

ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS

Radiography of Religious Minorities in Spain: An Estimation of Their Size and Characteristics

Radiografía de las minorías religiosas en España: una estimación de su tamaño y sus características

Jacobo Muñoz Comet

National Distance Education University (UNED), Spain
jmcomet@poli.uned.es

Juan Ignacio Martínez Pastor

National Distance Education University (UNED), Spain
jimartinez@poli.uned.es

Received/Recibido: 28–10–2024

Accepted/Aceptado: 27–1–2025



ABSTRACT

This article examines religious minorities in Spain using multiple data sources. First, it analyses six nationally representative opinion surveys conducted between 2018 and 2023, discussing their methodological limitations. According to these surveys, between 4% and 6.3% of residents of legal age in Spain identify with a non-Catholic religion. Secondly, data from the Labour Force Survey (Encuesta de Población Activa – EPA) are analysed, suggesting that the actual proportion of religious minorities may be twice as high. When including minors, this figure could reach up to 12.6% of the population (approximately 6.1 million people) by 2024, with 2.6 million identifying as Muslim. The opinion surveys reveal a distinct socio-demographic profile for religious minorities. However, due to the statistical underrepresentation of this group, there is an urgent need for new data sources that provide more accurate and comprehensive information.

KEYWORDS: religion; minorities; faiths; religious beliefs; methodology; immigration; statistical sources; quantification; Muslims; Catholics.

HOW TO REFERENCE: Muñoz Comet, J. and Martínez Pastor, J. I. (2025). Radiografía de las minorías religiosas en España: una estimación de su tamaño y sus características. *Revista Centra de Ciencias Sociales*, 4(2), 11–34. <https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.114>

The Spanish (original) version can be read at <https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.114>

ABSTRACT

Este artículo estudia las minorías religiosas en España mediante diferentes fuentes de datos. Por un lado, se analizan seis estudios de opinión —representativos a nivel nacional y realizados entre 2018–2023— y se discuten las limitaciones metodológicas que plantean. Según estas encuestas, entre un 4 y un 6,3% de los residentes en España mayores de edad pertenece a alguna religión no católica. Por otro lado, se explotan los datos de la EPA, cuyo análisis apunta a que el porcentaje real de minorías religiosas puede ser el doble. Al incluir a los menores de edad, la cifra podría alcanzar en 2024 hasta un 12,6% de la población (6,1 millones de personas), de las cuales 2,6 millones serían musulmanas. Los estudios de opinión analizados muestran un perfil sociodemográfico de las minorías religiosas singular. Sin embargo, ante los problemas de infrarrepresentación estadística de este colectivo, urgen nuevas fuentes de datos más precisas y adecuadas.

KEYWORDS: religión; minorías; confesiones; creencias religiosas; metodología; inmigración; fuentes estadísticas; cuantificación; musulmanes; católicos.

1. Introduction

Spain's cultural richness has been shaped over the centuries by a diversity of influences, including religious traditions. Although Catholicism remains the religion with the deepest historical roots, the last few decades have witnessed an undeniable transformation. This change has been driven primarily, though not exclusively, by the arrival of several million immigrants since the late twentieth century, mainly from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa. As a result, Catholicism has come to coexist with a variety of other religions.

Indeed, between 1996 and 2008, Spain was the second-largest recipient of immigrants worldwide, surpassed only by the United States (Fernández-Huertas, 2021). In relative terms, the increase in the proportion of immigrants in Spain during this period has been unprecedented. According to the Continuous Population Statistics compiled by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), while foreign-born individuals constituted 3% of the resident population in 1998, by the end of 2024 this figure had risen to 18.4%, amounting to approximately 9 million immigrants.

The phenomenon of immigration, alongside the legal recognition of major religious minorities and the continued presence of other minority religions already practised by non-Catholic believers in Spain, has contributed to shaping a dynamic and evolving religious landscape. From Islam to various Christian denominations and other spiritual traditions, religious minorities play a significant role in constructing contemporary Spanish identity. According to the Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, in 2024 there were 30,949 places of worship across

the country, 8,016 of which belonged to 17 minority religious denominations, understood here as non-Catholic faiths.

This study sets out several objectives. First, it aims to determine the proportion of the resident population in Spain that adheres to a religious minority, that is, a non-Catholic faith. Second, it explores a methodological question: whether opinion surveys, which typically include questions on respondents' religiosity, underestimate the size of this group. In addressing this issue, the Labour Force Survey (*Encuesta de Población Activa – EPA*) is used as an alternative statistical source. The third objective is to describe the socio-demographic characteristics and level of religiosity among members of religious minorities, compared with Catholics and the non-religious population.

This research is novel in several respects. On the one hand, it uses multiple data sources to analyse religious minorities. Datasets are employed from nationally representative surveys, which enhances the reliability of the information provided compared with other regular surveys that have studied religious minorities in Spain. On the other hand, by using multiple surveys we are able to assess the extent to which their estimates vary. This serves as a robustness check of the methodology and enables comparisons with figures reported by religious organisations or other relevant institutions. In sum, this article aims to provide the most reliable quantification of religious minorities in Spain to date. It also seeks to evaluate the robustness of opinion survey data regarding this topic, a task that, to our knowledge, has not previously been undertaken.

The findings of this study may have direct implications for public policy and social cohesion, informing decisions on the equitable allocation of public resources, the design of more effective integration policies and the prevention of discrimination. These efforts depend fundamentally on accurate data concerning the religious composition of society. For instance, understanding the distribution and size of minority groups can help identify areas of social vulnerability and support the implementation of inclusive and effective evidence-based measures.

The article is structured into three main sections. The first presents a review of existing studies on this phenomenon and discusses the methodological challenges involved in quantifying religious minorities in Spain. The second outlines the data sources used in this research, the methodology for estimating the group and the variables employed in characterising it. The third section presents the study's findings. Finally, the article presents the study's conclusions along with its limitations.

2. Background and difficulties in measurement

The specialised literature includes several lines of research concerned with religious plurality. Although in Spain the most established strand focuses on the diversity of beliefs and affiliation to denominations other than the majority (Díez de Velasco,

2010; Pérez Agote, 2015; Astor *et al.*, 2017), recent years have seen the emergence of studies analysing the evolution of the religiosity of immigrant-origin populations and their descendants within the host society (Vicente Torrado and Urrutia Usua, 2023). In countries with a much longer history of immigration, such research is more common (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2012; Cheung, 2016). Similarly, there is a body of work examining the role of religiosity in the socio-economic integration of both native and immigrant populations (Heath and Martin, 2013; Fullin, 2016; Khattab and Hussein; 2018; Koopmans *et al.*, 2019).

