



D2.3 Field Report

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List of acronyms/abbreviations

PoW	Place of Worship
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Glossary table

faith leader	In the PROTONE project, a faith leader is a priest, minister, imam, sheikh, or rabbi who is considered a representative of an Abrahamic religious community.
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1. Executive Summary:

Leiden University successfully carried out fieldwork for the Protone project between the period 5 October 2023 – 15 April 2024 in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The research team conducted interviews with 43 faith leaders of three Abrahamic faiths, 12 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. In addition, Leiden University is in the final stages of launching the survey that will target 1600 respondents in all four countries.

One of the main challenges of the research was the 7 October, 2023 attack by the Palestinian armed group Hamas on Israel and the continuing months-long counter-attack by Israeli forces on Gaza. This political crisis in the Middle East directly impacted Leiden University's research in Europe as it specifically focuses on issues of religious identity and protection. These implications included a lower number of accepted interview requests, an over-emphasis on anonymity, a preference for note-taking to recording during interviews, and avoidance of certain questions.

2. Introduction

The Leiden University researcher conducted fieldwork between 5 October 2023 and 15 April 2024 in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. This phase was preceded by obtaining clearance from Leiden University's Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs Research Ethics Committee and piloting in September 2023. Leiden University had two main objectives for the research. The first was understanding the intersections between religion and security in places of worship, which was subdivided into five sub-objectives. The second objective was to understand the relationships between religious communities and the state and their implications for protective security at places of worship PoWs. The study was divided into two sub-objectives. The researcher took into consideration the unique research contexts in each of the four countries and gathered data about the legal and constitutional frameworks of religious practices in each of the four countries, along with the day-to-day experiences of religious communities. Fieldwork activities constituted interviews with faith leaders and representatives of the religious communities, focus group discussions, note-taking, field observations, photo documentation, and site visits.

The report outlines the objectives and relevant methodologies used to reach them. It then delves into the research context in each of the four locations where fieldwork was conducted. The report then summarises targets reached during fieldwork, followed by preliminary findings. The report then discusses the challenges, opportunities, risk mitigation strategies used, and the next steps in the research work package.

3. Objectives and Relevant Methodology

The following section discusses the two main objectives of the fieldwork and explains the relevant methodology used to meet these objectives.

Objective I: Understanding the Intersections between Religion and Security in Places of Worship.

Objective I.1: Understanding the Roles Faith Leaders Play in the Religious Communities

Short description: The research aimed to understand the various roles faith leaders play in their places of worship. The aim was to obtain a multifaceted understanding of their responsibilities to their faith communities and identify in what ways protective security intersected with their religious responsibilities.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders

Objective I.2: Understanding the Importance of the PoW for the Faith Community and the Surrounding Environment

Short description: The research aimed to understand the importance of having a physical place for the religious community to manifest their religions and any challenges that arise when a PoW is not available or does not meet the community's needs. The objective is to identify how the faith community uses the PoW spatially and how having a place to gather with other faith members constitutes an important part of their religious identities. The research also aimed to understand the impact of PoWs on the surrounding environment (businesses, public spaces, residential buildings) to assess the acceptability of the PoW on the neighbourhood level.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders, focus group discussions, survey

Objective I.3: Assessing Security Threats at PoWs

Short description: The research aimed to get a clear understanding of the types of security threats that PoWs are facing to avoid normalising the same security needs across PoWs and to remain sensitive to the needs of each religious community. In each interview with a faith leader of a PoW, the researchers asked them to assess the level of security threats at their PoWs and how they impacted the attitudes and behaviours of their congregants in their aftermath.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders and experts, focus group discussions, survey

Objective I.4: Identifying Security Culture at PoWs

Short description: The research aimed to tease out the specific security cultures present at each PoW considered during fieldwork and gather findings about the security cultures of religions/denominations falling under the three Abrahamic religions considered for the Protone Project more generally. The objective was to understand how religion, size of the congregation, location, and history of threats impact the security culture put in place by these PoWs.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders and experts, focus group discussion, survey

Objective 1.5: Assessing Inter-faith relationships in Protective Security in PoWs

Short description: The research sought to understand the place of security in inter-faith dialogue by gauging whether religious communities could potentially cooperate, learn, and exchange knowledge practices on security provision in places of worship.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders

Objective 2: Understanding relationships between religious communities and the state and their implications for protective security at PoWs.

