

Towards an index on policies on and attitudes towards propagation of religion or belief

Testing the Religion and State Dataset
(Round 3) on BRICS+ countries

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Abstract

Propagating faith is a fundamental element of freedom of religion or belief. The datasets of the Religion and State (RAS) Project at Bar-Ilan University include variables across states related to propagation of faith and conversion. They cover religious discrimination against minority religions; regulation of and restrictions on the religious practice of majority religion or all religions; explicit legislative limitations; explicit constitutional protection or limitation; and societal discrimination, harassment, acts of prejudice and violence against proselytising by minority religions. This study explores the feasibility of an index on government policies regarding propagation of religion or belief and societal attitudes and behaviours in that regard. Therefore, as a pilot study, data from the Religion and State Dataset (Round 3) on the member states of the intergovernmental organisation of major emerging economies known as BRICS+ are examined and formulas are proposed to calculate index scores.

Keywords

Propagation of religion, proselytism, mission, conversion, religion and state, BRICS.

1. Introduction

Propagating religion or belief in a non-coercive way is a fundamental element of freedom of religion or belief, thought and conscience and also intersects with

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freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. It may also be called proselytism or mission and is mirrored by the responsive act, by recipients of a religious message, of changing one's faith.

Propagating one's faith can be subsumed under different facets of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).² One aspect is the freedom to *teach* a belief. This also forms part of the *manifestation* of belief and thus belongs to the *forum externum*. While the right to conversion enjoys absolute protection under human rights standards as part of the *forum internum*, manifestations of belief may possibly be limited under very clearly defined and narrow circumstances, despite their general eligibility for protection. Thus, whereas (from the perspective of a sociological interest in "propagation friendliness, neutrality or hostility" by government or society) propagation and conversion can be viewed together, any interpretation of data intended to identify human rights violations should clearly differentiate between matters of conversion and propagation (cf. Bielefeldt et al. 2016: 63-66).

As this study covers both government policies and societal hostility or friendliness towards propagation of beliefs, the title of the study combines references to "policies" and "attitudes." However, the use of the term "attitudes" does not imply that the data are based on attitudinal surveys (see the Research Design section).

Three methods of propagating one's belief should be distinguished: through birth and family relations, by choice and by force (cf. Sauer 2025: 95). First, what Western philosophy has called religion is most often perpetuated by tradition, as children are assumed to be born into the faith of their parents. The parents pass on their faith to their children by example, teaching and induction into rites. Such parental rights are also specifically protected by FoRB. Second, propagation of religion by choice covers communication by adherents to non-adherents, inviting those not born into a particular religion to consider the truth claims of this religion and to join its flock. Some religions claim not to practice proselytism in this sense, and others even keep their precepts secret from non-members or forbid others to join them. Nevertheless, most religious groups, or at least some sub-groups within those religions, do seek to gain new adherents in some way. Third, propagation of religion by force happens when a powerful agent compels non-adherents to adopt a religion (or to revert to it after converting from it). This has happened in history most often by military conquest, where those conquered were forced to adopt the conquerors' religion. But other types of coercion and compulsion also fall into this category.

² As FoRB encompasses both religious and non-religious beliefs, for the sake of brevity, this essay will summarily address them collectively as beliefs or worldviews.

Only the first two types of propagation (by tradition or mission) are protected by FoRB, whereas the third type (by force) and any coercive variants of proselytism are considered a violation of FoRB.

I will look mainly at the second type, propagation by offering a choice, or what is often called proselytism or mission, both understood as neutral terms. But we will also encounter the coercive type or variants of propagation of belief.

This study explores the feasibility of creating an index on government policies on propagation of religion or belief and on societal attitudes and behaviours in that regard. As a pilot study, selected data from the Religion and State Dataset (RAS Round 3) are applied to a manageable and sufficiently diverse sample of countries. As this research was first conducted for presentation at a conference in South Africa, it seemed desirable to select an entity to which South Africa belongs. Thus, the 11 countries used are the members of the intergovernmental organisation of major emerging economies known as BRICS+. ³

In the next section, I explain the research design. After that, applicable RAS3 data are examined, cluster by cluster, focusing on data that can potentially make operational contributions to the desired index. Formulas are proposed to arrive at unified country scores, combining results from question clusters, and the results are discussed. Eventually, a method is proposed to combine selected sub-scores so as to generate a government anti-proselytism score, a social anti-proselytism score, and an overall country score. I discuss the results and draw conclusions, while also pointing out limitations of the proposed approach.

2. Research design

The datasets of the RAS Project at Bar-Ilan University (ras.thearda.com) are in my assessment (Sauer 2025:96-97) the most comprehensive tools that include measures related to propagation of faith and conversion across states and religious groups. ⁴ They cover religious discrimination against minority religions; regula-

3 The original explorations also included a second set of 16 countries, namely the Southern African Development Community. However, only a few of these countries had any scores above zero for the various variables. For the sake of brevity, therefore, these countries are not discussed in this article. BRICS is an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. BRICS+ is an informal name used to acknowledge the expansion of BRICS beyond its original five members (<https://bricscooperation.com/brics-glossary>). Its current members additionally comprise Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Indonesia (<https://bricscooperation.com/brics>).