Academic research conducted thus far in Spain has certain limitations. Specifically, most studies on religious minorities have employed qualitative approaches, whereas quantitative contributions remain scarce. Below is a review of the estimated figures for religious minorities in Spain, their characteristics and the methodological challenges involved in studying this group.

2.1. What are the estimated figures?

Quantifying and analysing the characteristics of religious minorities is a complex task (Muñoz Comet, 2022). Firstly, there are no censuses or official records detailing the religiosity of the population in Spain, and where such data exist, they are neither exhaustive nor publicly accessible. Furthermore, as religious minorities constitute a very specific group, it is challenging to obtain survey data that include representative samples of two overlapping social minorities: immigrants and individuals belonging to minority religions.

Nevertheless, several organisations have attempted to estimate the number of inhabitants in Spain who profess religions other than Catholicism. One such organisation is the Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, which operates under the Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation. This institution is a public body affiliated with the Ministry of the Presidency, Justice and Relations with the Courts, with the primary objective of studying and managing religious pluralism. The Observatory's database includes information from three Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas – CIS) surveys conducted in 1998, 2008 and 2018. According to the most recent survey¹, which focuses on religiosity and is also used in this study, 5.6% of the population aged 18 and over residing in Spain belongs to a minority religion. Based on the Continuous Register Statistics for that year, this corresponds to approximately 2.2 million adults.

Other institutions linked to specific religions provide their own estimates of the number of adherents in Spain. For example, the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE), through the Observatorio Andalusi, estimates that in 2023 there were 2.4 million Muslims living in Spain. Their calculation method classifies as Muslims all inhabitants originating from countries considered predominantly Muslim. They justify this approach by stating:

Although Muslims reside in countries worldwide in varying proportions, either as majorities or minorities, this study utilises the absolute number of 29 nationalities, having verified that this figure compensates for Muslim minorities primarily immigrated from Europe and the Americas, such as Latin American Muslims (Observatorio Andalusi-UCIDE, 2024, p. 5, [translation]).

The Observatorio Andalusi's estimate also includes Hispanic Muslims, a group comprising residents of Ceuta and Melilla, naturalised Muslims and descendants of Muslims.

The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain (FEDERE), on the other hand, estimates that there are between 1.7 and 2 million Protestants in the country (FEDERE, 2023). This figure is a rough estimate derived from counting both attendees of evangelical churches and Protestants, including non-congregating evangelicals, who reside in Spain for at least six months per year.

Orthodox Christians represent another sizeable minority in Spain, primarily due to immigration from Eastern European countries where Orthodoxy is the dominant faith. Considering residents from Romania, who are mostly Orthodox, alongside nationals from Bulgaria, Serbia, Ukraine and Russia, it is reasonable to estimate that Spain is home to around one million Orthodox Christians, based on the 2022 Continuous Register figures.

Regarding other religious minorities, a projection by the Pew Research Center using 2010 data estimated that by 2020 there would be approximately 190,000 individuals adhering to religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and others. Data from the Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain, drawing on the 2018 CIS survey, suggests that 1% of adult residents identify with these other religions, amounting to around 384,000 people.

As has been observed, estimates for the number of people professing a minority religion in Spain vary significantly. According to CIS data, this figure is 2.2 million adults. However, when including estimates from Muslim and evangelical organisations and additional data from the Continuous Register and surveys, the total ranges from approximately 5.3 to 5.8 million, which also accounts for minors in some denominations. The results section will clarify which of these figures aligns most closely with those obtained from surveys using representative samples of Spain's population.

2.2. What is their composition?

Despite the paucity of data on religious minorities, sociology has made significant efforts to analyse their characteristics. In this regard, the study conducted by Alfonso Pérez Agote and Jose Santiago (2009), based on two surveys carried out by the CIS in 2008, is particularly noteworthy.² The first survey included interviews

with 2,000 adults, of whom 10% were migrants. The second survey was specifically designed to study religious minorities. A sample of 200 entities registered in the Ministry of Justice's Register of Religious Entities was drawn, with one leader and three additional members from each entity interviewed. In total, 736 individuals participated in the survey: 487 Evangelicals, 184 Muslims and 65 from other minority religions.

In relation to the objectives of the present research, the key conclusion of Pérez Agote and Santiago's study is that the degree of religiosity among immigrants was higher than that of the native population, across several indicators. It is important to note that the immigrant population considered in this study belonged to one of the minority religions. Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals affiliated with minority religions, the majority were men (57%) and under the age of 45 (63%). Half (50%) of the participants held only Spanish nationality. On a left–right ideological scale ranging from 1 (far left) to 10 (far right), the average score was 4.5, indicating a tendency towards the moderate left. As for educational attainment, 31% had completed primary education or less, while 34% held university degrees.

Among the initiatives of the Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation are two studies conducted by the Observatory of Religious Pluralism in Spain. The first is the "Survey on the opinions and attitudes of Spaniards towards the daily dimension of religiosity and its public management", conducted in two editions (2011 and 2012). The second is the "Study on the perception of discrimination on religious grounds in the workplace", carried out through a survey in 2022 and targeting individuals belonging to religious minorities. This survey received responses from 1,986 individuals, most of whom were Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims and Adventists. As it was not a probabilistic survey, based on non-random selection methods – mass emails were sent to local minority religious communities across Spain – the results must be interpreted with considerable caution, as must those of the study by Pérez Agote and Santiago.

Nonetheless, this study provides a detailed account of the socio-demographic profile of respondents, all of whom belonged to religious minorities. The majority were women (53%), university graduates (38%) or held upper secondary qualifications (35%), and were born in Spain (70%). Regarding religiosity, 62% described themselves as very or extremely religious, and 75% reported attending religious events at least once a week. The report itself compares its findings with those of the 2018 CIS survey (Survey 3194), which used a probabilistic sample. It concludes that university graduates are overrepresented in the Observatory's sample, those born outside Spain are underrepresented, and, on average, respondents were more religious than those in the CIS survey.

2.3. Difficulties in quantifying and analysing religious minorities

Attempts to quantify and understand the characteristics of religious minorities in Spain face multiple challenges. Ideally, a national register would exist containing information on individuals' religious affiliation along with some basic demographic characteristics. However, such a register is not currently available. As a result, efforts to measure the size and profile of these populations are necessarily partial and approximate. One of the most valid approaches, at least in theory, would be to conduct a probabilistic survey of the resident population. By asking respondents about their religious affiliation, this method would allow for precise estimations and the calculation of confidence intervals. Although this is theoretically the most robust method, in practice it presents significant limitations: certain groups are less likely to respond – even when the survey is part of the National Statistical Plan and participation is mandatory – or are more difficult to locate, despite repeated attempts by interviewers to contact selected households through various means. This issue is explicitly acknowledged in the methodological note of CIS Survey 3194 (2018), which focused on religion.