Objective 2.1: Identifying religious communities' relationships with the state and their status in society

Short description: This included collecting data on the legal and constitutional rights of religious communities in the four countries where fieldwork was conducted. It also included identifying the challenges or opportunities of specific relationships between the state and religious communities.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders and experts, focus groups

Objective 2.2: Identifying the effects of the relationships between religious communities and the state on the PoW itself

Short description: The research aimed to understand how the legal and constitutional frameworks affect how a religious community uses their PoW. It also aimed to understand the specific impact on access to PoWs, ensuring protective security, and obtaining support from the national government.

Methodology: interviews with faith leaders and experts, survey

4. Research Context

The research was conducted in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain. This section summarises the research context in each of these four locations.

I. Belgium:

Freedom of religion in Belgium is protected under Articles 19 and 20 of the Belgian constitution. Whereas Article 19 ensures the right to worship and practice one's religion privately and publicly, Article 20 protects against the obligation to participate in religious activities. In general, Belgium has a strong legal framework protecting the right to religious freedoms, and Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are all officially recognised. In terms of representation, Belgium's Muslims had been represented (up until 2022) by the "Muslim Executive" (Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique), an umbrella organisation of different Islamic organisations in Belgium that served as the representative body of the Muslim community and managed its administrative and religious affairs. The representative body of the Jewish community in Belgium is the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Organizations in Belgium (CCOJB). The CCOJB serves as an umbrella organisation representing various Jewish groups in Belgium. The Christian community is represented by several

denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church of Belgium, the Orthodox Church, and others.

Islamophobic attacks in Belgium include the use of pig heads and pigs' blood to defile Muslim places of worship. The Shia Muslim minority also faces heightened threats to their security. In churches, fire safety is a big issue. As for the Jewish community, a Jewish synagogue was bombed in Antwerp in 1981, and more recently, four people were killed in a terror attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014.

Research in Brussels was completed between 5 October 2023 and 23 October 2023. One of the biggest events that impacted fieldwork in Belgium was the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel and the ensuing Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip. The national atmosphere was one of caution, confusion, and anger. This had implications for the research, where faith leaders were either too busy with the duties of spiritual care to their congregants or careful about sharing information about security at places of worship.

In total, the researcher conducted interviews with 3 priests, 2 rabbis, and 3 sheikhs and conducted 1 in-person focus group discussion.

2. Germany:

Germany's constitution protects the three Abrahamic religions' legal and constitutional rights. However, there are a few particularities. The Jewish community in Germany has full recognition and protection by the state and is represented by the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland). Christianity is the predominant religion in Germany, and Catholic and Protestant churches are recognised as public organisations (with exceptions such as the Baptist and Methodist Free Churches), allowing them to collect tax and access governmental funding. Most Protestant churches are represented by the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD), while the Catholic Church is represented by the German Bishops' Conference (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz). Islam, although being the third largest religion in Germany and can be practised freely according to the constitution's protection of religious freedoms, does not have a state-sponsored representative body like the two other Abrahamic religions.

Numerous attacks in Germany have been motivated by antisemitism, including throwing Molotov cocktails at a synagogue in Berlin in 2023 and the prominent terrorist attack in the Halle synagogue in 2019. Mosques and Muslims have been targets of Islamophobia in the last decades. Big events include the shooting at a McDonald's in Munich in 2016 and the Hanau shooting in 2020, inspired by right-extremist and xenophobic ideologies.

