germany has recently been noticed in Berlin (10,000 members of the Jewish community), Munich (9,500 members), and Frankfurt (7,000 members) (World Jewish Congress 2024). The majority of the Jewish community in Germany possesses historical roots in the former Soviet Union; many of these individuals migrated to Germany after the end of World War II (World Jewish Congress 2024).

4.2 Institutional Specifics

Christianity in Germany has flourished historically, and its relative popularity has gone hand in hand with the country's lawmaking. Despite citing a strict separation of church and state, the Basic Law, Germany's constitution,

²⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/germany/>.

promotes solid government-church relations (Cremer 2023). With respect to the variations of Christianity in Germany, one can distinguish between the state's relations with the dominant Catholic and Protestant churches on the one hand and the smaller Christian entities on the other. The main bodies of the German Catholic, *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken* (ZdK), and Protestant Church, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD), receive the majority of financial and legal benefits and impact Germany's education system (Arzheimer 2024). Although lesser-established Christian organisations as well as entities of different faiths have become increasingly entrenched in society, they have, thus far, received considerably fewer privileges from the state (Arzheimer 2024).

The German government has at times expressed its caution and consideration of its recent history in its approach towards Judaism and its domestic Jewish population. In the years following the end of World War II, the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*) was established and this organisation receives subsidies from the German federal as well as local governments (Axelrod 2023; United States Department of State n.d.). Furthermore, the Council has been given a status equal to the Christian churches following an agreement with the federal government in 2003 that also included increased financial support (Deutsche Welle 2003). Furthermore, the German authorities have expressed their support for Israel in its ongoing conflict with Hamas, and its criminalization of racial hateful expressions includes the possibility of imprisonment of Nazi propaganda, Holocaust denial or other sentiments that could upset Jewish civilians (Connolly 2023; United States Department of State n.d.).

The structure of Muslim associations in Germany is not hierarchical and is made more complicated by national and ethnic differences in organisation. There are no state contracts with the Muslim community, therefore there is a lack of regulation when it comes to religious education, taxes, and other institutional matters (Fuchs 2018). Since 2006, German authorities have been organizing the Islam Conference to bridge the gap between the state and Muslim communities through their associations and push forward a German version of Islam. The essential grain of the Islam Konferenz, put forward by the Minister of Interior in 2006, was to integrate Muslims into German society. The Conference operates both at the level of the individual and at the population level, reshaping and reorganizing the existent Islamic organisations and their integration with the standing structures of the state (Hernandez Aguilar 2018). In previous years, Islam Conference invitees were established Muslim associations, which received some criticism from Muslims who did not feel represented by them (Fuchs 2018).

The primary Islamic representative body in Germany is the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) (Grieshaber 2023; Pfündel et al. 2021). The case of DİTİB illustrates how Germany has been struggling with respecting the constitutionally enshrined religious freedom while maintaining a controlling position in domestic affairs. The organisation DİTİB has close relations with Turkey, and it has been described as being significantly influenced by the Turkish authorities (Grieshaber 2021). For instance, DİTİB has allegedly received financial support from the Turkish regime to provide training to Turkish imams to preside over mosques in Germany (Niechziol and Medeiros 2023). The German authorities, in turn, have been seeking to reduce the influence of foreign interference by training imams to replace the Turkish-influenced imams (Grieshaber 2021; Niechziol and Medeiros 2023).

4.3 Socio-Cultural Characteristics and Identity

Many Muslims in Germany experience Islamophobia on a daily basis, and numerous reports about the German population's attitude towards Islam reveal the widespread racism against the Muslim population (Taz 2023; Al Jazeera 2023; Strack 2023). The far-right Alternative Für Deutschland [Alternative for Germany] party has

amplified such hostile sentiments, demonstrating how the German government has thus far failed to uniformly combat domestic Islamophobia (Abdelkader 2017; Kinkartz 2023). The number of Islamophobic incidents has increased significantly over the years, with the developments in the Israel-Hamas conflict being considered an important driver of anti-Muslim violence (Middle East Monitor 2024; Strack 2024).

Racism targeting the German Jewish community has been significantly prevalent and has increased over the years (European Union Agency for Human Rights 2019; Hänel 2023). Incidents such as the violent targeting of a rabbi's home in Essen illustrate the hostilities Jewish civilians potentially encounter in Germany, while the majority of respondents of Jewish background in a survey by the European Union Agency for Human Rights expressed sentiments of fearing security (EUFRA 2019; Hänel 2023). Particularly, against the backdrop of developments in the current Israel-Hamas conflict, Jewish citizens experience increasingly more anti-Semitic violence. Between the start of the conflict in the Middle East on October 7 and November 9, 2023, Germany's Research and Information Centre on Anti-Semitism recorded 29 incidents of anti-Semitic violence per day (RIAS 2023). These incidents include several instances of what RIAS describes as 'extreme violence', underscoring the persistence of anti-Semitic violence against Germany's Jewish population and this has caused fear among numerous Jewish citizens of Germany (RIAS 2023).

In a national survey, 19 per cent of Germans indicated that they would not be willing to accept a Jew as a family member, while 33 per cent indicated that they would not be willing to accept a Muslim as a family member. There was also a large difference between Catholics and Protestants in acceptance of religious minorities. While more than half of Catholics would not accept a Muslim, only 16 per cent of Protestants shared that view (Deutsche Welle, 2018; Wike et al., 2019). Both Catholicism and Protestantism have been declining in the last seventy years, albeit at different rates. According to PEW research data, Protestantism declined faster, according to both membership rolls and survey self-identification.³⁰

According to an interview with a Berlin Catholic representative, Catholicism has been declining in society, but certain privileges prevail. According to them, "[Church and state] are still strongly connected, in questions about money, acceptance in society, questions where I get invited and whether I can speak, or whether I need to explain myself. So, this for me is a very comfortable situation, I can enter many places and say I am part of the Catholic church and they grant me a place. Although the Catholic institution has many problems, they still are an official partner".³¹

4.4 Places of Worship: Space and Practice

For the Muslim community, finding a space to serve as a PoW is considerably complicated due to renting. Bigger mosques with sources of funding own the PoW, but these are also subject to building laws and regulations that need to meet standards of height, safety, accessibility, and other infrastructural specificities that need to be negotiated with the municipality and government. According to Protone interviews, Muslims prefer going to mosques that give services in their own languages and often go to groups in smaller communities and centres close to their neighbourhoods that are accessible multiple times a day for prayer. For everyday prayers, Muslim

³⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/02/12/once-a-majority-protestants-now-account-for-fewer-than-a-third-of-germans/#:~:text=The%20share%20of%20those%20who,43%25%20currently%20identify%20as%20Catholic.&text=Protestants%20and%20Catholics%20in%20Germany,to%20Pew%20Research%20Centre%20data.>

³¹ Interview with Berlin Catholic Representative I on 22.11.2023

focus group discussion (FGD) participants mentioned that they need to find the closest and most accessible prayer spaces that often include mosques from other communities, whereas they prefer their Friday prayers to take place in mosques of their own communities in their own languages.³² Participants mentioned that they were lucky to live in Berlin where there are several opportunities to pray in mosques and community centres. This varies regionally, and a comparison to Munich was made where finding an operational neighbourhood mosque on short notice is more challenging. Focus group participants also mentioned the difficulty of finding spaces for prayer at schools, universities, and workspaces and indicated that they often had to find hidden spaces where they would have their daily prayers without interrupting colleagues and other students and staff. Practising hygiene and cleaning before prayer is also considered complicated as there are few spaces where they can prepare for prayer privately, which makes it an uncomfortable interaction in shared spaces, especially for Muslim women. This is also the case for women's spaces in smaller mosques. According to one female FGD participant, "It is as if they build a mosque and then say oh now we need to put in a space for women".³³

Technological equipment is common in large mosques, where the sermon is broadcasted on big screens and translation is available through headphones. During the Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2020, the government introduced a phone app to monitor the spread of the virus. According to FGD participants, this method of tracking made them very uncomfortable as they were reluctant to give out personal details and provide information to the government about their stays in their mosques. These statements revealed a lack of trust and discomfort towards the German authorities, reflecting a broader trend of Muslims feeling securitised by the government, especially in a climate of politicized Muslim identities and rising Islamophobia in the media.

Berlin's Jewish religious community is spread out between Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Progressive congregations with varying practices. For example, there are two synagogues in Berlin where women are allowed to step on the bimah and read from the Torah. In interviews with rabbis, they expressed that physical spaces for meetings are important, yet the number of people is more important for the religion.³⁴ In order to have a religious meeting, at least ten male Jews should be present. Some synagogues are connected to Jewish spaces where educational, culinary, and other activities take place to strengthen the community and create non-official spaces for people to interact and support one another. Synagogues in Germany are under police protection, and there are security-trained personnel from the Jewish community who complement these state security measures. According to one rabbi, synagogues are only a small part of the Jewish community's life. Spaces of gathering (whether included inside synagogues or nearby centres or homes) are equally important in fostering Jewish life as they offer spaces for cooking, sharing meals, and engaging in informal discussion.³⁵

4.5 Integration of PoWs and Relationships with the Surrounding Community

Mosques in Germany tend to be concentrated in areas with high migrant populations. In Berlin, several mosques can be found in Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Wedding, and Charlottenburg that serve diverse immigrant populations. On the other hand, other areas such as Zehlendorf have fewer mosques, reflecting the lower levels of cultural and religious diversities, and the more affluent nature of the neighbourhoods. There are several "mega-mosques" in Germany, notably in big cities that serve a high number of Muslims. However, the construction of new mosques is always a subject of political, expert, and civil society debates that can hamper or delay construction. For example, a large mosque project in Munich was shut down due to delays in payment and legal issues (Müller 2019). Other

³² Focus group participant Berlin/Online on 26.02.2024

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Interview with Berlin Rabbi 1 on 20.11.2023; Interview with Berlin Rabbi 2 on 28.11.2023

³⁵ Interview with Berlin Rabbi 1 on 20.11.2023

mosques are forced to shut down because of safety issues, such as overcrowding, which affects most mosques, especially on Fridays where congregants often spill out in the streets. Other mosques are shut down because renters refuse to renew the lease, one of the most common findings across all countries of the Protone research. In some areas, efforts to use public spaces for prayer, such as squares and parks, are shut down by political groups (Vonberg 2017). According to one FGD participant, parking is also a major issue in big cities, such as Berlin. He says, “They try to regulate where they’re praying, but they can’t regulate where people are parking, and that’s more of a problem”.³⁶

The lack of prayer space is leading non-Muslim religious communities to offer spaces for Muslims to pray. However, interviewed imams expressed the need for visibility as Muslims in cities. Stumbling across a mosque, according to them, does not improve relationships with society. According to one imam, “If you are not visible, then you have to be searched for, and it’s much more complicated and more difficult, of course, to be transparent, or at least, to give trust to [society]”.³⁷ Smaller mosques and community centres also tend to be associated with the national, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of the immigrant populations that they serve, which limits interactions with outsiders.