Religious minorities are often underrepresented in this type of survey, as they frequently overlap with other hard-to-reach populations, such as immigrants, who typically display lower response rates than the native-born population. While survey designers sometimes correct for such underrepresentation by weighting their data, these adjustments are rarely based on religious affiliation, which is the key variable of interest here.

Consequently, several minority religious organisations – such as the aforementioned Observatorio Andalusí – have sought to estimate the number of adherents through alternative means. One such method involves inferring religious affiliation from the national origin of Spanish residents. This is a straight-forward approach that entails assigning a specific religion to individuals originating from countries where that religion is dominant. This is typically done using data from the Municipal Register of Inhabitants. However, this method has a significant drawback: it assumes religious affiliation based solely on country of origin. This means individuals may be incorrectly classified as adherents of a particular faith, despite possibly belonging to another religion or identifying as non-believers.

Estimating the proportion of individuals who claim affiliation with a minority religion is one issue; identifying their characteristics is another. The latter requires a substantial number of interviews in order to draw reliable conclusions within a reasonable margin of error. Yet, in standard surveys, the number of respondents from religious minorities is typically too small to allow for meaningful socio-demographic analysis. This is a classic example of the “small-*N*” problem. Therefore, when a deeper analysis of their characteristics is required, researchers often resort to *ad hoc* surveys specifically targeting members of those religious minorities.

Such was the case with CIS Survey 2759, conducted in 2008. As outlined previously, this survey focused on individuals participating in worship activities at religious in-

stitutions recorded in the Register of Religious Entities, kept by the Directorate General for Religious Affairs. This approach has the advantage of increasing the number of respondents from minority groups. However, the challenge lies in determining the extent to which the interviewees are representative of these minority groups. Because the respondents were recruited from worship centres – and often included leaders of those centres – it is likely that they were significantly more religiously active than other members of the same faiths who do not regularly attend places of worship.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Data sources

3.1.1. *Opinion surveys*

Despite the aforementioned limitations, opinion surveys remain the primary statistical source for identifying and quantitatively describing individuals who profess a minority religion in Spain. Several studies in recent years have gathered relevant data, and most agree on certain key points. Typically, these are surveys aimed at the entire resident population of Spain, with representative samples ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 respondents. To analyse religious minorities, this research draws on six surveys conducted between 2018 and 2023³: the Spanish General Social Survey (Encuesta Social General Española – ESGE, 2023), the Health Barometer (Barómetro Sanitario – BS, 2023), the European Social Survey (ESS, 2022), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP, 2018), the European Values Study (EVS, 2018) and the Innovarómetro (INV, 2018).

All these surveys target the population residing in Spain aged 18 or over, except for the ESS, which includes individuals aged 16 and 17. They represent the most recent and relevant sources available for approaching the study of religious minorities in Spain. These surveys make it possible to estimate the proportion of the resident population that identifies with a minority religion. However, each survey has unique characteristics that may influence the estimates produced (see Table 1).

The Spanish General Social Survey (ESGE) is a survey conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) and has been carried out four times since 2013, with the latest edition in 2023. Although it is not specifically focused on religious beliefs or practices⁴, two relevant questions are included. The first is: “How do you define yourself in religious matters?” Answer options include Catholic, several minority denominations (such as Protestant, Orthodox, other Christian de-

nominations, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and other Asian religions) and the catch-all category “Other, please specify”. This question format is commonly used in studies addressing religious affiliation, although variations exist – such as distinguishing between practising and non-practising Catholics, or differentiating among those who profess no religion (e.g., agnostics, atheists, non-believers or those who respond with “don’t know” or provide no answer).

The second ESGE question relates to religious practice: “How often do you attend religious services or ceremonies, excluding special occasions such as weddings, baptisms or funerals?” Answer options offer eight levels of frequency: several times a week, two to three times a week, once a week, once a month, several times a year, once a year, less than once a year and never. As with the previous question, this structure is similar to those used in other surveys addressing religious practice.

The Health Barometer (BS) – also conducted by the CIS, on behalf of the Ministry of Health – has been in place for nearly 30 years, typically running three waves per year. Its key advantage is its larger sample size than other surveys. Over 10,000 respondents participated in the three 2023 editions, with approximately 500 individuals falling into the usually very small religious minority category. However, the BS only asks about religious belief and, unlike the ESGE, collapses all non-Catholic affiliations into a single category (“believer of another religion”).

The European Social Survey (ESS), a European Commission initiative launched in 2002 and conducted biennially, completed its tenth wave in 2022. In Spain, the CIS is responsible for conducting the survey. The added value of the ESS lies in the fact that, although it covers a range of social and political issues, it also includes questions on religion, such as beliefs, attendance at religious services, degree of religiosity and frequency of prayer. Notably, its affiliation question is phrased differently to those in the ESGE or the BS (“What religion do you belong to?”), something that may affect responses. With regard to the question on the frequency of prayer, seven response options are provided, ranging from “never” to “every day”. For religiosity, respondents rate themselves on a 0–10 scale based on the following question: “Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, to what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?”

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), in collaboration with the CIS, arguably provides the most comprehensive data for analysing religiosity in Spain. Each year, the survey focuses on a specific topic, with subjects being revisited every ten years. Accordingly, the 2018 edition centred on religion, enabling long-term comparisons of religious trends in Spain using data from the 1998 and 2008 surveys. However, as with most surveys, the main limitation of the ISSP in

analysing religious minorities lies in the small sample size of this subgroup (100 individuals), which hinders a more in-depth analysis of their characteristics.

Two additional surveys from 2018 are the European Values Study (EVS) and the Innovarómetro (INV). The former is a private European initiative offering insights into religious beliefs and practices, though its data on religious minorities is limited (just 49 individuals in the sample). The INV, by contrast, conducted by the CIS, features a larger overall sample. However, similar to the BS, it does not disaggregate non-Catholic believers by specific denomination, limiting its usefulness for studying religious diversity in detail.