Research in Berlin was conducted between 15 November 2023 – 24 November 2023. By November, the Middle East war became an issue of national importance in Germany and impacted conversations around antisemitism and Islamophobia. This resulted in decreased accepted interview requests as faith leaders were busy with other responsibilities or declined to discuss matters of security with outsiders.

In total, the researcher conducted interviews with 2 rabbis, 3 imams, and 2 Christian community representatives. 1 focus group was conducted online.

3. Italy:

Italian secularism is defined by the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and the deep connection between the state with the Catholic Church. The main religious group in the country is the Catholic Church, and the second group contains all other non-Catholic religions. Within the second group, certain religions

have agreements (Intesa) with the state that guarantee tax breaks, access to PoWs, public education, and other benefits. Denominations that signed agreements with the state include Waldensians, the Christian Churches of the Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, the Union of Jewish Communities, the Christian Evangelical-Baptist Union, and the Lutheran Church, and recently Buddhists. The Muslim community has yet to have the Intesa passed in parliament despite constituting the second-largest non-Christian religious group in Italy. Muslims in Italy are represented by various institutes and cultural organisations, but they lack an umbrella organisation. The main representative Jewish body in Italy is the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, UCEI).

Islamophobia is on the rise in Italy, and the negative perception of Muslims is supported by far-right parties that lead to discrimination and violent attacks. Prominent Islamophobic attacks include the throwing of pig heads and desecration at Muslim places of worship. For the Jewish community, antisemitism is on the rise. A large attack was the terrorist attack on the Grand Synagogue in Rome in 1982, which has increased the Jewish community's security measures across all synagogues since then.

Research in Italy was conducted between 18 January 2024 – 12 February 2024. The researcher conducted interviews with 2 Jewish community representatives, 2 Christian community representatives, 3 Muslim community representatives, 3 Priests, 2 Rabbis, 2 Imams. One online focus group was also conducted.

4. Spain:

Spain's three Abrahamic religions are protected by the Spanish constitution, which guarantees religious freedom. The Jewish population in Spain is relatively small compared to the Jewish population in Italy, Belgium, and Germany, and it tends to exist in the big cities of Madrid, Barcelona, and Malaga. Spanish Jews are represented by the Federation of Jewish Communities in Spain (Federación de Comunidades Judías de España, FCJE). Catholicism has historically been the dominant religion in Spain and holds a special status in society. Spanish Catholics are represented by the Spanish Episcopal Conference (Conferencia Episcopal Española). Muslim, Jewish, and Protestant churches made an agreement of Cooperation with the State in 1992. Muslims are represented by two main Islamic organisations, Comisión Islámica de España and Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas in the country.

Research in Spain was conducted between 27 February 2024 – 21 March 2024. In total, the researcher conducted interviews with 3 imams, 1 representative of the Muslim community, 6 Priests, and 4 Rabbis. The researcher also conducted 2 in-person focus groups that were accompanied by an inter-religious dinner. The research in Madrid was very well facilitated by the local partner that pre-arranged interviews and facilitated contact between the researcher and interviewees.

5. Fieldwork Targets Reached

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.

Table 1: Interviews with faith Leaders per country

Country	Number of Faith Leaders and Representatives Interviewed
Belgium	8
Germany	7
Italy	14
Spain	14
Total	43

Table 2: Interviews with Experts per country/area of speciality

Country	Number of Experts Interviewed
Belgium	2
Germany	2
Italy	1
Other EU countries	6
EU-MENA	1
Total	12

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.