Berlin has commemorative spaces for remembering the Holocaust and numerous initiatives commemorating Jewish life. These activities surged after the fall of the wall in 1989 when the German state was establishing relationships between Germans and Jews that dealt with the violence of WWII and aimed to make Germany hospitable for Jews and foster Jewish memory. One of the most important memorials, The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, located in the centre of Mitte, is in an open space with high foot traffic, which makes it vulnerable to anti-Semitic graffiti (Deutsche Welle 2022). Synagogues remain closed spaces and with the increase of security measures following October 7, individuals external to the congregation are subjected to highly stringent security checks before entering. These additional security measures have decreased the frequency of interactions between synagogues and the surrounding community.

4.6 Security and Safety Risks

Over the years, Germany’s Christian community has been on the receiving end of anti-Christian violence, including attacks on churches and multiple attempts to perpetrate terror attacks on Christian institutions (Die Welt 2021; Al Jazeera 2024). A prominent attack occurred on 1 November 2021 in Nordhausen, Thuringia, when an individual destroyed several religious symbols in a church and disturbed a service (Die Welt 2021). According to the church’s pastor, the perpetrator’s motivations for his act of violence are related to religious reasons (Die Welt 2021).

Islamophobia has surfaced as a primary motivation for multiple attacks in Germany in the past decade, both mosques and Muslims have been targeted in these incidents (Hofmeier & Bakmaz 2017; Stoddard 2016). The shooting at a McDonald’s in Munich in 2016 and the Hanau shooting in 2020 have both been associated with Islamophobic sentiments, yet anti-Islam sentiments have not conclusively been determined as the main motivations for these attacks which resulted in 10 and 11 deaths including perpetrators respectively (Deutsche Welle 2019; McHugh et al. 2020). Nevertheless, in both attacks, right-extremist and xenophobic reasons allegedly influenced the perpetrator to commit his act of violence. The victims of the Munich attack primarily belonged to the German Muslim community (Job 2016). In interviews, imams mention Islamophobic actions

³⁶ Focus group participant Berlin/Online on 26.02.2024

³⁷ Interview with Berlin Imam I on 22.11.2023

ranging from attacks on imams with knives to rocks and graffiti being painted, especially in reaction to the appearance of ISIS in Europe and the influx of Muslims immigrants.

Besides Islamophobia, anti-Semitism poses a significant security problem in Germany. Numerous attacks in Germany have been motivated by anti-Semitic sentiments, including the targeting of a Berlin synagogue with Molotov cocktails last October (Hülsemann 2023). The most prominent attack against the Jewish community in Germany relates to the Halle synagogue shooting, which led to two fatalities and two wounded (BBC 2019). The perpetrator failed to enter a synagogue and killed two other civilians instead. He acted upon his anti-Semitic sentiments and sought the killing of large numbers of Jewish civilians (Koehler 2019). In the aftermath of this attack and other acts of violence targeting places of worship, the European Union and the German government stepped up their efforts to increase the protection of Jewish PoWs.

4.7 Security Culture: Trends and Effects on Practicing Religious Population

Muslim reactions to the introduction of security technology in mosques vary depending on their background and length of residence in Germany. In focus group discussions, Muslims of Turkish background welcomed security technology, namely CCTV footage. However, they mentioned that the idea would be mildly discomforting, but something that they could get used to if it keeps their mosques safe. By contrast, Muslims fleeing the war in Syria, for example, equate surveillance with narratives of persecution and danger, and state that having cameras inside mosques would discourage members from attending. Large mosques have mixed experiences with the police. While some are attended by police during special events to ensure security, there have been instances where the police raid mosques on allegations of terrorism or corruption.

In interviews, rabbis expressed that, although their community was subjected to anti-Semitic harassment prior to October 7, these incidents have risen significantly since then. According to one rabbi, part of their responsibility is being worried about security at all times. At the same time, they expressed that such mentality, among rabbis and the congregation itself, makes Jews close in on themselves and avoid contact with outsiders, which has negative effects on social integration. According to the rabbi, “Just building the distance between you and the others is back to the ghetto, and we don’t want to go back to the ghetto”.³⁸ Although security measures are in place in and around synagogues, rabbis also feel the responsibility of ensuring psychological security for their congregants in spaces outside the synagogue, in public spaces, and specifically the streets, where harassment has increased. Jews are implementing preventative behaviours such as removing the kippah, avoiding lingering around the synagogue before and after service, and attending cultural activities in groups, but these measures are in turn embedding strong psychological insecurities about not being accepted in society.

4.8 Case Study: Halle Attack

On 9 October 2019, Stephen Balliet attempted to enter the Halle synagogue to engage in a killing spree. After several failed attempts to access the building, he killed two civilians and wounded two others (Koehler 2019; Wojtasik 2020). Balliet expressed both in his manifesto and while live-streaming his violent extremist attack on Jewish people, whom he blamed for all the problems he had been experiencing (Koehler 2019; Wojtasik 2020). Moreover, Balliet had begun his violent act from his car parked near the synagogue and seemed considerably frustrated for failing to enter the Halle synagogue; the target for his killing spree (Koehler 2019).

³⁸ Interview with Berlin Rabbi I on 20.11.2023.

Balliet also held xenophobic views and considered a mosque as a more feasible target because of its perceived limited security (Koehler 2019). However, Balliet's targeting of the Halle synagogue – in it were 50 individuals praying – on the Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur and his repeated anti-Semitic expressions demonstrate how Balliet specifically intended to maximise fatalities among the Jewish community (Koehler 2019; Ware 2020; Wojtasik 2020). This anti-Semitic attack, perpetrated by a German civilian with both a military and educational background seeking to instil fear in Germany's Jewish population (Koehler 2019; Wojtasik 2020), underscores the security threats Jewish places of worship in Germany could encounter.

This case study adopts a content analysis on the portrayal of the Halle synagogue attack by a broad spectrum of German news outlets. To scrutinise how news sources of various political and socio-economic alignments have described the violent extremist act, this content analysis analysed the discourse featured in media channels across the political landscape. For example, it examined the coverage of the Halle attack by news outlets adopting distinct left-wing stances (Stern, Taz,) and progressive outlets that are considered to embrace a centre-left political alignment (Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Tagesspiegel,). On the other hand, this research analysed newspaper records that tend to lean to the (centre-)right (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt). Additionally, the study probed media outlets that have explicitly voiced their stance on societal developments, such as the tabloid Bild and rightist platforms Junge Freiheit and Tichys Einblick. The various news platforms in this research tend to hold starkly different political views, such as a conservative (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt) versus a progressive (Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung) outlook. Moreover, this research selected newspapers of record (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt, Süddeutsche Zeitung) and controversial online platforms (Junge Freiheit, Tichys Einblick). The inclusion of such varying media outlets enhanced the anticipation for divergent depictions of the Halle synagogue attack and its associated elements.

Conceptual Analysis

Key words	Frequency across news outlets
Alternative für Deutschland [Alternative for Germany] (AfD)	72 mentions
antisemitische Motivation [anti-Semitic motivation]	13 mentions
Christchurch	11 mentions
Dönerladen [kebab shop]	18 mentions
Einzeltäter [lone actor]	10 mentions
erschüttert [shocked]	9 mentions
Gamer-Szene / Computerspiel-Szene [the scene of gaming/ the gaming world]	9 mentions
Halle	111 mentions
Jom Kippur [Yom Kippur]	14 mentions
Judenhass [hatred of Jews]	78 mentions
Manifest [Manifesto]	8 mentions
Massaker [massacre]	21 mentions
rechtsextreme Gewalt [right-extremist violence]	32 mentions
selbstgebauten Waffen [self-made weapon]	11 mentions
Stephan Balliet	132 mentions (59 mentions of his name, 73 mentions of descriptions)
Synagoge [synagogue]	74 mentions
Tätervideo [video by the perpetrator]	54 mentions

Relational Analysis

Concepts	Analysis
Reactions of local authorities	<p>Inflammatory remarks:</p> <p>Ex 1: „Was ist schlimmer, eine beschädigte Synagogentür oder zwei getötete Deutsche?“ [“What's worse, a damaged synagogue door or two Germans killed?”] (Betschka 2019). Such trivialisation by AfD politicians of the anti-Semitic attack in Halle features in Tagesspiegel and in 2 articles of Die Welt.</p> <p>Ex 2: Der Berliner AfD-Chef Georg Pazderski sagte, eine „Eskalation“ wie in Halle sei absehbar gewesen. Er machte die „fatale Politik“ der anderen Parteien dafür verantwortlich, weil sie „Antisemiten duldet und teilweise sogar hofiert“ [Berlin AfD leader Georg Pazderski said that an "escalation" like the one in Halle was foreseeable. He blamed the "fatal policies" of the other parties because they "tolerate and in some cases even court anti-Semites"] (Locke & Wehner 2019). Such reference to the extremist attack to assign responsibility to political rivals features numerous across the outlets (FAZ, Die Welt, Junge Freiheit).</p> <p>De-escalation:</p> <p>Ex 1: „Bundesinnenminister Horst Seehofer (CSU) spricht am Abend von einem „zumindest antisemitischen Angriff“. „Das ist ein abscheulicher Angriff auf unser friedliches Zusammenleben“ [In the evening, Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (CSU) spoke of an "at least anti-Semitic attack". "This is a despicable attack on our peaceful coexistence"] (Litschko et al. 2019). Such actions or discourse features in media across the political spectrum (Taz, Junge Freiheit, Spiegel, Deutschlandfunk Kultur).</p> <p>Ex 2: „Der Parteivorsitzende Alexander Gauland sprach von einem „monströsen Verbrechen“; die „uneingeschränkte Solidarität“ der AfD gelte der jüdischen Gemeinschaft in ganz Deutschland.“ [Party chairman Alexander Gauland spoke of a "monstrous crime"; the AfD's "unreserved solidarity" was with the Jewish community throughout Germany] (Locke & Wehner 2019). Such de-escalatory discourse has been featured about politicians that faced much criticism for fueling anti-Semitic sentiments (FAZ, Die Welt 2x, Tagesspiegel).</p>