Table 1
Statistical sources with direct information on religious denominations

Survey	Organism	Year	Sample size	Minorities subsample	Minorities category	Question
Spanish General Social Survey (ESGE)	Centre for Sociological Research (CIS)	2023	2,254	131	Disaggregated	How do you define yourself in religious matters?
Health Barometer (BS)	CIS – Ministry of Health	2023	10,377	453	Aggregated	How do you define yourself in religious matters?
European Social Survey (ESS)	CIS – EU	2022	2,283	113	Disaggregated	What religion do you belong to?
International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)	CIS – ISSP	2018	1,733	100	Disaggregated	How do you define yourself in religious matters?
European Values Study (EVS)	University of Deusto – EVS Foundation	2018	1,209	49	Disaggregated	Do you belong to any religion?
Innovarómetro (INV)	CIS	2018	6,308	320	Aggregated	How do you define yourself in religious matters?

Source: own elaboration based on the statistical sources.

3.1.2. *The Labour Force Survey*

In addition to opinion surveys, this research employs microdata from the Labour Force Survey (EPA) to provide an alternative estimate of religious minorities in Spain. The EPA, conducted quarterly by the National Institute of Statistics, surveys approximately 65,000 households (around 160,000 individuals). The primary reason for choosing the EPA over other sources such as the Municipal Register of Inhabitants or the Census lies in its inclusion, since 2021, of information on the country of birth of respondents' parents. This allows us to identify individuals born in Spain whose parents (at least one) originate from a foreign country.

Using EPA data, we will produce two estimates: one to compare with opinion surveys (specifically the 2023 ESGE) and another to calculate the proportion of individuals belonging to religious minorities in Spain using the most up-to-date data available. In both cases, the same procedure will be followed. For the first comparison, we will use data from the first quarter of 2022, as the last ESGE sample was based on the Continuous Register as of 1 January 2022. As with the ESGE, this analysis will focus on the adult population (aged 18 and over). For the second objective, we will draw on the most recent EPA data available at the time of writing (third quarter of 2024), and in this case, we will include the entire resident population, including minors.

3.2. Analytical strategy

3.2.1. *Estimation of religious minorities*

To estimate the proportion of religious minorities in Spain, we first consult six opinion surveys, each of which provides direct data on individuals' religious affiliation⁵. Subsequently, to assess the accuracy of these estimates, we calculate the percentage this population comprises using data from the EPA. For this purpose, we analyse separately (A) the immigrant population and (B) the native population.

(A) This study assumes that the religious composition of individuals who emigrate from a given country is broadly similar to that of those who remain in the country of origin. Empirical evidence on this point is mixed and inconclusive (see Connor, 2008; Norris and Inglehart, 2012; Guveli, 2015). In general, research suggests that over time the religiosity of immigrants tends to converge with that of the host population. However, such studies primarily address religious belief and practice, rather than affiliation itself, which tends to remain relatively stable. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that religious affiliation among emigrants does not differ substantially from that of the population in their countries of origin.

Based on this assumption, we have weighted the immigrant population residing in Spain according to the percentage of non-Catholic religious adherents in their respective countries of origin (e.g., Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Buddhists). The sources used to obtain these estimates include data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, the Pew Research Center, and, to a lesser extent, other official statistical bodies. For instance, if approximately 20% of Ecuador's population belongs to a non-Catholic religious group, then in our calculations we assume that 20% of Ecuadorians residing in Spain are affiliated with a minority religion.

In addition, studies such as Fleischmann (2022) show that Muslim minorities are more likely to transmit their religion to their children (born in the host country) than are Christian immigrants or the native population. As a result, in our calculations, we include as Muslim those individuals born in Spain who have at least one parent from a predominantly Muslim country, weighted by the proportion of Muslims in the country of origin.

(B) The estimation of religious minorities among the native population is derived indirectly from the above calculations. The 2023 ESGE estimates that religious minorities in Spain consist of 40% native individuals and 60% immigrants. Thus, once we calculate the share of immigrants belonging to minority religious groups, we can infer the corresponding native share using this proportion. However, the 40/60 ratio has been adjusted due to overrepresentation of the native population in the ESGE sample. While the EPA (Q1 2024) estimates that immigrants represent 16.5% of Spain's adult population, the ESGE places this figure at only 14.1%, meaning that immigrants are underrepresented by 17.6% in the ESGE. This discrepancy has been accounted for by adjusting the immigrant/native proportion among religious minorities to 36/64 instead of 40/60. It is important to note that the estimated native share excludes individuals already counted in category (A), i.e., those with at least one parent from a predominantly Muslim country.

3.2.2. Analysis of characteristics

Following the comparison of estimates derived from the various data sources, the second part of this research focuses on analysing the socio-demographic characteristics of religious minorities. This analysis will be conducted using the six selected opinion surveys. Specifically, a comparative approach will be adopted across three groups: i) people who identify as believers of a religion other than Catholicism; ii) Catholic believers, both practising and non-practising; and iii) the remainder of the population, including non-believers, agnostics, atheists, those indifferent to religion, and those who responded "don't know" or gave no answer.

The comparison will focus on the socio-demographic profile of the groups and on their religious characteristics. In relation to socio-demographic attributes, the following variables will be included: gender, average age, country of birth (Spain vs abroad), educational attainment (university studies vs other; primary education or less vs other) and ideological self-placement from 0 (far left) to 10 (far right). Regarding religious characteristics, the analysis will cover degree of religiosity (0 = not at all religious; 10 = extremely religious); frequency of attendance at religious services or ceremonies, excluding special occasions (with a distinction between those attending at least once a week vs less frequently); and frequency of prayer (at least once a week vs less often).

Analyses will be conducted using a 95% confidence level, taking into account margins of error and confidence intervals, in order to assess the statistical significance of the differences observed between the three groups.

4. Results

4.1. Calculation of religious minorities from opinion surveys

Table 2 presents the estimates provided by the selected opinion surveys regarding the size of religious minorities in Spain. Where available, data is disaggregated by major non-Catholic religious denominations. Overall, these sources suggest that approximately 5% of the population residing in Spain identifies with a religious denomination other than Catholicism.

However, estimates vary: from 4% according to the European Values Study (EVS) to 6.3% in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), both based on data from 2018. This translates to a range of 1.5 to 2.4 million adults in Spain affiliated with a minority religion during that year⁶. Looking at more recent data from 2023, the figures range from 6% according to the Spanish General Social Survey (ESGE) to 4.5% in the Health Barometer (BS), representing between 2.4 and 1.8 million individuals, respectively⁷. It is important to emphasise that these figures, derived from surveys, are subject to a margin of error (reported in square brackets in Table 2). For instance, the 2023 ESGE estimates that 6% of adults in Spain belong to a religious minority, but given the margin of error, we can state with 95% confidence that the actual value lies between 5% and 7%. This would correspond to a population between 2.0 and 2.8 million people.

