



A Human Security Approach to Religious Freedom: A Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Religious Minorities

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Abstract: Freedom of religion is a fundamental right that often faces serious challenges, especially for religious minorities who are vulnerable to discrimination and violence. This article examines the human security approach as a conceptual framework for assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities and proposes a systematic, evidence-based assessment tool. The research employs a literature review and comparative analysis of various theories on human security and freedom of religion, complemented by the identification of vulnerability factors. This research refers to the human security framework developed by UNDP for Africa, which emphasizes an integrated, anticipatory, and people-centered approach to addressing systemic risks that transcend sectoral and territorial boundaries. Furthermore, this article draws on the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) introduced by Petri as an instrument that measures the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life. The findings indicate that the human security approach enables a holistic vulnerability assessment by considering political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Empirical findings from various contexts—including discrimination against religious minority youth in Turkey, discriminatory secularism in Europe, and structural discrimination against local belief communities in Indonesia - reinforce the argument that the vulnerability of religious minorities is multidimensional and requires a comprehensive assessment approach.

Contribution: The contribution of this article lies in developing an assessment tool that can assist policymakers and stakeholders in formulating more effective and inclusive interventions to protect religious minorities.

Keywords: human security; freedom of religion; religious minorities; vulnerability; assessment tool.



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1. Introduction

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right guaranteed in various international legal instruments. In practice, however, religious minority groups often face discrimination, violence, and restrictions on freedom of belief. Studies show that globally, 88.5% of countries discriminate against at least one religious minority, and religion-based discrimination has been increasing over time (Fox, 2008). In various countries, especially

those with dominant religious majorities, minorities become vulnerable groups to rights violations (Bielefeldt, Ghanea, & Wiener, 2016). Cases of religious intolerance demonstrate that formal legal protection does not necessarily guarantee real security for these communities (Oberoi, 1995). Therefore, a new approach that is more responsive to field realities is needed.

One relevant approach is the concept of human security, introduced by UNDP in the *Human Development Report 1994* as an alternative paradigm to state security (UNDP, 1994). This approach places people, not the state, at the center of security policy. As updated in the UNDP (2025) report for Africa, human security encompasses protection from physical, economic, social, and political threats that can damage human existence and dignity, and emphasizes that "governance, development, and security are inseparable." The report also affirms that the human security approach "is not a luxury—it is a prerequisite for sustainable peace, inclusive development, and democratic legitimacy in Africa" (UNDP, 2025). Thus, this approach is highly suitable for analyzing the vulnerability of religious minority groups. It also opens space for strengthening protection strategies that are participatory and contextual.

In the context of religious freedom, human security is not only about physical protection from violence, but also spiritual and cultural freedom guaranteed in essence by law (Sen, 2000). This means that a person is considered insecure if they cannot practice their beliefs freely and without pressure. López Ruf (2024) questions whether religious freedom is a "forgotten freedom" within the human security framework, showing that the religious dimension is often marginalized in human security discourse. Freedom from fear and freedom from want are the two main principles of this approach (Alkire, 2003). UNDP (2025) adds that "solidarity"—both within and across communities, nations, and regions—has become a third foundational pillar, alongside protection and empowerment (UNDP, 2025). When minority groups experience social rejection, desecration of places of worship, or restrictions on religious expression, their human security is being undermined. This issue is often overlooked by conventional security approaches that focus on armed conflict or state threats.

Many international reports show that the vulnerability of religious minorities often arises from a combination of social, economic, political, and cultural factors (Bielefeldt et al., 2016; Fox, 2008). These factors form patterns of systemic exclusion that are not always visible to normative legal instruments. UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "poverty and