Reactions of the general public	<p>Traumatisation:</p> <p>Ex 1: “Die Menschen sind noch immer fassungslos nach diesem brutalen Terroranschlag in ihrer Stadt” [“People are still bewildered after this brutal terrorist attack in their city”]. (Richter 2019). This sentiment of traumatisation featured in an article of Deutschlandfunk Kultur and across both left-and right-leaning outlets (SZ, Junge Freiheit, Taz, Spiegel).</p> <p>Criticism:</p> <p>Ex 1: “Dass die Synagoge in Halle an einem Feiertag wie Jom Kippur nicht durch die Polizei geschützt war, ist skandalös” [“The fact that the synagogue in Halle was not protected by the police on a holiday like Yom Kippur is scandalous.”] (Lehmann & Ziegler 2019). Such criticism by members of the general public, in this case, a representative of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, features across several outlets besides Spiegel (FAZ, Tagesspiegel, Die Welt, Deutschlandfunk Kultur).</p>
Description of perpetrator	<p>Perpetrator’s name:</p> <p>Ex 1: “Nach dem Terroranschlag von Halle, bei dem der Attentäter Stephan Balliet zwei Menschen tötete und versuchte, in eine Synagoge einzudringen, steht auch die AfD weiterhin in der Kritik” [Following the terrorist attack in Halle, in which the attacker Stephan Balliet killed two people and attempted to break into a synagogue, the AfD continues to be criticised” (Die Welt 2019). Both Bild articles and two of the three articles by Die Welt in this analysis include the full name of the perpetrator of the Halle attack, as does the Tichys Einblick article.</p> <p>Perpetrator’s characteristics:</p> <p>Ex 1: “Am Nachmittag wird im Süden Sachsen-Anhalts ein Verdächtiger festgenommen, über dessen Identität die Behörden keine Angaben machen; später sickert durch, es handele sich um einen weißen Deutschen. [“In the afternoon, a suspect is arrested in the south of Saxony-Anhalt, but the authorities do not give any details about his identity; it later emerges that he is a white German” (Bovermann & Käppner 2019). SZ was the sole news outlet</p>

	<p>that discussed the identity characteristics of the perpetrator, the other mediums omitted such description.</p> <p>Perpetrator's background profile:</p> <p>Ex 1: "Eine Erklärung hierfür lieferte nach dem Attentat ebenfalls Balliets Vater gegenüber BILD: Sein Sohn sei bei der Bundeswehr gewesen, habe aber keine Spezialausbildung gehabt. Dennoch: Während seiner Grundausbildung lernte er dort das Schießen" [Balliet's father also provided an explanation for this to BILD after the attack: his son had been in the Bundeswehr, but had no specialised training. Nevertheless, he learnt how to shoot during his basic training] (Bild 2019). An article of Bild provided some background information on the perpetrator, which also featured in other articles (Die Welt, Spiegel, Tichys Einblick).</p> <p>Perpetrator's ideological belief:</p> <p>Ex 1: "In Halle versucht ein Rechtsextremist die Synagoge zu stürmen" ["A right-wing extremist tries to storm the synagogue in Halle"] (Litschko et al. 2019). Nearly all outlets in this analysis included connections between extreme-right beliefs with the perpetrator of the Halle attack. The right-leaning medium Tichys Einblick depicted a dismissal of right-extreme motivations and included the influence of the gaming world on the perpetrator instead (2019).</p>
Description of the overall political climate	<p>Anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism in the mainstream:</p> <p>Ex 1: "Der Thüringer AfD-Vorsitzende Björn Höcke sei „einer dieser geistigen Brandstifter, wenn es darum geht, wieder mehr Anti-Semitismus in unserem Land zu verbreiten" ["The Thuringian AfD chairman Björn Höcke is "one of these intellectual arsonists when it comes to spreading more anti-Semitism in our country again"] (Locke & Wehner 2019). Such a description of anti-Semitic discourse and actions gaining footing in German regional and national politics, or the debunking of this process, features across multiple articles in this analysis</p>

	<p>(FAZ, Die Welt 3x, Tagesspiegel, Junge Freiheit, Deutschlandfunk Kultur).</p> <p>Polarisation in German politics:</p> <p>Ex 1: “Jüngsten Umfragen zufolge führt die Linkspartei mit Ministerpräsident Bodo Ramelow als Spitzenkandidat vor der AfD. Beide Parteien warfen sich am Donnerstag im Thüringer Landtag gegenseitig vor, das Verbrechen von Halle für ihren jeweils eigenen Wahlkampf zu instrumentalisieren” [According to the latest polls, the Left Party, with Minister President Bodo Ramelow as its lead candidate, is ahead of the AfD. In the Thuringian state parliament on Thursday, both parties accused each other of instrumentalising the crime in Halle for their own election campaigns”] (Locke & Wehner 2019). Numerous articles in this analysis feature extensive polarisation in the German political landscape, with parties on opposing ends (FAZ, Die Welt 2x, Junge Freiheit, Tagesspiegel).</p>
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The empirical data on the media coverage of the Halle synagogue attack offer some insights that inform the understanding of the security-religious nexus in Germany. For example, the data show a tendency among German media outlets to refer to the Christchurch attacks in reporting on the Halle attack, as both incidents involved the targeting of places of worship fuelled by right-extremist motivations. Despite these commonalities, the two attacks also bore significant differences, including the targeted religious community and the number of fatalities, which are not discussed in the selected articles.

Besides this erroneous conflation of two extremist attacks, the findings of the analysed articles also demonstrate notable employment of ‘othering’ discourse. This kind of rhetoric involves a distinct separation between one group and outside groups (Ajanovic et al. 2018; Fielder & Catalano 2017); in this context, the dominant group in German society is against the country’s minority demographics. It has been primarily highlighted concerning German far-right societal actors and their comments on the anti-Semitic Halle attack and the Jewish community in Germany in general. For example, Trauel’s (2019) article in Die Welt includes the incitive language of a far-right figure who discusses how „wir, die Guten“ [“we, the good ones”] should remove the „Parasiten“ [parasites].

Lastly, the findings indicate how the attack in Halle provoked not only grief and sadness but also frustration and criticism. The selected articles reveal that these responses arose among politicians and civilians alike. The articulated criticism targeted mainly AfD for inciting the right-extremist violence that occurred in Halle and the German police for its failure to safeguard the synagogue on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

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5. Rome, Italy

5.1 Introduction

Rome, the capital of Italy, is not only a popular destination for global tourism but also the port of call, starting in the 1990s, for most migrants coming from North and Sub-Saharan African states. Since 2015, migration through the Mediterranean Sea-route to Italy (and other Mediterranean EU countries) increased significantly, affecting a turn to dominant right-wing shifts in national politics. Excessive migration and eventual settling are also changing the demographic landscape of the country and slowly influencing Italy's previously Catholic-dominant religious composition. Many right-wing parties in the early 2000s, such as Lega Nord, started using anti-Muslim rhetoric that remains today (Allievi 2003). There are differences from other European waves of migration: the Italian Muslim community comes from a heterogeneous group of countries that do not necessarily have colonial pasts with Italy and there is a higher number of irregular migrants and non-citizens. In addition, most migrants are men, and this creates a gender imbalance between men and women (Vidino 2008).

Christians made up 77.51% of the Italian population in 2020. The majority of Christians in Italy are Catholics 74.59%, while the second biggest Christian group is Orthodox 2.04%, Protestants are 0.65% of the population, and lastly, independent Christians who identify as independent of the major Christian traditions and historic, organized, institutionalized and denominationalist Christianity are 1.63% (Zurlo 2020). Islam is the second most practiced religion with 4.63% of the total population. Of this percentage, the majority are Sunnis 4.30% while Shias are only 0.34%. This percentage is mostly composed of migrants moving to Italy and the two countries that have contributed the most are Morocco (28.5%) and Albania (20.5%). Other countries of origin are Tunisia, Senegal, Egypt, and Bangladesh (Zurlo 2020). Muslims have increased by ten times since the 1990s and projections show that they are destined to double again by 2030.³⁹ The Jewish population in Italy represents 0.04% of the total Italian population. The core Jewish population is approximately 27,000 individuals, which includes individuals who identify as Jewish, individuals who have Jewish parents and have not changed religion, those who converted to Judaism by procedures, and those who declare to be Jewish without having undergone conversion (Zurlo 2020).

5.2 Institutional Specifics

Italy is a constitutional democracy and the right to freedom of religion is protected by the Constitution. The articles that confirm the principles are 2, 3, 7, 8, 19, and 20, forming the principle of secularism ("*principio supremo di laicità* "). Articles 2, 3, and 19 elaborate on the freedom of practising religious and nonreligious beliefs, while articles 7, 8, and 20 focus on the denominations and institutions of religious communities in Italy, with a particular focus on the Catholic Church (Alicino 2023). The rooted presence of the Catholic Church has influenced and shaped the fundamental rights of religious communities in the Italian territory.

Italian secularism is characterized by two fundamental aspects: the need to protect fundamental rights and freedoms, and the strong and deep connection between the Catholic Church and Italy's historical and cultural heritage (Culianu 1981). This secularism has created a particular version of religious legal pluralism that

³⁹ <https://worksthatwork.com/5/italy-hidden-mosques>

categorizes types of religious groups. The first and main group is the Catholic Church, protected by Article 7 of the Constitution. The second group consists of religions other than Catholicism. This group is divided between those with an official agreement with the State (*“Intesa”*) and those without an Intesa with the State. The latter category is further subdivided into “admitted cults” and non-religious associations. In this latter subcategory are placed all Islamic organisations (Alicino 2023).

Islam is the second most practised religion in Italy among people living in the country (Vidino 2008). However, the Italian State hasn’t legally recognized Islam as a religion. The reason behind the absence of an accord between the Muslim community and the State is justified by the lack of unified leadership of the Italian Muslim community. To sign an official agreement, the Italian government needs to identify a representative of the religious community. However, over the years several representative groups have put forward proposals for an agreement, but they all have been rejected by the governments as not representative enough (Vidino 2008). The organisation with the most followers is the UCOII (Union of the Communities and Organisations of Italy) which presented a proposal for an agreement that was declined because it was considered too ambitious by the Italian state (Vidino 2008). Being without recognition has some practical implications for the Muslim community. It prevents imams from visitation rights in prisons and hospitals, gaining recognition for places of worship, having access to state funds to promote religious activities and obtaining tax and social benefits. According to one religious representative, the absence of an agreement with the Italian state creates feelings of instability in the Muslim community and can lead to security threats due to the lack of robust protective mechanisms to which other religions have access.⁴⁰

The Italian Jewish community reached an agreement with the Italian government in 1987, later published in 1989 under the name “Rules for the Relations between the State and the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities”. Part 4 of the agreement recognizes the right of Jews to observe the Sabbath as their day of rest, with a specific mention of State employees and other public workers. It also describes the rules and procedures to exercise this right practically (Lattes 1993). Parts 18 and 19 focus on the character of the organisation, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI). The institution has the responsibility to represent the Jewish religion in front of the State and to take care of Italian Jews’ religious interests, preserve Jewish tradition and culture, and coordinate the different communities nationally and abroad (Lattes 1993). Even though an agreement with the Jewish community was reached, the aspect of unanimity has been put under pressure recently. Progressive Judaism has gained major importance, and it has attracted mixed families (Jewish families where the husband is Jewish and the wife is not), members of the LGBTQ+ community, and foreign Jews. Progressive Jews face some difficulties in establishing their status quo, as the Accord and the Italian legal framework give the UCEI and the Orthodox Jewish community the monopoly over religious rights in Italy.⁴¹