Discrepancies between surveys become more pronounced when examining specific religious denominations. A particularly illustrative example is the category of Christians who do not belong to either the Catholic or Protestant churches: the EVS estimates this group at just 0.1% of the population, while the ESGE places it significantly higher at 1.4%. A similar discrepancy appears with Protestants, whose estimated share ranges from 0.3% in the EVS to 2% in the ISSP.

Several factors may account for these differences, including the year of data collection, the age of the surveyed population and the exact wording of the survey questions. Another critical factor is the size of the subsample of individuals belonging to minority religions. These subsamples are typically small, often with margins of error as high as ± 1.1 percentage points for small groups. Increasing the sample size of these subsamples would improve the precision of the estimates and likely reduce variability between surveys.

Table 2
Estimation of religious minorities in Spain based on opinion surveys. Population aged 18 and over

	ESGE (2023)	BS (2023)	ESS (2022)	ISSP (2018)	EVS (2018)	INNOVA. (2018)
Religious minorities	6.0 [5.0–7.0]	4.5 [4.1–4.9]	5.0 [4.1–5.9]	6.3 [5.2–7.4]	4.0 [2.9–5.1]	5.0 [4.5–5.5]
Muslims	1.5 [1.0–2.0]		1.1 [0.7–1.5]	1.7 [1.1–2.3]	1.8 [1.1–2.6]	
Protestants	1.0 [0.6–1.4]		0.6 [0.3–0.9]	2.0 [1.3–2.7]	0.3 [0.0–0.6]	
Other Christians*	1.4 [0.9–1.9]		0.9 [0.5–1.3]	0.3 [0.0–0.6]	0.1 [0.0–0.3]	
Orthodox Christians	0.7 [0.4–1.0]		0.9 [0.5–1.3]	1.2 [0.7–1.7]	0.7 [0.2–1.2]	
Other minorities**	1.4 [0.9–1.9]		1.5 [1.0–2.0]	1.1 [0.6–1.6]	1.1 [0.5–1.7]	
Catholics	53.8 [51.7–55.9]	50.5 [49.5–51.5]	44.9 [42.9–46.9]	63.2 [60.9–65.5]	60.3 [57.5–63.1]	63.8 [62.6–65.0]
Remainder of the pop- ulation	40.2 [38.2–42.2]	45.0 [44.0–46.0]	50.1 [48.1–52.2]	30.5 [28.3–32.7]	35.7 [33.0–38.4]	31.2 [30.1–32.3]
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Confidence intervals are shown in square brackets.
*Primarily evangelical.
**Includes Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah’s Witnesses and adherents of other faiths.
Source: own elaboration based on the statistical sources.

4.2. Alternative estimate using the EPA

Below we present the results obtained from the Labour Force Survey (EPA) regarding the estimation of religious minorities in Spain (Table 3). Firstly, our own calculations based on the first quarter of 2022 allow for a comparison with the estimate from the latest ESGE, which reports that religious minorities constitute 6.0% of the adult population – equivalent to approximately 2.4 million individuals. According to the EPA, however, the proportion is significantly higher: 11.9%, or roughly 4.6 million people. This total includes 3.5% Muslims, 4.5% immigrants from other religious minorities and 3.9% natives who also belong to minority religious group. These figures suggest that the ESGE – and, by extension, the other opinion surveys – underestimate the size of religious minorities in Spain by nearly half.

Secondly, we calculated the percentage of religious minorities within the total resident population in Spain, including minors, using EPA data from the third quarter of 2024. This figure rises to 12.6% of the population, amounting to approximately 6.1 million people, of which an estimated 2.6 million are Muslims. Non-Muslim religious minorities are estimated at around 3.5 million people, with the total population comprising 4.8% immigrants and 2.4% natives affiliated with these faiths.

As noted earlier, it is essential to take into account the margin of error associated with the EPA-based estimates. In this case, we can affirm with 95% confidence that religious minorities represent between 12.4% and 12.8% of all Spanish residents. This relatively narrow confidence interval stands in stark contrast to the wider margins typically observed in opinion surveys and is primarily attributable to the significantly larger sample size used by the EPA – 119,728 observations in the third quarter of 2024 – allowing for much greater precision in the estimates.

Table 3
Estimation of religious minorities in Spain based on the EPA

	ESGE 2023 (18+ years)		EPA Q1 2022 (18+ years)		EPA Q3 2024 (entire population)	
	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%	Abs. no.	%
Muslims of migrant origin			1,368,818	3.5	2,626,283	5.4
Born abroad			1,207,600		1,655,598	
Both parents born abroad			73,339		732,186	
Father only born abroad			48,393		102,134	
Mother only born abroad			39,487		136,364	
Immigrants of other religions			1,743,766	4.5	2,316,084	4.8
Natives of other religions*			1,498,925	3.9	1,167,913	2.4
TOTAL MINORITIES	2,366,344	6.0	4,611,509	11.9	6,110,281	12.6
Population of Spain**	39,389,072	100	38,774,315	100	48,490,116	100
Sample size (N)	2,254		109,620		119,728	

*Excluding those born in Spain with at least one parent from Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries.
**For the total population of Spain, the ESGE uses the Continuous Register as of 1 January 2022 as the reference; the EPA relies on the population estimated by the survey itself (weighted) for the respective quarter.
Source: own research using the EPA library.