inequality remain foundational drivers of human insecurity across the continent," and that "chronic income disparities, unequal access to services, and the marginalization of communities based on gender, geography, or age" deepen vulnerability to shocks and undermine progress toward peace and prosperity (UNDP, 2025). Research on structural discrimination against the Sunda Wiwitan community in Indonesia shows that religious freedom is not merely a matter of individual rights violations, but also a problem of institutional recognition embedded in state regulations, public policies, and everyday social relations (Hidayat, 2026). Arizona and Cohen (2024) further demonstrate how the Indonesian Constitutional Court has played a significant role in decolonizing colonial legal structures that discriminated against indigenous communities, particularly regarding customary land rights. In many cases, the state becomes an actor of omission or even a participant in violations of religious freedom. UNDP (2025) notes that over 70% of African countries still operate under security legislation inherited from colonial systems, which emphasizes regime protection over public accountability (UNDP, 2025)—a reality also relevant to the context of religious minority protection in many developing countries. Therefore, vulnerability assessment must encompass non-legal dimensions that affect the daily lives of religious minority communities. The human security approach provides a framework that can accommodate this complexity.

This article aims to examine how the human security approach can be used to comprehensively assess the vulnerability of religious minorities. This research draws on the development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) introduced by Petri (2021) as a tested instrument for assessing the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life. Additionally, the UNDP (2025) report proposes the development of a "Human Security Policy Tool"—a web-based policy instrument that helps policymakers consider diverse scenarios, anticipate emerging risks, and make informed decisions by navigating complex trade-offs in real time (UNDP, 2025). This tool is expected to become an instrument that helps state and non-state actors understand and address the risks faced by religious minority communities. As argued by Klocek and Petri (2023), measuring FoRB violations requires attention to subnational variations that are often overlooked by nationally scaled instruments. In the process, this approach not only evaluates threats but also emphasizes the importance of community empowerment as part of the solution. Thus, this approach contributes to the formation of more just and inclusive policies.

Finally, the choice of the human security approach also constitutes a critique of the inadequacy of formalistic legal paradigms and traditional security approaches in addressing religious freedom issues. UNDP (2025) asserts that "fragmented responses are not only ineffective but counterproductive," and that "we must transition from 'security-as-usual' and 'development-as-usual' to a holistic approach that recognizes the interdependence of risks and the centrality of human security" (UNDP, 2025). Through a broader reading of the living conditions of minority communities, we can develop vulnerability assessment tools that are sensitive to context. With this approach, resulting policies will be more targeted and oriented toward genuine protection. This article offers a theoretical and applicative foundation for such efforts. This research also opens space for further study and cross-sectoral collaboration in advocating for religious freedom.

2. Methods

This research employs an exploratory qualitative approach with case study and systematic literature review methods to understand the vulnerability of religious minority groups through the lens of human security. This approach allows researchers to explore the subjective experiences of minority communities as well as the socio-political dynamics that affect their religious freedom (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this research adopts a comparative approach to various existing religious freedom assessment tools, as recommended by Petri (2021) in the development of RM-VAT. This research is also inspired by the UNDP (2025) methodological framework which emphasizes the importance of "participatory and decentralized monitoring systems" and collaboration between government, research institutions, and civil society (UNDP, 2025). Data were collected through document studies and analysis of empirical reports on religious discrimination from various contexts, including studies on discrimination experiences of religious minority youth in Turkey (Tanyas, 2024), studies on structural discrimination against local belief communities in Indonesia (Hidayat, 2026), and studies on the Constitutional Court's role in recognizing customary land rights (Arizona & Cohen, 2024). Furthermore, this research analyzes the findings of Saiya and Manchanda (2026) on the relationship between discriminatory secularism and violence against religious minorities in Europe as cross-contextual comparative material. The assessment tool was developed inductively from field findings and derived from human security indicators developed by UNDP (UNDP, 1994; Alkire, 2003). Human security theory is used as the

main analytical framework, while human rights theory provides the normative foundation for understanding religious freedom (Bielefeldt, Ghanea, & Wiener, 2016).