4 According to the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), "The RAS Project has been used in over 250 peer-reviewed publications including books, academic articles, doctoral dissertations and MA theses and is the most used database on religious freedom and religion-state relations in academic writings." See IIRF, "Global Religious Freedom Index" (<https://tinyurl.com/5zrrkpvd>). In a prior related project I have developed a "mission hostility index" focused on Christian propagation with data from the World Watch List (Sauer 2025).

tion of and restrictions on the practice of the majority religion or all religions; explicit legislative limitations; explicit constitutional protections or limitations; and societal discrimination, harassment, acts of prejudice and violence against proselytising by minority religions.

Since 2003, several new rounds of data coding have been pursued. The latest accessible dataset at the time of writing is the third round, published in 2017 and containing data from 1990 to 2014.⁵ The methodology of the RAS3 dataset entails first the composition of a non-public summary report on each country based on all available sources, followed by completion of a code-sheet to arrive at numerical codes.

The sources include (1) government and intergovernment reports on human rights and religious freedom, including reports and other information from sources such as the UN, the EU, and the US State Department; (2) reports by nongovernmental human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights without Frontiers, and Forum 18; (3) news articles primarily taken from the Lexis/Nexis database, but also from other sources; (4) relevant academic articles and books; (5) primary sources such as laws and constitutions; and (6) an internet search for relevant sources (Fox 2022: 15).

Although the most recent round of data ends with the year 2014, it is still worth using and not necessarily outdated, as government restrictions remain relatively stable. Thus, the main data analysed come from the RAS3 for the year 2014, complemented by the RAS Constitutions Dataset for 2022.⁶

The RAS3 dataset contains about 30 indicators or variables pertaining to proselytism and/or conversion.⁷ Related items are already grouped, and the grouping is retained in this analysis, but I prioritise the topic of proselytism and differentiate it from conversion-related issues. Unfortunately, the key terms in the RAS3 project are not defined any further beyond the questions in the codebooks.

5 Currently, the RAS4 update is underway and will include data through 2023. It is not yet publicly available. However, analysis of regional data has been published in the Global Religious Freedom Index, an initiative of the IIRF, since my initial analysis for the present paper (see Petri and Fox 2023; Petri et al. 2025a, 2025b; <https://iirf.global/publications-resources/global-religious-freedom-index/>).

6 It is important to emphasise that the main RAS3 codings focus on the relationship between religion and the state apparatus. For a variable to be coded, there must either be a law or a consistent government practice. In cases where law and practice contradict each other, consistent government practice was coded. If a majority of local or regional governments engage in a practice, this variable is also coded.

7 The exact count depends on the assessment of which variables are sufficiently specific and how narrowly the concepts of propagation and conversion are delimited.

The research question driving this study is, whether an index can be effectively developed, based on the RAS Round 3 dataset, to compare governments' policies regarding propagation of religion or belief and societal attitudes and behaviours related to such propagation. The implicit sub-question is what formulas may be suitable for processing the data.

Of the 11 countries examined, South Africa scores 0 on all indicators, with only Brazil coming close to similar results. These scores mean either that all is well at the national level in those countries or that the sources and measures used are not sufficiently sensitive or comprehensive.

In the following discussion, I examine the RAS3 data, cluster by cluster, for their potential contributions to answering the research question. After that, I filter out the variables most suitable for constructing an index. The first cluster of variables deals with government restrictions and measures against minority religions relating to propagation of belief and conversion, including the promotion of majority beliefs among minorities.

3. Government restrictions against minority religions

Because the intensity of restrictions can vary, each item in this and the following categories is coded by the RAS3 methodology on a scale of 0 to 3:

0 = Not significantly restricted for any, or the government does not engage in this practice.

1 = The activity is slightly restricted, or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities.

2 = The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice, or the activity is sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for some of them [only].

3 = The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted, or the government engages in a severe form of this activity for most or all minorities.⁸

To achieve some degree of comparability, my own calculated scores are all adjusted to a scale of 0-10 by multiplication with the respective adjustment factor.

I first address restrictions placed on proselytisers as persons. Then I consider limits on the means of propagation, namely religious publications and symbols. Third, I consider restrictions on conversion versus propagation of

⁸ This and all the following definitions of codes are copied verbatim from the RAS3 Codebook (Fox 2017b), and therefore the American spelling is maintained.

the majority worldview, before comparing the above cumulative government restriction scores.

3.1. *Restrictions on proselytisers discriminating against minority religions*

Three codes in the RAS3 dataset cover restrictions on proselytisers⁹ who are members of minority religions. The codes differentiate the proselytisers by permanent residents and foreigners, and their addressees by majority or minority religions:

mx25: Restrictions on proselytizing by permanent residents of state to members of the *majority* religion.

mx26: Restrictions on proselytizing by permanent residents of state to members of *minority* religions.

mx27: Restrictions on proselytizing by *foreign clergy or missionaries*. (This includes denial of visas if it is specifically aimed at missionaries but not if it is the same type applicable to any foreigner.)

In Table 1, I have simply added the scores given for these codes in the RAS3 data to a total score (abbreviated “pros-min” for proselytising by minorities), adjusted to a scale of 0 to 10. The maximum of 10 points signifies total prohibition or the sharpest form of restriction for many or most of the minorities.

Brazil received 1 point for a mild form of restrictions on proselytising by permanent residents of state to members of minority religions. Russia accumulated 3 points for slight restrictions in all three categories. India (4 points) drastically seeks to curtail activities of foreign missionaries so as to curb the spread of minority religions such as Christianity and Islam. However, the Indian government does not restrict proselytism among these and other minorities.