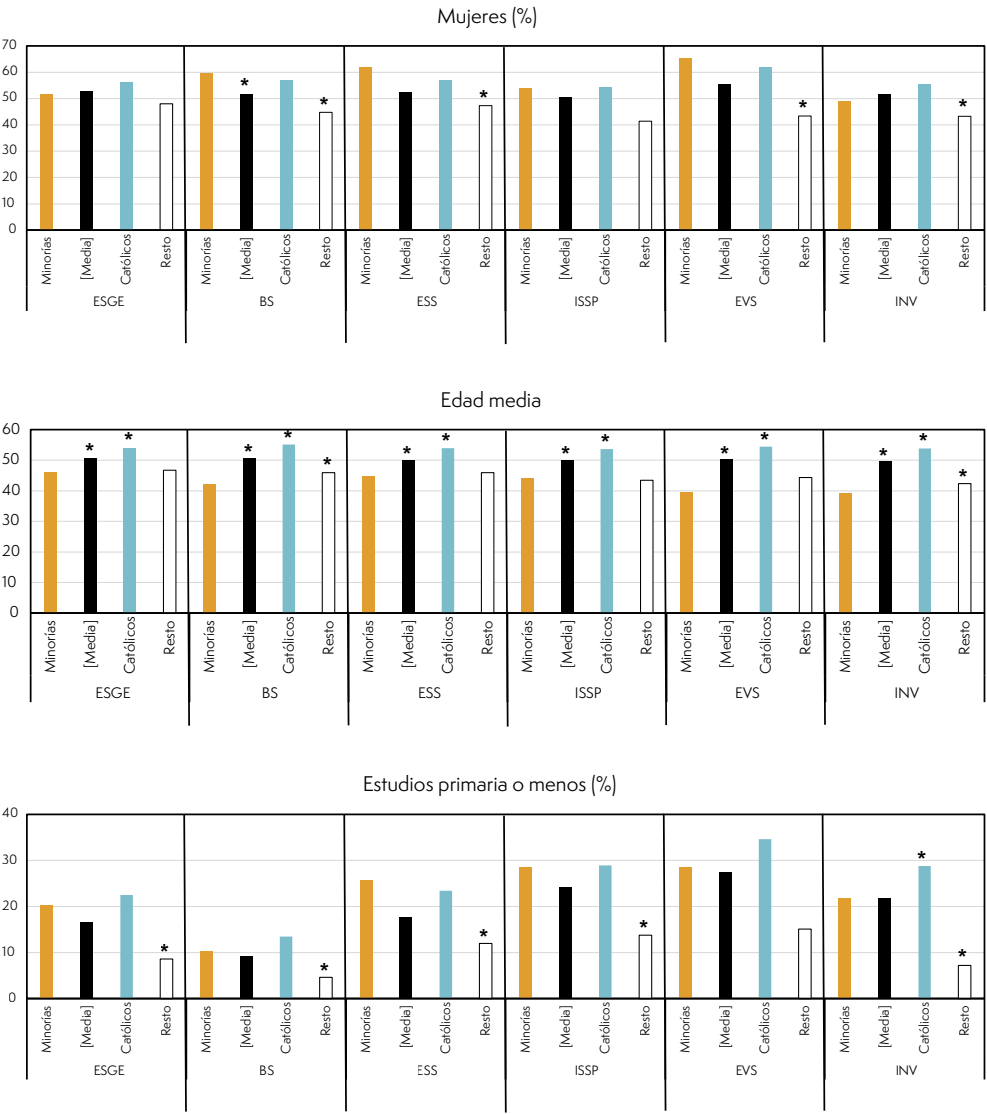
4.3. Profile of religious minorities: a comparative perspective

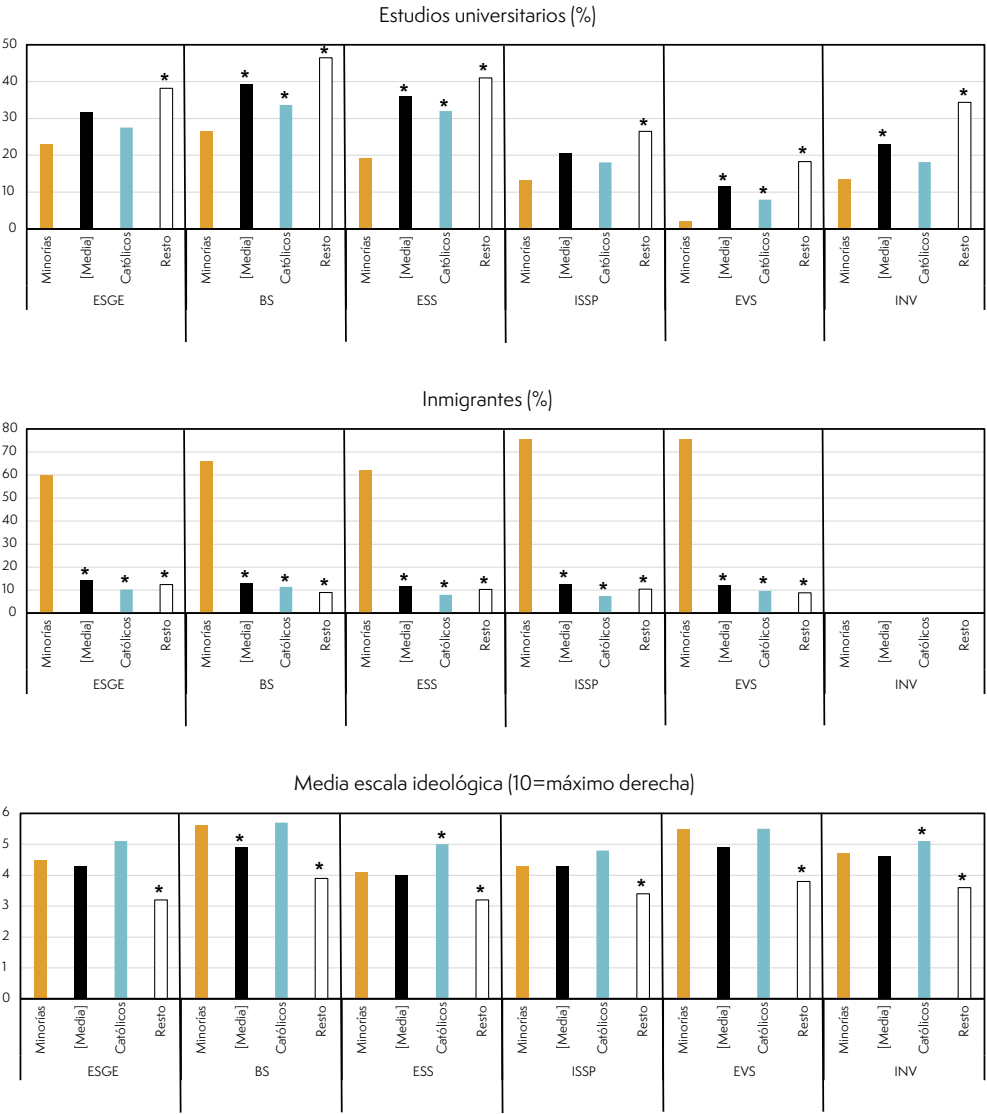
4.3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics

Analysing the socio-demographic characteristics of religious minorities presents challenges, primarily because the subsample size of these groups in surveys tends to be too small for precise estimates. Consequently, margins of error are often large, resulting in wide confidence intervals. However, by drawing on multiple studies, we can gain a general understanding of how religious minorities compare to Catholic believers and the rest of the population who do not identify as believers.

Graph 1

Socio-demographic characteristics of religious minorities in Spain based on opinion surveys





Note: ESGE, ESS and ISSP use an ideological scale from 0 to 10; BS, EVS and INV use a scale from 1 to 10.
(*) An asterisk indicates statistically significant differences where confidence intervals do not overlap with those of minorities.
Source: own elaboration based on the data sources.