Survey:

The survey was developed by the Leiden University research team in collaboration with project partners and external experts in survey design and methodology. The process began with a comprehensive literature review to identify key themes and knowledge gaps related to the intersections of religion and security in places of worship. Based on these findings, the team drafted an initial set of survey questions covering topics such as demographic information (age, gender, religious affiliation, etc.), perceptions of safety and security threats at places of worship, experiences with discrimination, hate crimes, or other forms of victimisation, awareness and opinions of current security measures at places of worship, trust in law enforcement and other authorities to provide protection and attitudes towards interfaith cooperation and dialogue on security issues. The draft survey underwent multiple rounds of review and revision based on feedback from project partners, religious community representatives, and survey methodology experts. The final survey instrument was translated into the primary languages of the four countries studied (French, German, Italian, and Spanish) and piloted with a small sample of respondents to ensure clarity and effectiveness. Respondents for the survey will be selected using a stratified random sampling approach to ensure representative participation from the three Abrahamic faith communities in each country. The research team will work with local partners and religious organisations to identify potential respondents and invite them to participate in the online survey. The target sample size of 1600 respondents (400 per country) was determined based on power analysis calculations to ensure statistically significant results.

6. Challenges, Opportunities, Risk Mitigation

Political Context: The conflict in the Middle East, starting 7 October 2023, severely impacted the willingness of Abrahamic faith leaders (specifically Rabbis and Imams) to agree to interviews. Some stated their unavailability due to the higher number of responsibilities they had at that time to their communities, while others were reluctant to discuss security issues at PoWs. However, at the same time, faith leaders who agreed to interviews in this context demonstrated a strong desire to discuss their religious community's concerns and gave testimonies of resistance against antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Mitigation strategies: The researcher expanded the definition of faith leaders to include representatives in high positions within their religious communities.

Gender Dimension: Although Leiden University actively tried to identify female faith leaders and representatives of religious communities, most of the interviews were with males. This is due to the higher number of males than females in religious professions.

Mitigation strategies: The researcher achieved gender balance in the interviews with religious representatives, security experts and researchers, as well as participants in the focus group discussions.

Limited Time for In-depth fieldwork: Due to limited time and budget, the Leiden University researcher could not stay long-term in the four field sites as is customary during ethnographic fieldwork.

Mitigation strategies: The researcher relied on the support of local partners to facilitate fieldwork and provide contacts, supplemented background research with reports and other secondary literature, and focused on a few significant PoWs.

7. Preliminary Conclusions

1. Antisemitism and Islamophobia are on the rise in Europe.

Across all four countries, faith leaders and focus group participants indicated an increase in the levels of antisemitism and Islamophobia, especially since 7 October, 2023. In most cases, except for Catholics in Italy, participants indicated that religious identities are less appreciated in society and that state-sponsored secular values are viewed as a competing ideology.

2. Individuals are free to practice all three Abrahamic religions. However, the legal status of each religion differs across the four countries.

The most notable example is that Islam is not recognised 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 lack one 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 loopholes in the administrative system that prevent Muslims from accessing the same resources as Christians and Jews.

3. Synagogues have high levels of protective security in place, whereas mosques fear that security technology could increase the securitisation 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 have lower degrees of security. Bigger mosques welcome security cameras outside the building but refrain from introducing security cameras inside the prayer halls. Fears of being targeted by state authorities or being associated with terrorist activity if a wanted individual enters their mosque without their consent make imams reluctant to introduce security technology.

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 an increase in vandalism and theft. Most priests interviewed expressed that keeping churches open is a privilege and an important factor in being able to practice 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 them.

5. Faith leaders feel responsible for the physical security of their congregants in places of worship but cannot be held solely accountable.

Faith leaders feel responsible for the well-being of their congregants, which includes ensuring protective security at places of worship 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. They also expressed that responsibilities in relation to buildings more directly lie with elected committees, and the need for and benefit of training in security matters could be useful to expand to office holders (chairpeople, etc.). Furthermore, faith leaders expressed the need to receive security and safety training.

8. Future Steps

Upon completing the survey, survey data will be integrated with the qualitative findings from the interviews and focus groups. The data will be analysed using qualitative and quantitative software and coded according to themes and key findings emerging out of fieldwork. Furthermore, the data will be triangulated with existing reports and academic literature on the topics of religion and security in Europe.

Results will be shared in presentations, academic and policy publications, and stakeholder meetings. The findings will also appear in a final monograph.



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