China received the highest score among the original five BRICS countries; however, the new BRICS+ members worsen the average score. The Muslim-majority countries score high on restricting or banning proselytism within the majority religion, while usually permitting it among the minority religions. Indonesia and Iran received the maximum possible score.




From this sample of countries,¹⁰ it appears that governments hostile to “proselytising by permanent residents to members of the majority religion” (code mx25) are at least as hostile or more so to such action by foreign missionaries or clergy

⁹ Whereas this paper uses the neutral term “propagation of faith” in its title, the RAS3 code sheet uses “proselytism” and its derivatives.

¹⁰ As South Africa scores 0 points on all measures examined here, it is excluded from the tables for simplicity.

Table 1: Restrictions on proselytisers from minorities				
	permanent residents		foreign missionaries	
country	to majority mx25	to minority mx26	mx27	pros-min
Brazil	0	1	0	1.1
Ethiopia	0	0	2	2.2
Russia	1	1	1	3.3
India	1	0	3	4.4
Egypt	2	0	2	4.4
Saudi Arabia	3	0	3	6.7
UAE	3	0	3	6.7
China	2	2	3	7.8
Indonesia	3	3	3	10
Iran	3	3	3	10
Average	1.8	1	2.3	5.7

pros-min = restrictions on proselytisers from minorities

shading	score	descriptor
	0.1-3.3	moderate
	3.34-6.66	strong
	6.67-10	severe

(code mx27). Some states, such as Ethiopia, oppose activity by foreign missionaries but do not seek to prevent proselytising by permanent residents.

3.2. Comparing restrictions on means of propagation by minorities

Different from the prior examination of restrictions placed on proselytisers as persons, the following three restrictions all have to do with potential means of propagation, namely religious publications and symbols. However, the codes do not pertain exclusively to propagation of religion; rather, they could also cover simply maintaining and manifesting a non-proselytising religious adherence. Nevertheless, from the perspective of a government, all these behaviours might be considered means of propagation or proselytising. In RAS3 the relevant codes are grouped in the category of “other restrictions of religious practice of minorities.” They can be helpful in assessing countries that have the restrictions described in Table 1 above.

For the sake of comparison, the three relevant codes, shown in Table 2 and discussed below, are bundled into a cumulative score, which is adjusted to a scale of 0 to 10.¹¹

¹¹ The formula is ((mx07+mx08)/2+mx12)/2 = Score.

Table 2: Restrictions of means of propagation

	publish	import	symbols	cumulative scores	
country	mx07	mx08	mx12	pros-means-min	pros-min
Brazil	0	0	0	0.00	1.11
India	0	0	0	0.00	4.44
Ethiopia	0	0	1	1.67	2.22
Egypt	1	1	0	1.67	4.44
UAE	1	1	0	1.67	6.67
Indonesia	1	0	0	0.83	10.00
Iran	2	2	0	3.33	10.00
Russia	3	2	1	5.83	3.33
China	2	2	2	6.67	7.78
Saudi Arabia	3	3	3	10.00	6.67
Average	1.1	1.0	0.5	2.63	4.70
pros-means-min = restrictions on means of proselytism pros-min = restrictions on proselytisers from minorities (from Table 1)					

Among the 11 countries examined, restrictions on writing, publishing, disseminating or importing religious publications or on wearing of religious clothing or symbols are found in eight countries, but not in Brazil and India, both of which have restrictions on proselytisers (cf. Table 1). Accordingly, it appears that restrictions on the means of proselytism are not the policy most frequently employed by governments to limit such behaviour. Rather, they are usually additional restrictions employed by some governments on top of the more usual ones discussed in section 3.1 above.

A related pair of restrictions are prevalent and intense in four countries: “Restrictions on the ability to write, publish, or disseminate religious publications” (mx07), and “Restrictions on the ability to import religious publications” (mx08). All affected countries score the same on both measures, except for two. Therefore, these twin variables are amalgamated and their average is used when calculating country scores on restrictions of means of propagation.

The third measure, “Restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols or clothing” (mx12),¹² is reported as prevalent in four countries, and their average intensity across all countries is only half as strong as that for the publication-related codes.

When comparing the country scores for restrictions on means of propagation by minorities with the scores for restrictions on proselytisers from religious minorities, the following can be observed: First, restrictions on proselytisers ap-

¹² This includes presence or absence of facial hair but does not include weapons or clothing that covers one's face.

pear more prevalent and more severe than those on the means of propagation. Second, those countries that place more severe restrictions on proselytisers are more likely also to place more severe restrictions on the means used. Those countries with less severe restrictions on the proselytisers are likely to have no or less severe restrictions on the means of propagation.

3.3. Measures regarding conversion, discriminating against minority religions

I understand conversion as a voluntary change of religious belief or affiliation by an individual or group, including the adoption of or departure from non-religious worldviews. In some contexts, however, adherents of the majority worldview mainly understand conversion as a manipulative or coercive act by a proselytiser done to a (helpless) victim.

The RAS3 dataset includes four¹³ relevant codes regarding conversions, converts and converting:

- mx21: Restrictions on conversion to minority religions.
- mx22: Forced renunciation of faith by recent converts to minority religions.
- mx23: Forced conversions of people who were never members of the majority religion.
- mx24: Efforts or campaigns to convert members of minority religions to the majority religion which do not use force.

