



University of
Central Lancashire
UCLan

Participant Information Pack

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND STATE RECOGNITION OF BELIEF

2021-2022

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Image: free-to-use image of Balinese man praying in the
Tirta Empul Temple in Bali, Indonesia by Artem Bali.

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Study overview

Study title: **Religious Freedom and State Recognition of Belief**

Study subtitle: **Abuse of legal apparatuses for the recognition of belief systems and their detriment on religious freedom conditions**

Primary research question: **Do recognitory and commercial restrictions imposed on religious organisations around the world cause impediments to freedom of religion?**

Invitation

Your receipt of this Participant Information Pack confirms your invitation to participate in the research conducted as part of the project titled *Religious Freedom and State Recognition of Belief*. This information pack will provide you with the necessary details pertaining to the purpose of this research, the provision of your consent as a participant, and what you as a participant can expect from the research (e.g. the questions set to be asked, how the results of this research will be used afterwards etc.).

It is hoped that following your reception of this information pack, you will have understood fully the contents of this research, its purpose, your role as a participant, what is expected of you as a participant, and that you are comfortable to move forward in your acceptance of this invitation to participate.

If you have any questions regarding the contents of this information pack, please email the researcher with your enquiry *prior* to your acceptance of the invitation. Researcher Contact Email: **brtaylorian@uclan.ac.uk**

Abstract of study

Every nation state on Earth has established its own unique approach to dealing with the religions and beliefs of its citizens. Some states have opted for a welcoming coexistence of multiple religions based on a framework of pluralism while others have decided to enshrine one religion into their constitution and penal code to the detriment and disregard of minorities. In a smaller number of cases, however, such countries have decided to banish religion altogether, to integrate irreligion into state apparatuses, and to deal, with egregious severity, any citizen whose faith is more important to them than the state itself. Whichever way governments have decided to approach the “issue” of citizens’ religion, spirituality, or philosophical beliefs, they all share the burden of how to legally recognise different groups and their institutions. Since the first nations emerged in ancient times, religions have sought, and in some cases, have achieved, sweeping recognition and endorsement from the state and this relationship and practice has only accelerated in contemporary times. However, the apparatus of religious recognition has come to be used as more of a method to control religion than to maintain citizens’ religious liberties.

This research aims to identify the collection of tactics employed by governments of all kinds in using the recognition of religions as a way to restrict religious activity. The study intends to explore how legal and commercial restrictions imposed on religious organisations negatively impact the religious freedom situation. A discussion will ensue as to whether a free-market economy is the most efficient counterforce to the governmental abuse and misuse of the apparatus of religious recognition. This research will analyse the knowledge of existing literature and will produce knowledge from participant interviews to test whether this approach to religious freedom advocacy could contribute to the improvement of freedom of religion conditions in countries around the world. This will include recommendations for how recognition systems could be established and used for the betterment of religious freedom rather than to its detriment.

This research presents the hypothesis that the systems established by some governments to recognise belief systems, as well as the absence of recognition systems at all, are abused as a means of controlling citizens’ identities and to maintain a hegemony on belief. Fundamentally, that it is recognition or lack thereof that stands as the central, persisting obstacle to the protection of freedom of religion or belief and that with a greater understanding of how recognition systems can be abused, experts active in the field at national and international levels will be more equipped to identify when recognition, non-recognition, or misrecognition are the cause of other issues impacting religious freedom conditions like terrorism, the disenfranchisement of minorities etc. By exploring the extent of the issue of recognition system abuse, this research hopes to enable advocates, commissioners, and scholars to understand the centrality of recognition to broader human rights concerns regarding religion and belief.

Research questions and objectives

There are a total of six research questions for this study and two primary objectives.

Research questions:

1. Is the imposition of commercial restrictions on religious institutions a freedom of religion issue?
2. What techniques of restriction could be included in a religious recognition apparatus?
3. By what avenues can religions be legally recognised?
4. What types of religions could be adversely effected by the abuse of recognition systems?
5. What recommendations can be made to help resolve the potential issues arising from government systems of religious recognition?
6. Is a free-market economy the remedy to religious freedom repression?