The relationship between human security theory and human rights in this research is complementary. Human security provides a framework for measuring concrete conditions of vulnerability, while human rights theory provides the normative foundation establishing that religious freedom is a universal right that must be protected (Donnelly, 2013). UNDP (2025) affirms that "capable, legitimate states remain indispensable: not only to uphold the rule of law and ensure territorial integrity, but also to protect citizens from structural vulnerabilities and empower them to lead secure and dignified lives" (UNDP, 2025). Intersectionality theory is also used complementarily to reveal how religious minority identity interacts with other social factors such as ethnicity, class, and gender in shaping vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1991). This intersectional approach is relevant given the finding that women from religious minority communities often face multiple layers of discrimination that reinforce their vulnerability, as well as UNDP's (2025) recognition that "inclusive societies—particularly those with greater gender equality—tend to enjoy higher levels of stability, trust, and development outcomes" (UNDP, 2025). Thus, the research design not only assesses external risks but also identifies structural dimensions that exacerbate group vulnerability. This theoretical synthesis helps design a contextual, rights-based assessment tool oriented toward protection and community empowerment.

3. Result

3.1. Freedom of Religion as a Human Right and Religious Minorities

The human security approach was first introduced by UNDP in the *Human Development Report 1994* as a new paradigm to respond to threats that are not only military but also multidimensional—encompassing economic, health, environmental, political, and social dimensions (UNDP, 1994). The UNDP (2025) report updates this framework by emphasizing that "in this new era of risk, siloed responses are not only ineffective but counterproductive," and that "strengthening African resilience demands a human security perspective; one that directly confronts the complex and interconnected challenges facing the continent and the world" (UNDP, 2025). The focus of this approach is to protect human life from fear and want, as well as to empower individuals and communities (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Owen (2004) notes that although the concept

continues to be debated, it offers a threshold for identifying when human life is seriously threatened. In the context of religious freedom, this paradigm offers a new opportunity to comprehensively view the vulnerability of religious minorities. Thus, human security provides an analytical framework for understanding and responding to the complex dynamics of religious freedom violations. This approach becomes an alternative to conventional security models that are state-oriented and militaristic (Krause & Williams, 1997).

Normatively, the human security approach aligns with human rights principles enshrined in international instruments such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966). Both documents affirm that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (OHCHR, 2013). In practice, however, these rights are often violated, especially when religious identity intersects with majority politics and discriminatory state policies (Fox, 2008). Saiya and Manchanda (2026) show that discrimination against religious minorities is often justified not on the basis of religious ideology but on the basis of secularist principles, creating an unequal religious "playing field." Therefore, human rights theory needs to be contextualized through a human security approach so that protection is not merely normative but also transformative (Donnelly, 2013). UNDP (2025) affirms that the human security approach "does not replace the role of the state; it complements and reinforces it," and that "capable, legitimate states remain indispensable" for protecting citizens from structural vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2025). The synergy between human rights and human security enables rights-based protection that is also adaptive to local contexts (Sen, 2000).

To analyze the vulnerability of religious minority groups, it is important to use vulnerability theory, which maps individuals or groups that are systematically more vulnerable to social, economic, or political hazards (Turner et al., 2003). This theory emphasizes that vulnerability is not merely individual but also structural, often reinforced by social institutions and public policies (Watts & Bohle, 1993). UNDP (2025) identifies that "poverty and inequality remain foundational drivers of human insecurity across the continent," and that "chronic income disparities, unequal access to services, and the marginalization of communities based on gender, geography, or age" deepen vulnerability to shocks and undermine progress toward peace and prosperity (UNDP, 2025). Bouchier (2019) demonstrates how ideological contestation in Indonesia has

shifted from democratic cosmopolitanism toward religious nationalism, creating a political environment where minority belief communities face increasing structural discrimination. In the case of the Sunda Wiwitan community in Indonesia, vulnerability arises from a combination of state non-recognition (misrecognition) and unjust resource distribution (maldistribution), resulting in structural barriers to access to civil rights, education, and religious services (Hidayat, 2026). Arizona and Cohen (2024) further show how the Constitutional Court's landmark decisions have begun to address these colonial legacies, particularly regarding customary forest rights. Therefore, vulnerability theory provides a conceptual tool to assess the level of risk experienced by minorities in various aspects of life. The integration of vulnerability theory and human security is crucial for formulating an effective assessment tool.