Table 3: Conversion to minorities and majority propagation						
country	conv-host	pro-maj	mx21	mx22	mx23	mx24
Indonesia	0	2	0	0	1	1
China	0	2	0	0	0	2
UAE	3	1	3	0	0	1
Egypt	4	2	3	1	1	1
India	4	3	2	2	1	2
Saudi Arabia	5	3	3	2	1	2
Iran	6	4	3	3	2	2
Average	3.1	2.0	2.1	1.0	0.8	1.3
conv-host = government hostility to conversion to minority religions pro-maj = government propagation of the majority religion						

¹³ There is a very high correlation between lx18, “Restrictions on conversions away from the dominant religion” [in legislation] and mx21, “Restrictions on conversion to minority religions.” Therefore, only the latter will be included in the analysis, as its coding of answers is more differentiated regarding intensity and scope.

In the pursuit of a conversion friendliness or hostility score, these four codes (mx21-24) should not be simply lumped together, as the first two restrict conversion towards minority religions while the last two are measures of government being an agent of proselytism and propagating the majority worldview. From the perspective of a government, the two pairs of issues might simply be two sides of the same coin, emanating from the same logic. From the perspective of establishing a propagation friendliness or hostility index, however, the two pairs of issues have to be kept apart. One could use mx21+22 to establish a “conversion hostility score” for governments pertaining to conversions to minority religions, while using mx23+24 to establish a “majority religion proselytism friendliness score.” Both types of activities discriminate against minority religions but in opposite ways: one approach prevents the minority from growing by conversions, and the other seeks to reduce the minority’s size by inducing conversions away from it.

All the states in this sample that restrict conversion also propagate the majority worldview (see Table 3). Most countries that propagate the majority worldview also restrict conversion, with the exception of China.

3.4. Comparing four cumulative government restriction scores

Looking at the four different groups of measures examined so far (including the two different types of measures I have distinguished in Table 3), restrictions of minority proselytisers and their means of propagation are the purest measure of

Table 4: Comparing four scores: minority proselytisers, means of proselytism, conversion hostility and majority propagation

country	pros-min	pros-mean-min	conv-host	pro-maj
Brazil	1.11	0	0	0
Ethiopia	2.22	1.67	0	0
Russia	3.33	5.83	0	0
UAE	6.67	1.67	5	1.67
Indonesia	10	0.83	0	3.33
India	4.44	0	6.67	5
Egypt	4.44	1.67	6.67	3.33
China	7.78	6.67	0	3.33
Saudi Arabia	6.67	10.00	8.33	5
Iran	10	3.33	10	6.67
Average	5.7	3.2	3.7	2.8

pros-min = restrictions on proselytisers from minorities
 pros-means-min = restrictions of means of proselytism by minority religions
 conv-host = government hostility to conversion to minority religions
 pro-maj = government propagation of the majority religion

state neutrality towards propagation of faith. However, it is also useful to compare these states regarding hostility towards conversion to minority religions and government propagation of the majority worldview.

In Table 4, the countries are provisionally ordered according to their totals with respect to the four different scores. There are various combinations of scores, representing different contextual scenarios. Most often, conversion hostility and majority-religion propagation by governments occur only in a context of restrictions of minority-religion proselytism, but in some cases, hostility against minority-religion proselytism remains isolated.

4. Comparison to restrictions on religious practices of the majority religion or all religions

Whereas the previous section has dealt with minority religions, the next set of variables addresses whether the state regulates either all religions or the majority religion regarding any aspects that appear more specifically linked to propagation of religion. According to the RAS3 Codebook (Fox 2017b), “This is qualitatively different from restrictions on minority religions because it indicates a fear, hatred, or suspicion of religion in general rather than this type of attitude toward minority religions.” From the 29 types of restrictions on the majority religion or all religions that RAS3 distinguishes, four appear to be particularly influential on propagation of religion; these four are related to activities and gatherings, their location, written material, and display of symbols. In the RAS3 Codebook, the 29 types of restrictions cover the majority of aspects in the cluster of restrictions related to “Religious Practices,” whereas none are from the groups “Restrictions on Religion’s Political Role,” “Restrictions on Religious Institutions” or “Other Regulation of Religion.”¹⁴

These variables are also coded on a scale of 0 to 3:

3 = The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.

2 = Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale.

1 = Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale.

0 = No restrictions.

¹⁴ Some of the other restrictions listed there have the potential to also limit propagation of religion but are not exclusively limited to this purpose. Thus, they are not considered here due to their insufficient specificity. Examples include restrictions on public religious speech or religious hate speech, along with restrictions on access to places of worship or a requirement for foreign religious organisations to have a local sponsor or affiliation.

Table 5: Comparison to restrictions on major or all religions

	inside only	publications	gatherings	symbols		
country	nx16	nx17	nx19	nx20	anti-maj	pros-min
Brazil	0	0	0	0	0.0	1.1
Ethiopia	0	0	0	0	0.0	2.2
Russia	0	0	0	0	0.0	3.3
India	0	0	0	0	0.0	4.4
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0.0	6.7
UAE	0	0	0	0	0.0	6.7
Iran	0	0	0	0	0.0	10.0
Indonesia	0	1	0	0	1.1	10.0
Egypt	2	0	0	0	1.7	4.4
China	3	2	0	0	4.2	7.8
anti-maj/all = restrictions on major or all religions affecting proselytism pros-min = restrictions on proselytisers from minorities						

Table 5 presents the results for all BRICS+ countries that previously scored higher than 0 for restrictions on minority proselytism (in Tables 1 and 2).

Overall, there was very scarce evidence of any such regulations or restrictions affecting the majority religion or all religions. They were identified in only three of the countries for one of the markers, with one of these countries also scoring on one additional marker.