Research objectives:

- To provide an empirically-based, qualitative understanding of the tools that states use to restrict religious and philosophical groups via recognition, or lack thereof.
- To examine how recognition is central to many of the human rights concerns regarding freedom of religion or belief and to propose a fairer system for recognising belief systems that sustains religious freedom standards.

Interview questions

Identified here are the primary interview questions that participants should expect to be asked. This is in addition to a series of secondary questions based on each participant's individual expertise as part of the semi-structured interview approach.

Primary interview questions:

- 1.To what degree do you consider recognition of belief a factor in issues such as terrorism, discrimination, social ostracism, and the disenfranchisement of minorities?
- 2.To your knowledge, are there examples of systems of registration for religious groups that are purposefully skewed against new groups trying to register?
- 3.To what extent are religious registration and recognition systems used as a means of controlling the religious or belief identities of citizens?
- 4.What are some of the key tactics adopted by some governments in restricting religious activity?
- 5.What are the key techniques currently available to advocates to help improve freedom of religion conditions?
- 6.Do you consider commercial restrictions imposed on religious groups, especially limiting their ability to collect donations and to survive financially, a concern for freedom of religion?
- 7.Which countries do you consider to be the worst offenders in misusing religious recognition systems to severely limit religious activity with detriment to freedoms?
- 8.Do you consider recognition, or lack thereof, to be important in causing issues regarding religious freedom violations?
- 9.What actions can be taken to establish fairer religious recognition apparatuses?

Background to the study

This study is being conducted due to the present definitive lack of research on the role that religious recognition and registration systems play in effecting conditions for freedom of religion.

Brandon is the principal researcher for this study. It is he who will be conducting your interview and will be writing the final thesis. Brandon's aims to work in the field of religious freedom have certainly played a role in his deep interest in and passion for this area of scholarship. Brandon wants to try to improve the way in which advocates, scholars and commissioners approach religious freedom issues by highlighting recognition as a potentially fundamental cause to many persisting issues.



Image of Brandon, principal researcher

You have been invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as possessing expert knowledge in the area and it is felt that you will have a considerable amount to contribute to the research topic due to your experience in religious freedom advocacy and/or scholarship.

This research is being conducted in order to ultimately improve freedom of religion conditions around the world, especially by tackling some of the bureaucratic recognition systems that exist only to restrict religious activity and abuse freedom of belief. This research aims to improve freedom of religion conditions by providing advocates the insight required into how recognition is fundamental to issues both positively and negatively impacting religious freedom and how the negative impacts could be dismantled. It is also hoped that your contacts and your overall presence in the field will help influence change in the way others approach the topic of freedom of religion by engaging with the hypothesis of this research.

It is aimed that there will be around fifteen to twenty main participants in the study whose interviews will be used to draw information from for the final write-up of the thesis.

Participating in the study

Accepting your invitation to participate in this study means that you will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher, Brandon, to discuss the current landscape of religious recognition systems around the world. This will include answering to the best of your ability a preset of primary questions (see page 7) and some secondary questions tailored specifically to each participant's expertise and their fields of particular interest. This interview will be recorded both in video and audio and the contents of the interview will be transcribed afterwards.

Upon receipt of this Participant Information Pack, you have precisely 2 months to decide whether to take part in this research. This will allow time for you to adequately read the Information Pack and to decide whether to participate in the research. If you do not respond via email to Brandon within this timeframe, it will be presumed that you have declined participation in this research.

The participant will be asked to schedule one hour for the interview on a date and time that is suitable to them; scheduling the interview will take place over email between the participant and the researcher. If the participant has to change the date of the interview, the participant should inform the researcher at least a week prior to the interview so that the researcher can organise a reschedule for the interview.

Participants should expect their interview to be transcribed, which they will receive a copy of following its completion.