5.3 Socio-Cultural Characteristics and Identity

The case of Muslims in Italy is directly connected to discourses of migration and integration. The history of migration of Arab Muslims specifically started relatively recently. In the 1980s a small number of migrants coming from North and Sub-Saharan Africa arrived in Italy, the majority of them Moroccan, then Egyptians and

⁴⁰ Interview with Rome Muslim Representative 3 on 02.02.2024

⁴¹ Interview with Rome Jewish Representative 2 on 31.01.2024

Tunisians. The peculiarity of Italian Muslims is the heterogeneity of its community and their diverse backgrounds, which sets apart Italy from other European countries.⁴² Moreover, there are internal differences in Muslim communities within the country. Muslims in the North are more organized, and wealthier, and have more mosques and cultural centres. However, their visibility and organisation also attract more scrutiny and are more of a public issue.⁴³

Muslims in Italy face several challenges connected to racism and xenophobia. In a 2019 survey, 55% of the respondents in Italy stated they have a negative perception of Muslims (Pew Research Centre 2019). This negative perception is bolstered by far-right parties, such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega, which have direct links to discrimination and violent attacks. Sociologist Fabrizio Ciocca conducted research that shows that 65% of Muslims living in Italy experienced different forms of prejudice, violence, or discrimination because of their religious affiliation (Altomonte 2021). Anti-Muslim discrimination is largely present on social media: *Vox Diritti* found 67,889 tweets in Italy against Muslims published between March and September 2020 (Altomonte 2021). In the Italian context there is a strong emphasis on the identity of the 'Italian Muslim' – speaking Italian as their mother tongue and emotionally connected to Italy rather than to their parents' countries of origin.⁴⁴ However, younger generations of Muslims, who come from migrant families, are trying to solve this identity dilemma by applying their culture and religion to the Italian context without feeling marginalized or neglected by society.⁴⁵ One imam expressed, "That's why we try to facilitate multicultural belonging, thinking that the multicultural participation will eventually become the Italian multicultural society. So it's not Turkish or Bosnian or Pakistani or Senegali in Italy. It's of course their roots or their parents' roots, but Islamically speaking is part of Islam. In Italy, it's part of Italian Islam".⁴⁶

Italy is historically a Catholic country, and the Catholic Church has always played a role in the country's society and culture. In 2023, around 78% of Italians and foreigners living in the country considered themselves Catholics, however, as the general European trend goes, only 19% attend service weekly and 31% have never attended. The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed the effects of this already-rooted trend.⁴⁷ One of the oldest Christian minorities in Italy are the Waldensians, a Protestant community originally from the northern valleys in the region of Piemonte.⁴⁸ Today, Waldensians consider themselves a progressive minority aligned with the interests of the youth. They accept LGBTQI+ members and often show support for Pride in Rome and for migration. These social-political stances have often received pushback from far-right parties who openly oppose the community and its members.⁴⁹

⁴² Interview with Rome Muslim Representative 1 on 26.01.2024

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Interview with Rome Muslim Representative 2 on 27.01.2024

⁴⁵ Interview with Rome Muslim Representative 1 on 26.01.2024

⁴⁶ Interview with Rome Imam 3 on 01.02.2024

⁴⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/italy-religion-catholic-church-secular-032f2e49ba1a7149407ad25a62b481ab>

⁴⁸ Interview with Rome Christian Representative 2 on 02.02.2024

⁴⁹ Interview with Rome Priest 2 on 21.02.2024

Eurispes, The Research Institute of Italians, conducted a survey in 2020 that revealed that 15.6% of Italians deny that the Holocaust happened, while 23.9% of the people believed that Jewish people controlled financial and economic power (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019). In a survey carried out by the European Union 81% of the respondents stated that anti-Semitism has increased in Italy in the last five years, while more than a third have experienced anti-Semitic discrimination (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019). Jews in Italy are mainly concentrated in big cities such as Rome, Venice, Milan, Florence, Turin and Livorno. Before October 7th, 2023, the community felt a certain degree of safety in expressing and showing their religious affiliation, however after the attacks, Jews became more careful in disguising their identities. The Jewish community in Italy is very diverse. Rome specifically is known for its community of Roman Jews, one of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe, and Libyan and Persian Jews who populate different centres in Rome. The Progressive movement also comprises a heterogeneous community, accepting LGBTQI+ members and mixed families, when non-Jewish women are married to Jewish men and have a desire to raise their kids Jewish. This community's openness to new members attracts new members and lowers the general age.⁵⁰

5.4 Places of Worship: Space and Practice

Italy has the fourth-largest Muslim population in Europe. However, it only has eight official mosques. However, Italy has about 800 cultural and informal centres for prayers.⁵¹ For Muslims in Italy, finding a space that can be transformed into a mosque is a difficult process. The lack of recognition of Islam as a religion limits the possibilities for the Muslim community to find appropriate spaces to house mosques, therefore they improvise Islamic cultural centres in garages, warehouses, shops, supermarkets, apartments and other buildings. In addition, the current government poses new challenges to the opening of Islamic cultural centres. In 2023 the governmental coalition led by the Brothers of Italy Party presented a draft law that aims to limit associations for the promotion of cultural activities that also conduct religious activities. This draft, which MP Tommaso Foti created, has been discussed within the Parliamentary Commission for the Environment to forbid the transformation of warehouses and garages into religious places. This law will directly affect the Italian Islamic community since it concerns urban planning laws for those religions that have not established an Intesa with the State. This situation forces the community to find places outside their own neighbourhoods to avoid conflict with their municipalities and neighbours. Most cultural centres used as makeshift mosques do not meet the general requirements around safety, due to the structural conditions of the spaces available for rent. In the 1990s, with a small number of Muslims in Italy, this was a temporary solution. However, with the large increase in Muslims, such solutions are untenable, leaving many mosque-goers feeling that their spaces are inadequate and unsafe for them.⁵² Moreover, as cultural spaces, they do not only offer religious activities but also have educational and cultural services, such as Arabic classes which also increase the number of congregants within tight spaces. Moreover, although each of these cultural centres aims to create spaces for women, these accommodations are also limited within the small spaces available to Muslims.⁵³

⁵⁰ Interview with Rome Jewish Representative on 31.01.2024

⁵¹ <https://qz.com/674377/there-are-over-1-6-million-muslims-in-italy-and-only-eight-mosques>

⁵² Interview with Rome Imam 1 on 27.01.2024

⁵³ Interview with Rome Imam 3 on 01.02.2024

The number of synagogues in Italy is estimated at around fifty.⁵⁴ Synagogues are present in most big cities in Italy, especially in the Roman community, which has its own specific traditions. Historically, Jewish populations lived in central areas where the synagogue, school, kosher shops, and housing were near each other. However, these patterns of life are changing with the ever-expanding gentrification of certain neighbourhoods and the touristification of Rome. The Jewish Quarter contains the Great Synagogue of Rome, which also houses a Jewish Museum. Security technology and personnel are prevalent in the Jewish Quarter, which also has seven Jewish schools, and is a very popular tourist destination. As with synagogues across Europe, security has heavily increased in the aftermath of October 7, 2023, and synagogues are equipped with security technology and protected by police cars during service. In fact, synagogues in Italy have been protected since a 1982 terrorist attack on the Grande Synagogue of Rome. COVID-19 was also challenging for synagogues as some rabbis preferred to keep service in person and not online. The Progressive Jewish community remains unrecognized and is yet to have a place of worship. This leads to similar arrangements in the Muslim community, where renting venues and other spaces is more common. Progressive Jews hope that these arrangements are tolerated only temporarily, as they take away from the religious experience⁵⁵ and decrease their visibility in society.⁵⁶ However, Jewish focus group participants expressed that although space and place are important, what mattered more was being surrounded by friends and other congregants. One focus group participant said, "The fact that we are all doing the same thing with the same goal, with the same mindset, singing the same prayer, the space doesn't really matter, it doesn't have a central role in it. The people make the space, so if you are comfortable with the people that you are praying with and doing service with, then where you are doing it doesn't matter."

5.5 Integration of PoWs and Relationships with the Surrounding Community

Churches are well integrated in their surroundings and they represent a place of congregation and union for their members, as well as touristic sites. Catholics express that they have the liberty of changing the churches that they attend based on their location and are always met with a warm welcome.⁵⁷ This speaks to the degree of liberty, availability and openness of Catholic churches across Italy more generally. Churches are often found in the middle of public squares, surrounded by markets, restaurants and cafes where there is heavy foot traffic. Due to their age and lack of investment in upkeep, most churches do not meet the safety requirements requested by law (specific issues are roofing, for example).⁵⁸ Churches are also often given to Catholic migrant communities. According to one priest who works in a Filipino Catholic congregation, being gifted the church in the city centre has made his community visible, and has accelerated the feelings of integration for his congregants. Offering services such as

⁵⁴<https://www.ibs.it/sinagoghe-in-italia-guida-ai-libro-franco-bonilauri-vincenza-maugeri/e/9788862613637#:~:text=In%20Italia%2050%20sono%20gli,%2C%20al%20rococ%C3%B2%2C%20al%20neoclassico.>

⁵⁵ Interview with Rome Jewish Representative 2 on 31.01.2024

⁵⁶ Interview with Rome Rabbi 1 on 31.01.2024

⁵⁷ Focus group participant in Rome/Online on 29.02.2024

⁵⁸ Interview with Rome Christian Representative 1 on 29.01.2024

Italian language learning and other skills that prepare newly arriving immigrants for the Italian job market, such churches serve both religious and integration purposes.⁵⁹

In contrast, Muslims must overcome many challenges and prejudices while integrating into the Italian urban fabric.⁶⁰ The integration of mosques also heavily relies on its conditions. Although there do exist large mosques in Italy, for example, the Mosques of Rome and Segrate are large buildings recognizable as mosques with a minaret, the majority of Muslim spaces are cultural centres hosted in warehouses, converted shops and garages, and other smaller spaces that the Muslim community rents out of its own funding. As mentioned earlier, these spaces often do not meet the proper safety regulations, specifically in busy periods such as Ramadan or other religious celebrations. The unavailability of space for mosques puts the community at risk more generally, because it creates a stigma related to the inability to integrate in society. According to one imam, having the liberty to be open and welcoming to the outside world is one of the only ways to overcome prejudice and stigmatization, and can be only done by having recognized, visible structures that elevate the status and image of Muslims in society.⁶¹

The main priority for the Jewish community in Italy is establishing high levels of security. However, security measures prevent synagogues from staying open to the public and interacting freely with the surrounding environment. Synagogues are mostly visible from the outside as the presence of police is always guaranteed by the State and private security is hired by the congregation to provide extra security measures. The Roman Jewish community mostly settled around the Jewish Quarter, represents an attractive visiting space to outsiders who are interested in their traditions, cuisine and overall culture. During the interviews, some congregants expressed their willingness to open the doors of synagogues for outsiders, such as students, for educational purposes. However, they have stressed the importance of respecting the culture and tradition of Judaism, and not essentialising it as a touristic site.⁶² Although this pattern has evolved through the years, Jews usually chose to live in the same area as the synagogue creating a specific Jewish neighbourhood.⁶³