None of the countries received any points for “restrictions on the public display by private persons or organizations of religious symbols, including (but not limited to) religious dress, the presence or absence of facial hair, [or] nativity scenes/icons” (nx20) regarding majority religions. This puts the restrictions imposed on minority religions examined above (mx12) by four governments in starker contrast. Another variable for which none of the sample countries scored is “Restrictions on religious public gatherings that are not placed on other types of public gathering” (nx19).

“Restrictions on the publication or dissemination of written religious material” (nx17) by all religions were registered in China and Indonesia only. A comparable marker for minority religions (mx07) registered such restrictions in seven states.

“Restrictions on religious activities outside of recognized religious facilities” (nx16) were exercised by two states, Egypt and China. In China, restriction of proselytism appears to be part of a general suspicion of religion. In India, which does not score on nx16, the restriction of proselytism localities appears clearly limited to minority religions. Thus, nx16 is an example of a marker that can measure restricting effects on proselytism, even though it appears to cover more than proselytism only.

5. Other government related variables not found useful for an index

Two further clusters of variables in RAS3 data contain codes of material interest regarding the intersection of government and propagation of belief. They concern (1) constitutional anchoring or protection of propagation or conversion and (2) bans on coercion, on one hand, and variations in limits on proselytising on the other hand. However, as shown below, these variables were found to be not the best for operationalising in an index.

Beneath the layer of national laws and actual practice of states lie their constitutions. Two types of clauses are relevant here. First, some constitutions explicitly mention religious freedom in terms of the right to change one's religion¹⁵ or to propagate a religion.¹⁶ Second, some constitutions contain a clause that expresses protection of religious freedom, such as a ban on the use of compulsion to convert or to prevent conversion.¹⁷

The source for these markers is the RAS Constitutions Dataset for 2022, which coded all religion clauses in constitutions of countries with a population of at least 250,000.¹⁸ This dataset is complementary to the RAS3 dataset used above. The coding is binary, simply stating whether such a clause exists or not.

When the constitutional data were compiled and compared to the practice of those countries as measured above, it was found that positive mentions of protections in constitutions are no reliable measure of actual freedom. Therefore, they should not be included in a comparative index regarding policies on this matter and related grass-roots realities.

Another set of variables that caught my interest was "Variations in limits on proselytising." Twelve variables are used to capture specific policies limiting proselytising and missionaries.¹⁹ The three most drastic ones do not apply to this sample.²⁰ The variations are differentiated by the legality or illegality of proselytism, as well as types of restrictions on proselytisers, the opponents of proselytism and the localities of proselytism. When one looks at the scores, it quickly

15 *cfreetype03x*: Freedom to change one's religion. Prevalent in 27 constitutions of 176 examined.

16 *cfreetype08x*: The right to propagate or spread a religion. Prevalent in 23 constitutions of 176 examined.

17 *cfreet16x*: Ban on the use of physical or moral compulsion to force someone to convert or prevent them from converting. Prevalent in 8 constitutions of 176 examined. By contrast, another constitutional reference to conversion is not considered here: "*cother17x*: Ban on conversion away from the majority religion," as this violates FoRB rather than protecting it. The only constitution containing such a clause as of 2022 was that of Mauritania. The complete Religion and State Constitutions Codebook (as of 4 April 2023) was scrutinised for this study.

18 Western countries with lower populations are also included.

19 The codes bear the exact names *vprosely01x* to *vprosely12x*, of which only the numbering is reproduced here.

20 These three are as follows: (#1) Proselytizing by all religions is illegal and is not allowed in practice. (If this category is coded, the other categories should not be coded.) (#2) Proselytizing is illegal but is sometimes allowed in practice. (#12) Practical or legal restrictions on proselytizing by all members of the majority religion.

becomes evident that the sum of varieties per country is not directly correlated with the intensity of restrictions on minority proselytism.

These variables are indeed helpful for qualitatively describing the variety and number of limits imposed on proselytism; however, they do not easily serve as components of an index on policies or attitudes on propagation of faith. There are several obstacles to using them for any cumulative score. They cannot be easily combined with any of the other scores, as they are binary only, not rating severity or prevalence. Some of them are mutually exclusive, and they contain many different variables. Thus, it is not easy to arrange them convincingly on a scale of severity. Therefore, I refrain here from using the data on constitutions or on varieties of limits on proselytising.

6. Calculating a government score regarding propagation of religion

We have now reviewed all the RAS3 variables relevant to government behaviour. Which sub-scores should be used for a “government score on restrictions of propagation of religion”? The guiding perspective must be the effect on those suffering limitations and restrictions. If in doubt, the minority perspective, representing the weaker party, should take precedence.

From the examinations conducted above, it appears appropriate to attempt to combine the following scores:

- 1) pros-min: restrictions on proselytisers from minority religions
- 2) pros-min-means: restrictions of means of proselytism by minority religions
- 3) anti-maj/all: restrictions on propagation by majority religions or all religions

But how should they be combined? Should one choose (a) addition; (b) using the maximum score; (c) a combination of (a) and (b); (d) using different weighing for sub-scores, particularly for variable groups 2 and 3; or (e) using certain scores alternatively, depending on the country scenario?

After experimenting with the additional inclusion of a further score (pro-maj) and various ways of combining the scores (maximum, average, average of all above 0, average of the previous three) and after assessing their respective advantages and disadvantages, I decided on a manual expert evaluation based on a bundle of rules and formulas, as all the simpler options did not prove satisfactory.