Graph 1 displays differences among the three groups defined earlier, based on data from the six selected surveys. Since results vary for several reasons, we focus here only on differences within each survey rather than comparing results across surveys. The key point is to identify consistent patterns in the differences between groups.

Regarding gender, there is a slight tendency for women to be more represented among religious minorities than in the general population. However, this difference is only statistically significant in the BS. When compared to non-believers, significant gender differences appear in four of the six surveys, but there are no significant differences when compared to Catholics. Age differences are clearer. Religious minorities tend to be younger than both the general population and than Catholic believers in particular. They are also younger than non-believers, though this difference is statistically significant in only two surveys. This is because a large part of religious minorities are immigrants, who tend to be younger than Spaniards, who are predominantly Catholic.

It is worth noting that larger sample sizes would reduce confidence intervals, potentially making some of these differences statistically significant. Indeed, the two surveys with the largest samples (BS and INV) show the most statistically significant differences in Graph 1, in contrast to the EVS survey, which has the smallest sample.

Several educational differences can be observed in the data. Most notably, religious minorities tend to have lower levels of university education compared to non-believers and, in some cases, compared to Catholics as well. This trend is confirmed by all surveys. Differences at the lower end of the educational spectrum (primary education or less) are less pronounced but still exist. Non-believers show a clearly lower proportion of individuals with low education compared to religious minorities.

Graph 1 clearly shows that the main characteristic distinguishing religious minorities from the rest of the population is their place of origin. All surveys indicate that at least 60% of non-Catholic believers were born abroad, a figure much higher than that of the other groups and the national average, which is closer to 10%. Regarding the ideological scale, it appears that religious minorities place themselves further to the right than non-believers, possibly even more than Catholics.

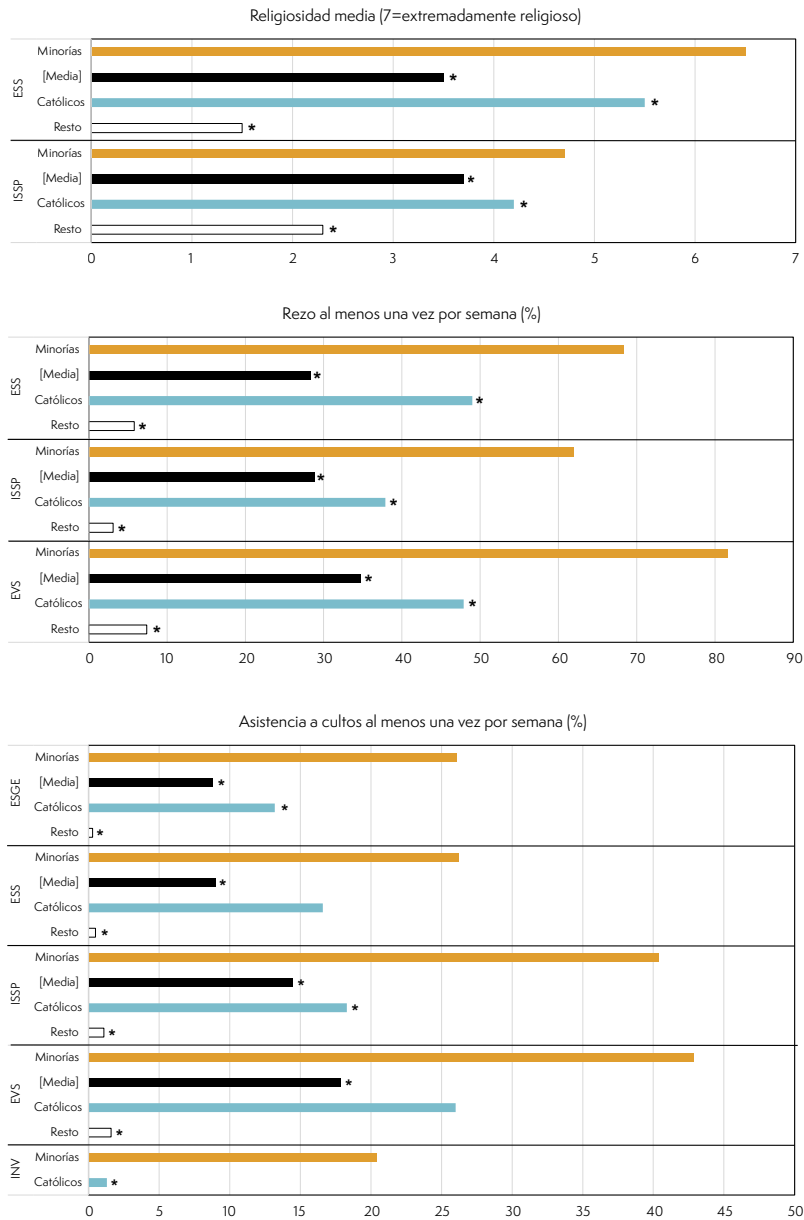
4.3.2. *Religious beliefs and practices*

A fundamental question regarding religious minorities is the extent to which these individuals hold stronger beliefs and engage in more frequent religious practices than other believers. Graph 2 offers evidence on this matter by examining three indicators: the degree of religiosity, the frequency of attendance at religious services and the frequency of prayer. The findings are striking: religious minorities express their beliefs more intensely than Catholics and, unsurprisingly, more than the rest of the population.

All three indicators point in the same direction. Religious minorities report a higher degree of religiosity than Catholic individuals, and they are also more likely to pray and attend religious services weekly. The differences between minorities and Catholic believers are particularly marked in terms of attending religious ceremonies.

As mentioned earlier, the socio-demographic profile of religious minorities in Spain differs in several respects from that of the Catholic population. It is possible that some of the observed differences in belief and practice may be partially explained by these socio-demographic factors. However, conducting multivariate analyses with such small subsamples presents problems of statistical significance and therefore does not allow for a clear understanding of the role of composition.

Graph 2
Religious beliefs and practices of religious minorities in Spain based on opinion surveys



Note: the ESS records religiosity on a scale from 0 to 7; the ISSP uses a scale from 1 to 7.
(*) An asterisk indicates statistically significant differences where confidence intervals do not overlap with those of minorities.
Source: own elaboration based on the data sources.

5. Conclusions

To study religious minorities in Spain, this article has drawn on six recent opinion surveys that include information on respondents' religious affiliation. Findings show that the estimates provided by these sources differ considerably from each other and, more importantly, tend to significantly underrepresent those who follow a religion other than Catholicism. Analysis of the Labour Force Survey (EPA) suggests that opinion surveys may be underestimating this group by as much as half. According to the EPA, by the end of 2024, there would be 6.1 million people in Spain belonging to a religious minority, 2.6 million of whom would be Muslim.