5.6 Security and Safety Risks

Jewish and Muslim communities have faced anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which has been steadily increasing since October 7th, 2023. Since the terrorist attack on the Grande Synagogue in Rome in 1982, the Jewish community has bolstered its security measures and followed up-to-date security procedures to ensure maximum protection. The 1982 attack left congregants severely injured and killed two, including a 2-year-old boy. Since then, the Italian state has provided synagogues with police and/or military surveillance. According to one interview, Jewish congregations have received extra training and support to increase protective measures since

⁵⁹ Interview with Rome Priest 1 on 01.02.2024

⁶⁰ Interview with Rome Imam 3 on 01.02.2024

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Focus group participant in Rome/Online on 29.02.2024

⁶³ Ibid

October 7, 2023.⁶⁴ Members of Jewish congregations have expressed their desire to continue having measures of protection and contributing to the funding of their own security measures.⁶⁵

Muslim populations in Italy have been increasingly stigmatized after September 11, 2001, and have received media backlash that has pushed the community to provide for their own safety and security. Anti-immigration and anti-Islam narratives are becoming more common in national discourses, which gives license to increased offline and online Islamophobia. However, Italy's strong left-leaning political voices are at the heart of countering anti-immigration. One imam recollects how as a right-wing, anti-Muslim demonstration was taking place outside his mosque, a pro-immigration demonstration was taking place at the same time. Both demonstrations were non-violent.⁶⁶ Apart from larger mosques that have more funding available to them, smaller cultural centres do not have robust security measures in place. One way to stay secure is limiting opening hours, although that is not always possible with the frequent prayer schedule throughout the day. In addition, the feeling of securitization is intensified with the normalization of security technology around public buildings, which brings back sentiments of persecution and stigmatization to Italian Muslims.

5.7 Security Culture: Trends and Effects on Practicing Religious Populations

Security is a top priority for the Jewish community, and it is a shared effort to ensure maximum levels of protection. Newcomers have to provide their ID before visiting a synagogue and often have to have a sponsor inside the community that guarantees for them and explains their intentions for joining. Jews have to ask the head of security permission beforehand to enter the synagogue, then they have to send a picture of their passport. Once these procedures are cleared, then newcomers are allowed to enter.⁶⁷ This also extends to the Grande Synagogue itself, where visitors are subjected to security scans at the entrance of the museum that comprises the synagogue complex. Members of the Jewish community expressed that having security in front of the synagogue and schools is familiar and comforting – whether this is state police or hired private security. In the absence of these security measures, Jewish members feel vulnerable.⁶⁸ These measures are quite expensive and are usually self-sustained by the community, who are willing to keep providing them.

For the Muslim community, security is a more complex issue as it is intertwined with the feeling of over-securitization and being targeted as immigrants. One imam declared that “the most important thing is understanding security for everyone. And the state ensures the security of everyone. If this is discriminatory, that is not needed. But if it doing professionalised security, there is no problem. We for example are under surveillance, a person shouldn't be living under this assumption”.⁶⁹ Security is an important issue for the Muslim community, but it is also a core part of their relationship with the Italian state. The biases regarding Islam have made it more difficult for them to accept security measures but they are willing to collaborate with the authorities to overcome

⁶⁴ Interview with Rome Rabbi 2 on 21.02.2024

⁶⁵ Focus group participant in Rome/Online on 29.02.2024

⁶⁶ Interview with Rome Imam 3 on 01.02.2024

⁶⁷ Focus group participant Online/Rome on 29.02.2024

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Interview with Rome Imam 1 on 27.01.2024

the situation, provide a safe space for the community, and find a solution where security is shared among all stakeholders.

5.8 Case Study: The Italian Draft Law to Forbid Turning Garages and Warehouses into Mosques

In 2023 the governmental coalition led by the Brothers of Italy Party presented a draft law that aims to limit associations for promoting cultural activities that also conduct religious activities. This draft, initiated by MP Tommaso Foti, has been discussed within the Parliamentary Commission for the Environment to forbid the transformation of warehouses and garages into religious places. This law will directly affect the Italian Muslim community since it concerns urban planning laws for those religions that have not established an *Intesa* (agreement) with the State.

12 sources from Italian and international news outlets were selected for this content analysis. From the right-wing governmental perspective, the study considers the newspaper *“Libero”* which is a right-wing, conservative, and populist newspaper that is a great supporter of Giorgia Meloni’s government; and the official website of the parliamentarian who advanced the draft, Tommaso Foti. For the more centrist perspective, *“La Stampa”*, a moderate newspaper, *“Il sole 24 ore”*, a specialized newspaper that focuses mostly on matters of finance and economy with a more centre-right approach, and *“La Repubblica”*, one of the most important daily newspapers in Italy with a centre-left political orientation were chosen. Lastly, on the left side of the spectrum, two newspapers can be found which are *“Il Fatto Quotidiano”* a leftist newspaper anti-elitist and progressive; and *“Il Manifesto”*, a Marxist-inspired outlet. Two alternative Italian sources are *“OPEN”* a news website released by the journalist Enrico Mentana and a TV report from the program *“Cartabianca”*. International sources include the website Middle East Eye and ANSA, an international Italian press agency.

Conceptual Analysis

Key Words	Frequency across news outlets
Intesa	19
Legittimità costituzionale/incostituzionalità (<i>constitutional legitimacy/unconstitutional</i>)	20
Norme urbanistiche (<i>urban norms</i>)	7
Discriminazione/discriminatorio (<i>discrimination/discriminatory</i>)	15
Libertà di culto (<i>freedom of religion</i>)	13
Sicurezza (<i>security</i>)	6
Proliferazione (<i>proliferation</i>)	6
Vietare (<i>ban</i>)	10

Musulmani Italiani/comunità islamiche (<i>Italian Muslims/Islamic communities</i>)	16
Luoghi di culto (<i>places of worship/prayer</i>)	28

Relational Analysis

Concepts	Analysis
Description of the Draft Law	<p>There are two main ways to describe the party and their proposal. One that is favourable and one that is against.</p> <p>Favourable:</p> <p>The favourable side, which is represented by the pro-government newspaper “Libero” and Tommaso Foti’s website, depicts Brothers of Italy as the protectors of security and guarantors of security and rule of law.</p> <p>EX.1 <i>“Brothers of Italy’s iron fist on places of Islamic worship. Giorgia Meloni’s party has presented a bill to limit the possibility of creating places of Islamic worship in environments that do not have a specific intended use and within master plans that do not provide for prayer centres.” (Libero)</i></p> <p>EX.2 <i>“Banning open mosques in shops, garages or warehouses, as in Milan’s Viale Jenner. This is the objective of the FDI bill, first proposed by group leader Tommaso Foti, which has begun its parliamentary procedure in the Environment Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, amidst the polemics of the opposition, which, with the green Angelo Bonelli, has also addressed the President of the Chamber of Deputies Lorenzo Fontana.” (Tommaso Foti)</i></p> <p>Unfavourable:</p> <p>On the other side, other outlets such as “Il Fatto Quotidiano”, “Il Manifesto”, and even international outlets like “Middle East Eye” perpetuate the depiction of a post-fascist xenophobic party that is threatening the Constitution and the freedoms it protects, while also showing concern for freedom of religion.</p> <p>EX.1 <i>“In words, the parliamentarians of ‘Christian’ Meloni’s party, it should be noted, are generally more cautious lately. In deeds, apparently, more determined. Their bill is advancing.” (La Repubblica)</i></p>

	<p>EX.2 <i>“A controversial law proposed by the ruling far-right coalition has again brought Muslims and their places of worship to the fore of Italy’s political discourse. If passed, the law could shut down hundreds of Islamic prayer spaces, a prospect triggering alarm within the country’s 2.5 million-strong Muslim community.” (Middle East Monitor)</i></p> <p>EX.3 <i>“The proposal, first signed by group leader Tommaso Foti, was presented to the Chamber’s Environmental Commission and the minorities have raised criticisms of its merit and also of its constitutional legitimacy, because it would affect freedom of worship through the urban regulations. This is why the leader of the Greens, Angelo Bonelli, has sent a letter to the Speaker of the House, Lorenzo Fontana.” (Il Fatto Quotidiano)</i></p>
Reactions of the opposition	<p>Generally, the position of the opposing party is mentioned in most articles. Some outlets have included these sentiments to highlight a fragmented political situation. Moreover, including these opinions is a way to create the idea of contention and disagreement.</p> <p>Disagreement and Fragmentation:</p> <p>EX 1: <i>“In commissione hanno subito espresso contrarietà Marco Simiani del Pd, il verde Angelo Bonelli, Daniela Ruffino (Azione-Iv), e Franco Manes (Minoranze linguistiche) che hanno chiesto un ciclo di audizioni per approfondire la vicenda. Prudente Fi, con Pergiorgio Cortellazzo, che ha convenuto sulla necessità di un approfondimento e di audizioni, mentre il leghista Giampiero Zinzi ha suggerito di limitare le audizioni ai soli sindaci, con Fi contraria alle audizioni. Alla fine il presidente Mauro Rotelli ha convenuto sulla necessità che “si svolgano gli opportuni approfondimenti attraverso un ciclo di audizioni”. (SkyTg24 and shared with other outlets)</i></p> <p>EX 2: <i>“That provision, however, the oppositions insist, is still unconstitutional: the change is only cosmetic, camouflage, useful to speed up the green light for the anti-mosque law-manifesto, for the European election campaign.” (La Repubblica)</i></p>
Description of person/community under attack	<p>To represent the community some outlets have included the voices of imams of big cities. This gives more authority to these voices and a sense of cohesion to the Italian Islamic community.</p> <p>The TV report is the only source that has included the opinions of the community. However, the message that it transmits is of a marginalized community that has little desire to integrate and that is still external to the Italian population.</p>

	<p>Imams:</p> <p>EX.1 “It is a bill that clearly discriminates against Muslims and does not respect the Italian Constitution, which protects all citizens living in Italy. It is something unconstitutional’. This was told to Adnkronos by Sami Salem” (<i>Il Sole 24 Ore and Middle East Monitor</i>)</p> <p>EX.2 “Those who proposed such a law need lessons in the Constitution. The Charter sanctions freedom of religion and any bill not in line with those principles will be sent back. Several regions have tried to do something similar but have failed because it is unconstitutional. It is a pity that some politicians who are in government today have not understood that our society has changed and must give answers to resolve situations and not to deflect society's problems”. The imam of Florence, Izzeddin Elzir, told Adnkronos.” (<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>)</p> <p>TV REPORT:</p> <p>EX.1 “Ignorance is there. We cannot generalize or say that they are all perfect. Italy was not prepared for them, even for the teaching of the Italian language. They found nothing.” (<i>Cartabianca</i>)</p> <p>EX.2 “I've been in Italy for 20 years. I've learned Italian by working, I've never studied it so I don't speak it well. I don't have time to learn it well, I'll stay here another seven or eight years and then go back to my country” (<i>Cartabianca</i>)</p>
Description of the overall political climate	<p>All sources describe a fragmented political climate, with high level of discrimination and xenophobia from the governmental coalition and especially from the main party Brothers of Italy.</p> <p>EX.1 “The intentions are clear. A rule to prohibit the use of the premises of third-sector organisations for religious activities. To religious denominations that do not have agreements with the State. 'Mosques and madrasas', underlines Brothers of Italy, to avoid misunderstandings.” (<i>La Repubblica</i>)</p>

In all the sources considered, the relevant keywords reveal two major discourses. First, there is the discourse of security and securitization of places of worship that are not Catholic churches. In this case, the right-wing parties are more connected to this type of narrative and underplay the constitutional and legal underpinning of the situation. Secondly, a narrative focuses more on freedom and expressing one's religion. This narrative is more concentrated on the limits to freedom of religion that this law can have and looks at its unconstitutional nature.