Two cumulative scores are created (Table 6): an anti-minority proselytism (anti-min) score and a government score for policies on propagation of religion (gov-score).

The *anti-min score* is composed of the pros-min score (restrictions of proselytisers from minority religions) plus one-third of the pros-means-min score

Table 6: Scores on government policies countering minority proselytism and propagation of religion in general

country	gov-score	anti-min	pros-min	pros-means-min	anti-maj/all
Ethiopia	2.8	2.78	2.22	1.67	0
India	4.4	4.44	4.44	0	0
Egypt	5.0	5.00	4.44	1.67	2.22
Russia	5.3	5.27	3.33	5.83	0
UAE	7.2	7.22	6.66	1.67	0
Indonesia	10.0	10.00	10	0.83	0
Saudi Arabia	10.0	9.99	6.66	10.00	0
Iran	10.0	10.00	10	3.33	0
China	10.0	10.00	7.78	6.67	5.56
Average	6.6	6.6	5.7	3.2	0.9

gov-score = consolidated government score on policies on propagation of religion
anti-min = combined anti-minority proselytism score
pros-min = restrictions on proselytisers from minority religions
pros-means-min = restrictions of means of proselytism by minority religions
anti-maj/all = restrictions on propagation by majority religions or all religions

(restrictions on means of proselytism by minorities). The rationale for this formula is that the pros-min score is the score on which the greatest number of countries is above 0 and can be considered a base score. The restrictions on means of proselytism can be considered as having an additional effect in restricting proselytism, but this effect is overlapping. Therefore, these items are weighted less heavily. Averaging would deny the severe effect of the pros-min score; simply adding the two would raise the scores above 10 in too many cases.

For the *gov-score*, the higher one between the anti-minority-proselytism score and the anti-majority-propagation score is used. The rationale is that minorities are more vulnerable. Usually their score is higher, and in that case restrictions of the majority or all do add to their lot. Therefore, the scores are not added or averaged. If all religions are restricted, then minorities are equally affected. I am not aware of cases where only majority religions are restricted and minorities are not.

All cumulative scores are capped at 10. Where the strict application of purely mathematical logic would result in a score above 10, the different factors are considered to increasingly overlap.

Thus, at the low end of the scale, in the case of some countries outside of this sample, the *gov-score* would equal the *anti-maj/all* score. At the high end of the scale, cumulative scores are capped for Indonesia, Iran and China.

Overall, the sample countries are evenly spread on the scale of 0 to 10 (South Africa and Brazil both score 0 and are not included in Table 6) and can be grouped into three blocks, tentatively designated as having moderate, strong or severe government restrictions on propagation of religion.

Having established a formula for a government score relating to propagation of religion, I now turn to societal discrimination, on which RAS3 data also contain a module.

7. Societal attitudes and behaviour towards proselytising and conversion

Unlike the other scores that pertained to governments, this section focuses on actions taken by societal actors. It primarily measures attitudes and discrimination towards minority religions from “non-governmental groups, entities, and individuals in society.” This adds an important dimension, as registering only governmental discrimination and restrictions would miss part of the picture. This data module offers two relevant bundles of measures; one focuses on “societal regulation of religion” (or more precisely social hostility) and measures attitudes, while the other focuses on societal discrimination and measures actual action.

7.1. *Negative or hostile attitudes*

The category “Societal regulation of religion ... replicates the original Grim & Finke SRI Index. It refers to attitudes against members of minority religions in a state by members of the majority religion” (cf. Grim & Finke 2012). The two attitudes of interest here are those toward proselytising (wsocrego3x) and those toward conversion to other religions (wsocrego2x). The coding follows this scale:

- 3 = Hostile against most or all minority religions
- 2 = Negative but not hostile against all minority religions or hostile against some but not most minority religions
- 1 = Negative but not hostile against some minority religions
- 0 = None

Generalised negative attitudes by adherents of a majority religion towards proselytising or conversion (Table 7) are registered in eight of the 11 countries in this sample, with proselytism being popularly detested in a similar number of countries as conversion to a minority religion. Most often negative attitudes affect both phenomena similarly, and the pairs always score the same in this case. The countries that score on only one of the measures are Russia regarding proselytism and China regarding conversion.

Table 7: Social attitudes and discrimination of proselytism or conversion

	ATTITUDES		att_score	dis_score	DISCRIMINATION/VIOLENCE		
country	att_pros WSOCRE G03	att_conv WSOCRE G02			dis_pros WSOCDI S14	dis_conv WSOCDI S15	viol_p+c WSOCDI S21
China	0	1	1.7	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	1	1	3.3	0	0	0	0
UAE	1	1	3.3	0.7	0	1	0
Russia	2	0	3.3	2	0	0	1
Indonesia	2	2	6.7	0	0	0	0
India	2	2	6.7	4.7	1	0	2
Iran	3	3	10	0	0	0	0
Saudi Arabia	3	3	10	0	0	0	0
Egypt	3	3	10	6	0	3	2

att_pros = attitudes toward proselytizing
att_conv = attitudes toward conversion to other religions
att_score = sum of attitude scores (scaled to 1-10)
dis_score = aggregated discrimination/violence score (scaled to 1-10)
dis_pros = harassment of proselytizers which does not reach the level of violence. This includes "verbal attacks."
dis_conv = harassment of converts away from the majority religion which does not reach the level of violence. This includes "verbal attacks."
viol_p+c = physical violence targeted specifically against proselytizers or people who converted away from the majority religion
NB: These are the original definitions of the variables in RAS3

7.2. Discriminatory or violent action

This category (also covered in Table 7) refers to actions taken against members of minority religions in a state by non-government actors. Two codes register harassment of either proselytisers (wsocdis14x) or converts from the majority religion (wsocdis15x) that does not reach the level of violence. This includes "verbal attacks." Another code registers physical violence targeted specifically against proselytisers or converts (wsocdis21x). The scale is as follows:

3 = This action occurs on a substantial level to members of most or all minority religions.