The analysis of the six opinion surveys offers a general view of the basic characteristics of religious minorities in comparison with the rest of the population. This group stands out above all for its significantly higher share of immigrants than the national average. They also tend to be younger, possibly more female and show a lower average level of education, particularly due to a lower proportion of university-educated individuals. In terms of ideology, they are more conservative than the average population, possibly even more so than Catholics.

This study is not without its limitations. The most significant is the lack of reliable data on religiosity, not only in Spain but globally. In the absence of censuses that record individuals' religious affiliation, national statistics are usually indicative and rely on surveys, which are not always harmonised and can yield differing estimates. This is especially relevant in our study, as our analytical strategy for estimating religious minorities in Spain is based partly on the religious composition of other countries.

In the EPA estimate, two assumptions were made that should be reconsidered in future research. First, that the religious profile of migrants mirrors that of those who remain in the country of origin. Second, that intergenerational religious transmission is most pronounced among Muslims. Although there are grounds to support both assumptions, the reality is undoubtedly more complex and deserves further nuance.

Finally, this study has treated religious minorities as a single, heterogeneous group. It would be a mistake, however, to overlook the diversity that exists within this category, which comprises a wide range of religious traditions that may vary greatly in both socio-demographic profile and religious practice. The main reason for not analysing each group separately is the nature of the data: the small sample sizes of the surveys do not allow for disaggregated analysis.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research are valuable for several reasons. They help illuminate a phenomenon that remains largely invisible in official statistics. Before religious minorities in Spain can be studied using data, the size of the group must first be quantified. This preliminary examination of socio-demographic characteristics provides a necessary foundation for constructing more comprehensive samples capable of capturing the complexity of religious minorities in Spain.

6. References

- Astor, A., Burchardt, M. and Grier, M. (2017). The politics of religious heritage: Framing claims to religion as culture in Spain. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 56(1), 126–142.
- Cheung, S. Y. (2016). Ethno-religious minorities and labour market integration: generational advancement or decline? In *Migrants and Their Children in Britain* (pp. 140–160). London: Routledge.
- Connor, P. (2008). Increase or decrease? The impact of the international migratory event on immigrant religious participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47(2), 243–257.
- Díez de Velasco, F. (2010). The visibilization of religious minorities in Spain. *Social Compass*, 57(2), 235–252.
- FEDERE (2023). *Informe anual sobre la situación de la libertad religiosa en España en relación con las iglesias evangélicas*. https://ferede.es/wp-content/uploads/InformeAnual_FEREDE_LibertadReligiosa-2020-2022.pdf.
- Fernández Huertas, J. (2021). *Inmigración y políticas migratorias en España*. FEDEA, Estudios sobre la economía española, 2021/10.
- Fleischmann, F. (2022). Researching religion and migration 20 years after ‘9/11’: Taking stock and looking ahead. *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*, 6(2), 347–372.
- Fleischmann, F. and Phalet, K. (2012). Integration and religiosity among the Turkish second generation in Europe: A comparative analysis across four capital cities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(2), 320–341.
- Fullin, G. (2016). Labour market outcomes of immigrants in a South European country: do race and religion matter? *Work, Employment and Society*, 30(3), 391–409.
- Guveli, A. (2015). Are movers more religious than stayers? Religiosity of European majority, Turks in Europe and Turkey. *Review of Religious Research*, 57(1), 43–62.
- Heath, A. and Martin, J. (2013). Can religious affiliation explain ‘ethnic’ inequalities in the labour market? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(6), 1005–1027.

- Khattab, N. and Hussein, S. (2018). Can religious affiliation explain the disadvantage of Muslim women in the British labour market? *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(6), 1011–1028.
- Koopmans, R., Veit, S. and Yemane, R. (2019). Taste or statistics? A correspondence study of ethnic, racial and religious labour market discrimination in Germany. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(16), 233–252.
- Muñoz Comet, J. (2022). Dificultades y retos para la cuantificación de las minorías religiosas en España. *Cuestiones de Pluralismo*, 2(1).
- Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. F. (2012). Muslim integration into Western cultures: Between origins and destinations. *Political Studies*, 60(2), 228–251.
- Observatorio Andalusi-UCIDE (2024). *Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana. Explotación estadística del censo de ciudadanos musulmanes en España referidos a fecha 31/12/2023*. <https://ucide.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/estademograf23.pdf>
- Pérez-Agote, A. (2015). Las dinámicas de la evolución religiosa. In C. Torres (Ed.), *España 2015. Situación social* (pp. 1433–1460). Madrid: Sociological Research Center.
- Pérez-Agote, A. (2022). *Religión, política e identidad colectiva: hacia una deriva, analítica y abierta de la teoría sociológica*. Madrid: Sociological Research Center.
- Pérez-Agote, A. y Santiago, J. (2009). *La nueva pluralidad religiosa*. Madrid: Ministerio de Justicia.
- Requena, M. (2008). Religión y sociedad. In M. Requena and J. J. González (Eds.), *Tres décadas de cambio social en España*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Vicente Torrado, T. L. and Urrutia Asua, G. (2023). Religious diversity and migration: Exploring research trends in an increasingly secular Spain. *Religions*, 14(6), 770.

Jacobo Muñoz Comet

A Doctor in Sociology with a European mention from the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), with additional degrees in sociology (UNED) and journalism (UCM), he has served as a visiting researcher at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), the University of Mannheim, Oxford University and the University of Amsterdam (UvA). He has published research on immigration, social inequality and labour markets in international journals including *European Sociological Review*, *Work, Employment and Society*, *International Migration Review* and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Juan Ignacio Martínez Pastor

He holds a PhD in Sociology from the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM). He has held various academic leadership roles, including director of the Research Department at the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) and vice-dean of research at UNED's Faculty of Political Science and Sociology. His research focuses on the labour market, social stratification, marriage, divorce, erotic capital and the interpretation and dissemination of social statistics, and his work has been published in international journals such as *European Sociological Review*, *Demographic Research*, the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Notes

- 1 Survey 3194.
- 2 CIS Surveys 2752 and 2759.
- 3 The monthly CIS barometers were excluded from the selection of surveys because they target only Spanish nationals, thereby excluding all foreigners, many of whom belong to religious minorities.
- 4 Each edition of the ESGE focuses on a specific theme; in 2023, it was the environment.
- 5 The percentages estimated in each survey were calculated using the available weighting factors.
- 6 According to the Continuous Register compiled by the INE, 38,422,217 people of legal age resided in Spain in 2018.
- 7 According to the Continuous Register compiled by the INE, 39,389,072 people of legal age resided in Spain on 1 January 2022.