The newspaper “Libero” is the only one using the verb *limit* instead of *ban*, which downplays the effects of the law for Islamic places of worship. Tommaso Foti's website does not refer to the possibility of unconstitutionality

or constitutional legitimacy, present in all other sources when describing the opposition. The Middle East Monitor frequently uses the words worshipping places and places of prayers, a total of 8 times.

The analysis has shown that the Muslim community is one of the most vulnerable religious communities in Italy because of the absence of an *Intesa* with the State. The current political climate with a right-wing coalition in the government has exposed this vulnerability and used it against the community. The result is a social and political atmosphere that is fragmented and highly polarized and where freedom of religion is under threat.

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6. Madrid, Spain

6.1 Introduction

Madrid, the capital of Spain, is a multicultural and multilingual city with vibrant religious diversity and is increasingly a destination for migrant workers. The phenomenon of migration has significantly increased the local population who practice non-Christian faiths. According to the Permanent Immigration Observatory in 2022, Spain has become a permanent destination for 6,007,553 citizens of African, Latin American, Asian, and Eastern European origin, significantly changing the country's demographic landscape.⁷⁰ According to the World Religion Database, in 2020, 86.68% of Spanish were Christians, of which 83.78% were Catholics, 1.71% were Orthodox, 1.22% were Independents, and 0.27% Protestants.

Spain is facing a radical change in its religious demographics due to an increased number of anti-religious sentiments in the country, which has mainly affected Catholics. A 2022 survey by The Center for Sociological Research has shown that 11.7% of the population consider themselves “nonbelievers”, 12.5% agnostic, and 14.8% atheist. Although Spain is a secular state that does not have a state religion, the Catholic church has played a fundamental role in shaping and influencing the fabric of society (U.S. Department of State 2023). Islam is the second most practised religion in the country (2.76% of the population). The majority of Muslims in Spain are Sunni 2.70% and a small percentage 0.05% is Shia (Zurlo 2020). According to a study by the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain conducted in 2023, the two major groups of Muslims are Spanish and Moroccan, followed by an increase in Pakistanis (Observatorio Andalusi 2024). Jewish people in Spain constitute 0.11% of the population (Zurlo 2020). The core Jewish population accounts for 12,900 people (Institute for Jewish Policy Research n.d.). Madrid, Barcelona and Malaga are the main cities for Jewish communities. The community comprises people from Morocco and the Balkans, who emigrated after the Balkan wars, and recent Jewish migration has come from Latin America, particularly Argentina and Venezuela (European Jewish Congress n.d.).

The Spanish Constitution, created after the fall of the Francoist dictatorship in 1975, guarantees freedom of religion and worship for individuals and groups. The constitutional framework is based on four fundamental principles. All citizens are equal before the law, and they cannot be discriminated against based on their religion. The Constitution only explicitly mentions the Catholic Church, but the penal code forbids the disruption and prevention of religious services and offending religious sites (U.S. Department of State 2023).

6.2 Institutional Specifics

The history of Spain reveals a complicated relationship with religious freedom and pluralism. Since the expulsion of Jews and Muslims in the 15th century, Catholicism has been the major religion of Spain. After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the dictatorship of Franco established Catholicism as the State religion while other religions were tolerated but not truly free. However, in 1975 Franco's dictatorship ended and a new Constitution was created. Four principles govern the new Constitution: religious freedom, equality, the secularity of the State, and cooperation (Combalía and Roca 2014).

The first principle of religious freedom is presented in Article 16.I which states that “freedom of ideology, religion, and worship of individuals and communities is guaranteed, with no other restrictions on their expression than may be necessary to maintain public order as protected by the law” (Combalía and Roca 2014). The second

⁷⁰ <https://www.freiheit.org/spain-italy-portugal-and-mediterranean-dialogue/migration-and-religious-diversity-spain>

principle of equality and non-discrimination is protected by Article 14 and states that “Spaniards are equal before the law and may not in any way be discriminated against on account of. . .religion. . .”. The third principle is the one of the secularity of the State. “No religion shall have a state character,” reads Article 16.3, which testifies to the intent of the State to consider religion an individual’s choice and not a State’s one (Combalía and Roca 2014).

In the same article, the principle of cooperation is described as such: “The public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and shall consequently maintain appropriate cooperation relations with the Catholic Church and other confessions.” In this light, agreements between the state and the confessions are put in place to synchronize issues of mutual interest. However, contrary to Italy, these agreements are not constitutionally necessary as the principle of cooperation applies to all (Combalía and Roca 2014).

In 1979 the Spanish State signed four agreements with the Catholic Church. These accords concern economic, religious education, military, and juridical matters. Until 2007, the government had been paying the Catholic Church directly through a special public funding framework. After that, the decision has been left to the taxpayers who can decide to give 0.7% of their taxes to the Catholic Church. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church need to respect certain criteria to establish bilateral agreements with the State. They have to be registered in the Registry of Religious Entities, which requires the group to serve a religious purpose. The group also needs to have deep roots in Spain and several followers. This criterion drastically limits the ability to participate for minorities (Institute on Religion and Public Policy n.d.). In Protone interviews, faith leaders expressed that the main difficulty is accessing public spaces that can be transformed into places of worship. Moreover, one faith leader declared that he did not receive Social Security for ten years, due to some delays in bureaucratic procedures when such an agreement was finally reached.⁷¹

In 1992 the Jewish, Protestant, and Muslim communities signed Bilateral Agreements with the state. These agreements allowed for legal protection of places of worship and ministries gave civil validity to marriages and guaranteed fiscal exemptions and benefits (Institute on Religion and Public Policy n.d.). The representative body for the evangelical churches is the Federation of Evangelical Religious Bodies of Spain (FEREDE), whilst the Jewish community is represented by the Federación de Comunidades Judías de España FCJE. The naturalization of Sephardic Jews in 2015 for those who had Spanish origins has increased the number of Jews in the country (Ministerio de Justicia Secretaría General Técnica 2017). Despite the recognition, Jews have long endured different challenges. Until 1970, Jews under the dictatorship were not allowed to gather as a religious community. Another challenge the Jewish community faces in Spain is the accessibility to physical places of worship. Although the municipality gives permits to open places of worship, the struggle is to find an appropriate place to rent, due to the lack of willingness of many to rent out spaces to synagogues.⁷²

The CIE (Spanish Islamic Commission) is the institution that represents the Muslim community and provides an estimation of worshippers according to the Al-Andalus Observatory of the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (Ministerio de Justicia Secretaría General Técnica 2017). The CIE coordinates two Muslim Associations: The Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Groups (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities. Furthermore, funding from the state for religious communities does not help maintain the places of worship.⁷³ It

⁷¹ Interview with Madrid Priest 2 on 11.03.2024; This is called the case “Manzanas Martin against Spain” which was presented in front of the European Court of Human Rights

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ *Ibid*

comes as monetary aid for schools, and cemeteries, and more broadly as financial support for other cultural-educational activities.⁷⁴

6.3 Socio-Cultural Characteristics and Identity

Compared to the other three countries considered in the PROTONE project (Belgium, Germany, and Italy), the three religions in Spain show a strong sense of acceptance of pluralism and interreligious activities. During the two focus groups conducted in Madrid, participants from the three religions voiced a feeling of safety in expressing their religion. They declared that generally they are confident in expressing their religion and feel that the state protects their freedom.⁷⁵

The Muslim community in Spain has increased 10 times in the last 30 years, with a population that exceeds 2.5 million people.⁷⁶ The majority of Muslims, around 1 million individuals, have Spanish nationality, while the second most common nationality is Moroccan with a population of 879,943. Catalonia is the province with the largest Muslim community in Spain, and Muslims strongly rely on their faith leaders to solve their issues.⁷⁷ Moreover, focus group participants indicated that the perception of the community in the country is important because it establishes social integration in society.⁷⁸ This aspect also affects their security. Attacks against Muslim communities in Spain continue to grow. The Spanish Ministry of Interior reported that in 2021 hate crimes in general increased, while between July and August 2022, there was a spread of 20% in online Islamophobia hate speech compared to the previous year (Garcia and Bolaños Somoano 2023). A member of the Muslim Association for Human Rights has testified that anti-Muslim hate in Spain is not recognized, and data collected by the government and NGOs does not always match (Inigo 2021). In addition to that, Moroccans are the second-largest migrant group in the country and are the first foreign victims of hate crimes, suffering from 7.8% of total attacks in 2019. Moreover, a study from the University of Valencia detected that Spanish citizens of Maghreb descent are 7.5 times more likely to be stopped by the police (Inigo 2021).

The Catholic religion is considered the first religion in Spain for the number of believers; however, the last decades have shown a visible decrease in faith followers. Compared to 2011, Catholics lost approximately 17.8 of believers by July 2020.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Catholics still represent the vast majority and this is also due to the type of migration coming to Spain, mainly from Latin America. Socially, there is a significant difference within the Christian community. The Protestant community accepted same-sex marriage in 2005, but this caused them to be rejected by the other Evangelical churches. This also portrays a diverse and heterogeneous community composed of 20/25% of LGBTQIA+ members.⁸⁰ The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe found that in 2022 there was an increase of 44% in anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe, which is connected to an increase in extremist motivation and greater tolerance in targeting churches (Payne 2023). A

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Focus group participant in Madrid on 12.03.2024

⁷⁶ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/muslim-population-in-spain-increased-10-times-in-last-30-years/2854684>

⁷⁷ Interview with Madrid Imam 3 on 18.03.2024

⁷⁸ Focus group participant in Madrid on 12.03.2024

⁷⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/992681/share-of-catholics-in-spain/#:~:text=Compared%20to%202011%2C%20when%20the,percent%20of%20the%20surveyed%20population>

⁸⁰ Interview with Madrid Priest 2 on 11.03.2024

report of 2023 from the Observatorio Para la Libertad Religiosa y de Conciencia showed an increase of attacks on places of worship by 40% and three out of four were against Catholics (Observatorio para la Libertad religiosa y de conciencia 2023).