2 = This action occurs on a substantial level to members [of] one or a few minorities but not most or on a minor level to all or most minorities.

1 = This action occurs on a minor level to one or a few minorities but not most.

0 = There are no reported incidents of this type of action against any minorities.

Seven of the 11 countries do not register negatively here, whereas four countries score points on various measures.

Harassment of minority proselytisers is reported only for India, whereas two countries have harassment of converts (UAE, Egypt) and three have specific violence against proselytisers or converts (Russia, India, Egypt). Generally, the scores are usually lower for actions than for attitudes. This can be expected, as not all negative or hostile attitudes translate into discriminatory or violent action.

7.3. *Calculating a social hostility score on proselytising*

Regarding potential contributions to a propagation friendliness or hostility index, one might argue that only measures for actions should be included but not measures for attitudes. Indeed, in the pursuit of a combined score, a threshold for the inclusion of markers needs to be determined. My reason for including attitudes as well as actions is that attitudes can be reflected in behaviours, such as body language or unfriendly glances, that may have a chilling effect on religious freedom. Not including attitudes would reduce the sensitivity of the score and thus would miss out on warnings of potential hazard.

In the pursuit of a purer “proselytism-related social hostility score” (Table 8), the conversion-related markers are excluded in combining the remaining markers. The formula combines “attitudes” (times 2/3), “discrimination” (times 1) and “violence” (times 5/3) on a scale of 0 to 10 (with the multiplication factors indicated in brackets). India and Egypt score highest in social hostility of members of the majority religion against proselytism by members of the minority religion.²¹

Thus, an overall score on societal attitudes and behaviours towards proselytising could be operationalised, composed of only three variables.

8. **Combining scores to form an index**

Following best practice, a propagation friendliness or hostility index should distinguish government and societal actors. Thus, the index must be composed of two sub-scores, representing these measures respectively.

The following observations can be made on how the government score and societal score relate to each other (Table 9). First, if both scores can be assumed to measure the same levels of severity, then social hostility is overall less severe in my sample than government restrictions. In most of the countries, government restrictions on proselytism appear more severe than social hostility against proselytism.

In China, the extreme case, the scores are 10 and 0, respectively, indicating severe government restrictions and no general social hostility towards proselytism.

²¹ A possible comparison excluded in this discussion is as follows: How do societal actions compare to government actions against proselytisers and converts, respectively, in those countries?

Table 8: Proselytism-related social hostility score				
country	att_pros	dis_pros	viol_p+c	soc-score
	WSOCREG03	WSOCDIS14	WSOCDIS21	
China	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	1	0	0	0.7
UAE	1	0	0	0.7
Indonesia	2	0	0	1.3
Iran	3	0	0	2
Saudi Arabia	3	0	0	2
Russia	2	0	1	3
Egypt	3	0	2	5.3
India	2	1	2	5.7
att_pros = attitudes toward proselytizing dis_pros = harassment of proselytizers which does not reach the level of violence. This includes “verbal attacks.” viol_p+c = physical violence targeted specifically against proselytizers or people who converted away from the majority religion soc-score = consolidated score on proselytism-related social hostility				

In two countries, namely India and Egypt, social hostility appears higher than government restrictions.

How can the two scores regarding government and social barriers to proselytism be combined? Forming an average would seriously underrate government restrictions. Thus, adding the two scores, while capping the scale, appears to be the better option. One could argue that in a context where government restricts proselytism, social hostility makes it worse.

The sample could be divided into three groups. The first group, which scores low on both measures, consists of Brazil and South Africa. A second group is around the middle of the scale on either or both scores but is escalated into the category labelled as severe by the addition of scores (Russia, India and Egypt). For the third group, government restrictions are so severe that low scores for social hostility provide little relief.

The additive method has the result that an increasing number of countries move into the group labelled “severe” (8 of 10) or newly or again reach the capping of 10 points (Table 9).²²

It can be debated whether it is legitimate to form this final combined score. Pew Research Center (2024) instead uses a scatter plot to indicate where the coun-

22 The capping is used as a means to keep the resulting score on a scale of 0-10.

Table 9: Government and Social anti-proselytism scores combined

country	gov+soc_comb	gov-score	soc-score
Ethiopia	3.5	2.8	0.7
UAE	7.9	7.2	0.7
Russia	8.3	5.3	3
China	10	10	0
Indonesia	10	10	1.3
India*	10	4.4	5.7
Egypt*	10	5	5.3
Saudi Arabia*	10	10	2
Iran*	10	10	2
Average	6.4	5.3	1.5
* = capped at 10 gov+soc_comb = combination of government score and social score gov-score = consolidated government score on policies on propagation of religion soc-score = consolidated score on proselytism related social hostility			