As this will be a semi-structured interview, participants should also expect the interviewer to ask follow-up questions that may not be in either the primary or secondary preset of questions.

You will be asked to give consent for the following:

- Anything said in the interview can be used in the final write-up of the thesis which specifically includes the use of content to support or not support the hypothesis.
- For the researcher to collect and store the data (interview recording and transcript) in a secure, password protected folder for up to five years after the interview takes place.

The legal basis for the researcher's use of your personal data is the necessity of this task as part of the research carried in the public interest.

Benefits of participation

There are several potential benefits for participating in this study. These are listed below:

- Participants will have the opportunity to engage in discussion regarding religious recognition that could then contribute to their advocacy.
- Participants will help to contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding freedom of religion and belief.
- Taking part in this study may also help you in your own professional role.
- Participants will be supported throughout the study with regular updates from the researcher on the study's progress.
- Participants will be supporting improvements in the broader religious freedom landscape by dispensing their expertise on how best to deal with religious recognition and how to devise a model for a fairer recognition system for future implementation.
- Participants will help to promote awareness of their own religious freedom work and advocacy and will promote freedom of religion and belief in general.
- In order to sustain and protect religious liberties around the world, the body of knowledge dealing with freedom of religion must continue to grow and develop and by participating in this study, you will be contributing to that very development.

It is important to clarify that participants **will not** receive funds as a result of their participation in this study.

Consent and identification

It is essential for participants to understand that for this study, they will **not** be anonymous participants. This means that you will be identified and referred to by name in the final thesis of this research and related productions resulting from this study (e.g. presentations).

- Participants will receive a copy of the final thesis prior to its submission. This will be your main opportunity to question any content that is in reference to yourself. Discussions regarding the removal of content will take place over email.
- It is important to note that you will not be the only participant in this study. This study aims to interview at least fifteen experts from the field. Participants will be given the same primary questions, however, individual participants will be given separate secondary questions according to their respective specialisms or areas of interest.
- In the email in which you received this information pack, attached was the Research Consent Form for this study which, upon completion, confirms your acceptance of the details outlined in this information pack and your acceptance to participate in this study.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study, you may do so up to one month after the interview has taken place. This should be done by emailing the researcher to inform him of your formal withdrawal. In this case, the recorded interview will be deleted and any transcripts created will be also be destroyed.

If you require the interview to be rescheduled, please inform the researcher of this up to a week before the interview is set to take place; this will allow time for the researcher to reschedule the interview to a time that is better suited to you.

The results of this study will be written up in a final thesis set to be submitted around December 2023. The participant will receive a copy of the thesis for them to read through before any submission is made. Participants will be given thirty days to respond upon receipt of the thesis (participants will be given a list of pages of relevance to them and their interview in order to quicken the reading time).

Dr Carl Morris is the supervisor of this research being undertaken at UCLan and is reviewing all materials produced by Brandon for this study. To contact Dr Morris directly if you have any concerns, please use the following email: **cjmorris2@uclan.ac.uk**

Contact details and next steps

If you have read this Participant Information Pack and you wish to participate then please send an email to Brandon at the following address: **brtaylorian@uclan.ac.uk**

Please include your sign consent form and explicitly state that you have read and understand the content of this Participant Information Pack.

Upon receipt of your email, Brandon will begin making preparations for your participation. A list of potential interview dates and times will be sent to you for your consideration. Once you have chosen your interview date, you will receive a confirmation email exactly one week before it is due to take place to re-confirm your participation and your fitness to take part on the scheduled date. It is up to this point that you will be able to re-schedule the interview if required.

We hope you agree to take part in this exciting research and become part of a study that is set to contribute to the field of freedom of religion and belief so that each human being is affirmed in their right to belong to whichever religion they choose, or none at all.

Please contact Brandon at any time if you have any questions and he will be on hand to answer them promptly. Alternatively, if you remain unhappy with something that you feel you cannot come to either Brandon or Carl with, then please contact the **Research Governance Unit** of UCLan at **OfficerForEthics@uclan.ac.uk**.