Another important aspect that highlights the special relationship between the Catholic Church and the State of Spain is religious education. The agreements on teaching Catholicism in public schools exemplify the close ties between these two institutions (Institute on Religion and Public Policy n.d.). In Spain, religious classes are offered in both private and public schools, however, the Catholic Church has a preferential framework. It has been mentioned in the interviews that some universities have churches on campus, thanks to an agreement between the Archbishop of Madrid and the universities.⁸¹ This presence strengthens the relationship between the two institutions, yet it is not well received by all members of the university. Some political groups, encouraged by secular groups, have posed serious threats to the Church and are against this religious presence on the university's grounds.⁸²

The Jewish community is strongly family-based.⁸³ Today there are around 13,00 affiliated Jews and 50,000 resident Jews in Spain. The community shows diversity in origin and portrays the diversity in migration waves of Jews to Spain. According to Jewish faith leaders, a substantial component of the Spanish Jewish community comes from Venezuela or Argentina. The majority of these families come from a similar economic background. Regarding security and discrimination, the report from the Spanish Ministry of Interior of 2021 showed that although hate crimes against other minority groups are on the rise, anti-Semitism was decreasing by 40% (Zaid 2021). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey found that 46% of the respondents experienced some form of anti-Semitic harassment in the previous five years, while 32% experienced it within that year. 84% of the respondents felt that the Arab-Israeli conflict had affected their security (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019). After the October 7th attacks the Jewish community has generally become more attentive to security and feels that religion needs to be kept inside the family and the community, not to be shared with the outside world.⁸⁴

6.4 Places of Worship: Space and Practice

The number of places of worship in Spain for non-Catholic communities cannot be determined accurately. This is because some religious groups decide to register as cultural organisations. Places of worship must meet the requirements for health and safety for public gatherings, as the Register of Religious Entities would require.⁸⁵ These rules particularly affect mosques and have a direct impact on the Muslim community. The requirements concerning bathrooms or sound insulation are difficult to meet, which pushes many unprivileged communities to move to the peripheries of cities where there is less visibility, which according to one imam is not a good direction

⁸¹ Interview with Madrid Priest 3 on 15.03.2024

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Focus group participant in Madrid on 14.03.2024

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ <https://www.iclrs.org/blurp/religion-in-spain/>

for integration.⁸⁶ Mosques are not only religious sites. Some of Madrid's big mosques have libraries and lecture halls that can host hundreds of people who are interested in studying various subjects.⁸⁷

Similarly, the synagogue has multiple functions. It is not only used for religious purposes. It is a place for celebration and gathering, such as dinners after the Shabbat prayer. Due to the high levels of security, private security trainings are held in the synagogue as well. There are seven synagogues in Madrid for around 20,000 Jews.⁸⁸

6.5 Integration of PoWs and Relationships with the Surrounding Community

There are differences in how places of worship are integrated into their environments and communities. There are 30,703 places of worship in Spain, the majority (22,974) are Roman Catholics followed by Evangelical churches and Muslim sites. Catholic churches are religious and historical sites, some of them also consist of historical museums. Churches are an essential part of the social fabric of Spain. They are not only a place to freely express their religion, but also a place of social gathering and community. In Madrid, a church can be found relatively easily in most neighbourhoods. Congregants express freedom in moving from their usual church to another one.⁸⁹

Muslim communities have complex relationships with their neighbours. Bigger mosques are built to have more interaction with their surroundings than smaller mosques or Islamic cultural centres. Bigger mosques have spaces where non-Muslims can attend. For example, the Islamic Cultural Centre in Madrid has a restaurant, an auditorium, a museum, a library, and a lecture room, and it also organizes visits from universities, cultural centres, and schools.⁹⁰ However, some imams shared that in highly populated neighbourhoods, some people have complained about the lack of Muslim PoWs. Some of these PoWs are then located outside these areas and can be reached only by cars, which can come at an expense and can be inconvenient for congregants who do not have personal cars.⁹¹

The Jewish community has a high level of protection around its places of worship and prefers to not be integrated with their surroundings due to security reasons. There is a high level of awareness in hiding the presence of synagogues from the surrounding neighbourhood. Synagogues are not open to the public and they are usually not visible from the outside and visible signs do not indicate them. Moreover, there are no Judaica shops in the city compared to other cities in Europe. In one interview, a rabbi indicated that he had to remove the mezuzah (a small scroll attached at the door of the synagogue from outside) due to fears of attracting unwanted attention.⁹² Furthermore, the security situation following October 7th has forced the Jewish community to close off and protect themselves from the outside by increasing police presence, which also increases the visibility of synagogues.

⁸⁶ Interview with Madrid Priest 2 on 11.03.2024

⁸⁷ Interview with Madrid Imam 2 on 07.03.2024

⁸⁸ <https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/spain/madrid/>

⁸⁹ Focus group participants in Madrid on 12.03 and 14.03.2024

⁹⁰ Madrid Imam 3 and <https://traveltriangle.com/blog/mosques-in-madrid/>

⁹¹ Interview with Madrid Imam 2 on 07.03.2024

⁹² Interview with Madrid Rabbi 2 on 15.03.2024

6.6 Security and Safety Risks

Relationships between religious communities and the police are generally perceived as positive across all studied faith communities. Madrid's police have a special unit against hate and persecution; this unit works closely with the Christian community on episodes of violence and attacks.⁹³

The Muslim community considers their biggest threat online hatred from right-wing organisations. There have been episodes of graffiti writings outside of the mosque, where people wrote xenophobic messages such as "Leave Europe". Some mosques hire security companies to protect the mosques and install protective security, such as cameras inside and outside. Moreover, smaller mosques have a policy of closed doors. This means that the mosques are only open when there is service, while they stay closed the rest of the time. This is to limit the cost of hiring security personnel at all times, and it prevents outsiders from coming into the mosques.

The level of security in the Jewish community is unmatched compared to the other religious communities. Non-members of the community go through a rigorous security process to enter the synagogue. They must know a member of the community who has to communicate to the synagogue's security personnel that a new individual will access the synagogue. In addition, this person's identity needs to be checked and verified by the authorities by sending their ID.⁹⁴

In security matters, the Christian community is relatively privileged compared to the other communities. Churches generally do not have any security measures implemented, they do not have cameras or private security that guards them, and they keep their doors open most of the time, even when services are not taking place. These lackadaisical practices sometimes lead to unwanted consequences such as thefts or graffiti in the churches. However, large churches, for example, the central Catedral de Santa Maria la Real de la Almudena, have robust security technology as they are open to thousands of tourists a day.

In 2022, 208 incidents violated religious freedoms: 175 of these incidents targeted Catholics, three were against Muslims, three targeted Jews, and 27 were categorized for targeting multiple or all religions. There were 34 attacks on places of worship and 24 cases of harassment against believers. The autonomous province of Madrid has the highest number of crimes against religious believers.⁹⁵ According to the FCJE's Observatory of Anti-Semitism, after October 7th, there has been an increase in anti-Semitic swastika drawings on Jewish families' homes, graffiti on synagogues, and increasing security threats to the Jewish community.⁹⁶ Islamophobic actions have also increased after October 7th. 85% of online hate speech was against Muslims. Moreover, faith leaders indicated that Muslims tend not to report hate crimes for fear of being further stigmatized by non-Muslims or the government.⁹⁷

⁹³ Interview with Madrid Priest 2 on 11.03.2024

⁹⁴ Interview with Madrid Rabbi 2 on 15.03.2024

⁹⁵ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/spain/>

⁹⁶ <https://observatorioanti-Semitismo.fcje.org/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/spain/>

6.7 Security Culture: Trends and Effects on Practicing Religious Population

Security is perceived in different ways by the three religions. In the Muslim community, believers who are used to attending bigger mosques are more comfortable with protective security such as cameras. However, believers who attend smaller mosques are less likely to accept security measures. October 7th and the situation in Gaza have changed the situation for Muslims. Faith leaders are more responsible for their congregants, as the latter relied on them not only for spiritual guidance but also for political guidance at a time when Muslims feel marginalized in Europe more generally.

Jewish security culture is highly developed, and the community considers it a priority, like elsewhere in Europe. Security protocols such as the presence of police cars in front of synagogues or armed guards have been present in Madrid over the past decade but have intensified after October 7. For some rabbis, the presence of the police force is a formality that may ward off attacks from assailants but attracts unnecessary attention. According to one rabbi, “At the end, they are creating another problem, which is a problem with the neighbours, which is a problem with the people who have to be integrated with the others. So that's the main problem”.⁹⁸ In the same interview, the rabbi expressed that if an attack happened, a police car would not be enough for protection. Another rabbi expressed that the private security-hired guards who hold long arms in front of synagogues intimidate neighbourhood residents. In a letter once addressed to him, a neighbour in the building expressed that residents feel scared that they will be wrongfully targeted as part of the synagogue in a security attack.⁹⁹ Practices of religious censorship are also common, where Jews refrain from wearing the kippah or wearing Jewish jewellery.

In interviews with Catholic priests, they feel that what they perceive as the overall political culture (in Madrid) against Catholicism is a major social and political concern, but not a security one. One priest shared an experience of “desacralization” when a group of protestors interrupted his sermon to promote pro-abortion policies, but such anti-clerical activism is not considered a security risk. However, the perception of being culturally attacked in the public sphere is shared across Catholic FGD participants. In interviews with Evangelical pastors, a Christian minority religion in Madrid, they indicated that they have been “reading the room” in case any suspicious individuals are attending their services. However, there is no clear security training on what to do in case suspicious individuals attend religious sermons, and the pastors do not know what steps to take to ensure the security of their congregants.¹⁰⁰ New regulations for PoWs require that pastors who start working at a PoW provide criminal records as they work with children.¹⁰¹

Muslim security culture varies according to the size and location of mosques. For large mosques, security culture has ramped up in the past few years, mainly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which introduced technology to keep congregants connected online. Limited opening hours and vigilance to who is entering the building is also a security practice resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic which gives the mosque more control of who is entering. In Madrid’s largest mosque, highly developed security systems are put in place due to the mosque being regularly opened to the public and functioning as a centre for several educational, cultural, and diplomatic activities. Congregants are used to security technology in large mosques, which would otherwise stand out in the smaller Islamic cultural centres.

⁹⁸ Interview with Rabbi 3 in Madrid on 17.03.2024

⁹⁹ Interview with Madrid Rabbi 4 on 21.03.2024

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Madrid Priests 4 on 17.03.2024

¹⁰¹ Ibid

6.8 Case study: Church Attacks in Algeciras

On the 25th of January 2023, Yasmine Kanhja, a 25-year-old Moroccan man committed a terrorist attack against two Catholic Churches in Algeciras, a city located in the southern region of Andalusia. The man first entered the Church of San Isidro with a machete, attacked people and left the priest injured. Then he proceeded to the Church of La Palma, located only 200 meters from the other, and killed a church official. The man was taken into custody by the police that same day and after careful investigation, it was found he was exposed to jihadism on social media. For that reason, the National Court declared that the attack was a terrorist action.