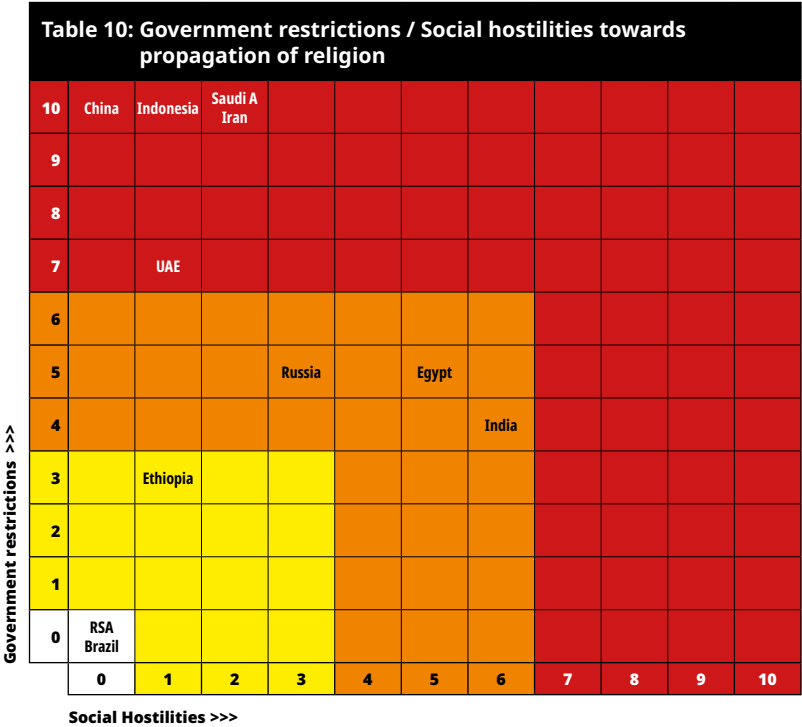
tries fall regarding the two measures of government restrictions and social hostility. Table 10 presents such a scatter-plot presentation of the data of this research.

9. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to determine whether it is possible to construct a credible index, based on the RAS Round 3 Dataset, to compare countries on government policies regarding propagation of religion or belief and on societal attitudes and behaviours related to such propagation. I believe my work demonstrates that creating a useful index from these data is possible.

As already noted, South Africa is the only state in the BRICS+ sample that does not register negatively on any of the measures as of 2014. Among the 10 other countries, only Brazil came close to South Africa's clean slate. Saudi Arabia, Iran, China, and the United Arab Emirates have severe restrictions or violations of the freedom to propagate belief, combined with moderate levels of social hostility. India, Egypt and Russia form another group, where strong restrictions or violations are combined with strong social hostility. The cumulative impact of the two factors for these three countries is only slightly less than that for the four nations with severe government restrictions.

As I chose to focus narrowly on the issue of propagation of religious belief, the interpretation of the situation represented on the index of policies and attitudes towards propagation of belief could be complemented by indexes of policies and attitudes towards conversion, of active state propagation of certain religions or ideologies, and of propaganda against all or certain religions.



This study has several limitations. On a material level, the data are over a decade old and some situations have changed in the meantime. For example, China, Russia and India have generally worsened on other FoRB measures (Aid to the Church in Need 2025). Another limitation is that the measurements assess the general situation on a national level or in the majority of regions of a state and thus do not always register phenomena that are regional only (Sauer 2022). Furthermore, a score of 0 could mean that the sources or measures used are not sensitive or comprehensive enough to register phenomena that do in fact exist. An incident-based approach, like that used in the IIRF Violent Incidents Database (Petri et al. 2025a, 2025b), could well bring to light some additional issues.

In addition, the depth of the information contained in the RAS3 data is limited. The dataset does not provide any explanations or accessible documentation as to why a particular country received a certain score on a particular measurement. When two alternative phenomena are combined to determine a score on a measurement, there is no information on which of the two applies.

One methodological challenge was the identification of appropriate codes to identify issues regarding propagation of belief. There are government restrictions that specifically target proselytism only. Other restrictions always affect freedom of proselytism and its enabling foundations while not targeting it specifically. Furthermore, there are broad markers that also affect proselytism but equally include other phenomena and are therefore not specific enough to compare policies and attitudes on propagation.

As a second methodological challenge, for my purposes, majority religions propagated, protected or privileged by the government fall into the same category as non-religious secular state ideologies. The RAS3 dataset, however, distinguishes them. Thus, government restrictions or violations of the freedom of propagation of belief in states propagating a non-religious secular ideology are covered by different questions from those involving a majority religion. This makes comparing states more complex.

All the composite scores are mine and not those of the RAS3 data. The formulas I used are a matter of careful weighting and contain numerous decisions among possible alternatives. Thus, the process might be more of an art than a science. The possible margin of error has not been calculated with statistical methods. Therefore, it is safest to focus mainly on clusters in the results (as shown by shading and scatter plot in Tables 9 and 10) and not to put much emphasis on minor differences in any scores.

It might be possible to get to a deeper level in the data or interpretation by considering additional questions that cover general anti-religious stances of governments, by using the minorities dataset of RAS, or by comparing the results with some general codes, such as whether a country has a state religion.

Despite such caveats, a first step has been made in establishing an index, based on the RAS Round 3 Dataset, that compares countries on government policies regarding propagation of religion or belief and on societal attitudes and behaviours related to such propagation. This formula could be tested on all countries in RAS3, to see if the outcome portrays a meaningful picture. As the RAS4 dataset is currently being processed, and as RAS4 contains additional variables and refinements, one would need to consider whether the approach proposed above would also work with the RAS4 dataset or if any amendments are needed.

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