To describe this event, 12 diverse media outlets were chosen. Most sources are Spanish, the majority being local newspapers, and we also include two TV reports. The only two international outlets are Al Jazeera and France 24, which often report events using local sources. Then there are local newspapers that mainly cover events in southern Spain: Europa Sur and Diario de Cadiz. The biggest national newspapers were also selected: El Mundo, a centre-right source with a conservative perspective; El País, which is more progressive and with a centre-left political dimension; La Vanguardia, with a moderate and pragmatic focus; la Razón, one of the oldest newspapers in Spain with a conservative perspective; and El Periódico de España, a less known newspaper with a progressive stance. Alternative selected sources are a brief report from the Real Institute Elcano, a Spanish think-tank that focuses on international relations and geopolitical analysis, a TV report from Informativos TVC, a news program produced by Televisió de Catalunya (TVC), the public broadcaster of Catalonia, and a blog post by the Onda Cero, a major radio and broadcast outlet considered to be centrist.

Regarding the methodology, as the attack was presented as a terrorist attack, the most common words were related to terrorism and violence, but also to migration and community, as well as media exposure and radicalization.

Content Analysis

Key Words	Frequency across news outlets
Terrorism	52
Jihadism	26
Internet/Facebook	6
Islamic community/Muslim	23
Church	53
Immigrant/Moroccan	20
Radicalization	21
Mental insanity	10

Relational Analysis

Concepts	Analysis
Description of the perpetrator	Defamatory and Xenophobic EX.1 "In Algeciras, according to sources consulted by LA RAZÓN, there is a community of 12,000 Moroccans, of which only 6,000 are registered. The terrorist, Ayoub El-Khazzani, was reduced, in a heroic action by several passengers, among them two American soldiers." (LA Razón)
Description of the Process Leading to the Attack	EX.1 "After his arrest, the young Moroccan claimed during his police statement that it was Allah who ordered him to do what he did, but on the social networks of which he was a user, there were samples of Salafi

	<p>sheikhs whom he followed through video recordings. Among them, Khaled Rashid and Mohamed Hassan.” (Real Instituto Elcano)</p> <p>EX.2 “To reach this conclusion, Gadea relied on the police reports and statements, the statements of witnesses and injured parties, the statement made by the defendant himself, as well as the expert reports and the documentation gathered during these months of investigation. It also addressed Kanjaa's possible psychological alteration at the time of the attack, and stressed that this would affect ‘the extent of his guilt’ but not the classification of the facts as terrorist.” (Diario De Cadiz)</p> <p>EX.3 “As reported by ‘El Periódico de España’, of Prensa Ibérica, the investigators found that Kanjaa's increased activity on his social networks about a month before the murder of the church's sacristan was a key factor, which showed his religious radicalisation.” (El Periódico de España)</p>
Description of the local community	<p>Local Community:</p> <p>EX.1 “Today marks one year since chaos, fear and indignation stained the city black, a place of 140,000 inhabitants where 140 different religions coexist peacefully and where all condemned the attack, an act that is still being tried by the Audiencia Nacional.”(La Vanguardia)</p> <p>EX.2 “At the time of the oral trial, which will take place in a few months, and with the repercussions it will have at all levels, the good name of our city will shine as a place of peaceful coexistence and will be highlighted once again at such a time.” (Europa Sur)</p> <p>Muslim Community:</p> <p>EX.1 “However, the incident was denounced by the local Muslim community, which said it condemned “the brutal and vicious attack in Algeciras” and deplored the verger’s death.” (Al Jazeera)</p>
Description of the overall political climate	<p>Condolences:</p> <p>EX.1 “Politicians have been quick to react to what has happened, expressing their condolences to the victims and their families and their support for the State Security Forces and Corps. Among them is the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez, who posted a message on his Twitter account.” (Onda cero)</p> <p>Far-right comments:</p> <p>EX.1 “However, confrontation has also arisen between several politicians after the message issued by the leader of Vox, Santiago Abascal, who has taken advantage of the event to attack illegal immigration. ‘He entered Spain illegally, he had an expulsion order, he was under surveillance for jihadism, he was a squatter. How many people like him will there be in Spain? The human trafficking mafias and the politicians who open the borders to them and water them with subsidies cannot hide their responsibility”, he declared. (Onda Cero)</p>

The portrayal of the attack shows a general condemnation of the terrorist action. Some outlets, however, use it to condemn policies on migration and politicize it to portray the other as a disruption to the local community. This sense of community is emphasized in the local newspapers, as well as showing that the Christian community is still the main religious community of the region and the country but is also the subject of attacks and discrimination. Some outlets have tried to give a more complete picture. They describe the causes and consequences of exposure to certain types of content and the effects of religious radicalization.

The perpetrator of the attack is portrayed as a terrorist and jihadist by most of the sources, while also underlying his country of origin. However, there are different approaches to describing him. On the one hand, conservative outlets have more of a xenophobic and anti-migration tone that tends to generalize the behaviour as a possible threat from all migrants. On the other hand, some outlets condemn the attack while also giving a more detailed description of the process that brought this radicalization and the conditions that were faced by the attacker. In this way outlets, try not to generalize the event. These sources report and highlight how the entire Muslim community is being condemned instead of one individual. Some outlets report on the condolences coming from the government and the opposition, and very few highlight how the right has politicized reporting on the attack.

Reporting shows that the outlets respect and approve of the action of the two penal institutions, even though some might seem more critical around the aspect of illegal migrants. Most outlets present the action of the police immediately after the attack and the action of the National Assembly and judge in giving a verdict. The description of the two churches attacked is directly related to the local community. Some outlets particularly focus on personalizing the attack by giving precise descriptions of the sacristan that was killed and his role in the community. Others highlight how the attack disrupted the community and brought unwanted chaos.

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7. Conclusion

This report summarizes the findings of the Protone research project that focuses on religious freedoms and practices in and around PoWs in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. In each of these countries, the report covered the institutional specifics of the three Abrahamic religions to understand the legal frameworks in which religion is practised, specifically access to building and use of PoWs. Most countries show that the use of PoWs is conditional on the legal arrangements between the religion and the state. For the Muslim community in Italy, for example, not being recognized limits the religious community's access to physical spaces and leaves the only option of renting small spaces that are converted into Islamic centres and unrecognized mosques.

The report also delved into the socio-cultural characteristics and identity issues that each Abrahamic community is facing today. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are on the rise across Europe, leaving Muslims and Jews feeling marginalized from mainstream society. Self-censorship, hiding religious symbols, and limited reporting on harassment are common findings for both these communities. Christian non-Catholic minorities, especially in Spain and Italy, are gaining more visibility in society and are attracting a young generation of congregants. Catholicism, on the other hand, is in decline, although it remains culturally hegemonic.

The report then zooms in specifically on PoWs to make sense of how Abrahamic communities access and use these important spaces, and how they integrate with their surroundings. Security features heavily for the Jewish community, which relies on state and self-funded security personnel to protect their PoWs. For Jews, security is the cornerstone of their ability to practice their religion, as was indicated in several interviews. Muslims are also weary of security concerns, but a larger issue across countries is safety due to overcrowding and the use of inappropriate spaces as PoWs, such as converted shops and garages. As securitized subjects of European states, Muslims feel uncomfortable in having security technology inside smaller mosques, although most respondents stated that CCTV cameras owned by the mosque are tolerable, as they serve as a means of prevention against external threats. Although churches also face attacks such as arson, theft, and graffiti, most of them have an open-door policy. In addition, Catholics expressed a universality in using their PoWs, where they can enter and use churches across the country, whereas Jews and Muslims tend to stay concentrated in specific PoWs tied to their communities with similar family, ethnic, national, and class backgrounds. As for integration with the surrounding environment, the cases show that the overt and highly visible use of security protection is undesired by outsiders, and limits accessibility to PoWs. This is acutely felt by the Jewish community, who cannot open their doors to their neighbours without stringent security checks. In addition, the atmospheres of highly visible security (army and police cars outside synagogues, and other community security personnel) are sometimes uncomfortable to neighbours who feel they themselves are living in heightened security. The report ends with a selection of case studies in the four locations with the objective of shedding light on how cases tied to PoWs are reported on and communicated to the public.

Across four countries, the research finds that access to and security in and around PoWs is directly tied to the legal recognition of religious communities, and the national discourses that accompany their integration. For Jewish and Muslim communities, rising anti-Semitism and Islamophobia go hand in hand with their security priorities at PoWs. Jewish communities invest heavily into security protective measures, while Muslims, although weary of external threats, fear over-securitization by local authorities, although this trend is also changing with more acceptance of security technology in public space more widely. Christian communities are very diverse, and while minority Christian communities are gaining strides in visibility and access to PoWs, they also are part of national conversations on political and migrant rights. The Protone research ultimately highlights the intersections of religious freedoms with physical spaces of worship, and the need for ongoing dialogue between religious communities, local authorities, and broader society to ensure safe practice of religion.

8. Appendix

Fieldwork:

The research team conducted **43 interviews with faith leaders and representatives of the three Abrahamic communities, 12 expert interviews with security experts and researchers in the fields of terrorism and/or religion, 5 focus groups**, and ethnographic research activities such as guided visits, field observations, and photo-documentation by the researcher.

Country	Number of Faith Leaders and Representatives Interviewed	Jewish	Muslim	Christian	Female/Male ratio
Belgium	8	2	3	3	0/8
Germany	7	2	3	2	3/4
Italy	14	4	5	5	4/10
Spain	14	4	4	6	1/13
Total	43	12	15	16	8/35

Interviews with faith leaders were aimed at identifying the various roles that faith leaders play in their religious communities, and the role PoWs play in their religious activities. Faith leaders provided valuable information on the history of attacks on their PoWs and the security cultures they have in place to protect their congregants.

Interviews with experts were conducted to understand the EU's security priorities and understand how protective security is being introduced to PoWs. Interviews were conducted with a range of experts who work on security and religion to identify the discourses, and priorities in both the fields of security and religion in Europe today.

Focus group discussions were aimed at understanding the prominent attitudes and beliefs of individuals belonging to the three Abrahamic communities in each country. The focus group questions focused on issues related to identity and the ability to freely express and practice religion and inquired about the impact of antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian sentiments on faith members. The focus group also brought up conversations on the requirements needed for religious communities to feel safer at their PoWs, and the role of the state authorities in providing security.

Breakdown of focus groups:

FGDs							
Location	Date	Total # of participants	Muslim	Jewish	Christian	Females	Males
Brussels	09.10.2023	3	3	0	0	0	3
Rome/Online	29.02.2024	4	0	3	1	4	0
Berlin/Online	26.02.2024	4	4	0	0	1	3
Madrid	12.03.2024	7	2	3	2	1	6
Madrid	14.03.2024	6	2	2	2	2	4



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