Furthermore, Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory helps unravel the complexity of vulnerability when religious minority identity intersects with other identities such as ethnicity, gender, or class. This approach is important because minority groups are not homogeneous, and their vulnerability is shaped by various mutually influencing factors. For example, women from religious minority groups often face double risks: discrimination based on religion and gender (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Recent research shows that women from religious minority communities often face dual layers of discrimination and harassment that reinforce perceptions of political costs and limit their political agency. UNDP (2025) supports this approach by emphasizing that "inclusive societies—particularly those with greater gender equality—tend to enjoy higher levels of stability, trust, and development outcomes" (UNDP, 2025). Intersectionality enables a deeper reading of marginalized social experiences and provides a foundation for more context-sensitive interventions. In the context of human security, this theory supports protection efforts based on social justice.

The concept of religious freedom itself has evolved not only as a civil-political right but also as part of the cultural and spiritual identity inherent in every individual (Bielefeldt, Ghanea, & Wiener, 2016). This freedom includes the right to adopt, change, express, and practice religion or belief privately and publicly (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). In many cases, religious minorities experience not only legal restrictions but also social violence and state neglect. This shows the importance of viewing religious freedom as a key indicator of human security. Religious freedom theory provides an ethical and legal foundation for developing vulnerability measurement tools.

In the practice of minority protection, multiculturalism and Kymlicka's (1995) minority rights theory offer important perspectives. He emphasizes that minority groups require special protection to maintain their cultural and religious identity within majority societies. This view aligns with UNDP's (2025) emphasis that "localized strategies that address underlying inequalities are essential," especially for "women, youth, and marginalized communities" (UNDP, 2025). Modood and Sealy (2021) argue for "multiculturalised secularism"—a framework that recognizes the public good dimension of religion and supports the accommodation of religious diversity through institutional recognition rather than exclusion. They contend that European moderate secularism must be "thickened" to include minority faith communities, a process they term "equalising upward" rather than "equalising down" through the removal of religious symbols and institutions. The report also notes that "Africa's greatest asset is its young people," which aligns with the argument that empowering minority communities—including their youth - is key to long-term resilience (UNDP, 2025). Multiculturalism views difference not as a threat but as a richness that must be institutionally protected. In this context, recognition and political representation of religious minorities become part of the strategy for strengthening human security (Bhargava, 2013). However, as shown by studies on structural discrimination, legal recognition without structural and social transformation tends to result in mere symbolic recognition (Hidayat, 2026). This theory helps avoid assimilationist approaches that could actually reinforce vulnerability.

To assess real field conditions, it is important to use human security indicators as formulated by Alkire (2003) and used by various international institutions. UNDP (2025) identifies seven main dimensions of human security—economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security—which can be directly linked to the challenges faced by religious minorities (UNDP, 2025). These indicators include physical protection, civil rights, access to public services, and participation in decision-making. Petri (2021) developed the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) which measures the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life and in relation to their types of religious behavior, rather than merely applying predetermined questionnaires. In the context of religious minorities, these indicators can be customized to measure experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and symbolic and structural violence. Tanyas (2024) shows that the discrimination experiences of religious minority youth in Turkey include social exclusion,

increased vulnerability to injury, and pressure to conform to majority members. The integration of theory and indicators enables the formulation of a vulnerability assessment tool that is data-based while rooted in human rights values. This is the strength of a transdisciplinary and applicative theoretical approach.

This research is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates human security, human rights, vulnerability theory, intersectionality, and multiculturalism approaches. Each theory contributes to mapping different dimensions of religious minority vulnerability—from structural, legal, and social experience aspects. The combination of these theories provides analytical depth and a strong conceptual foundation for developing a holistic assessment tool. UNDP (2025) affirms that "governance, development, and security must be understood not as separate tracks but as mutually reinforcing pillars of resilience" (UNDP, 2025)—a view that directly reinforces the argument that religious freedom protection cannot be separated from efforts to create comprehensive human security. Thus, this theoretical framework forms both normative and operational foundations for this research.

3.2. Human Security Approach in Vulnerability Assessment

The human security approach emphasizes the protection of individual dignity and well-being, not just state security (UNDP, 1994). The UNDP (2025) report expands this framework by emphasizing that human security "is not an abstract ideal, but a practical framework for building resilience, empowering citizens, and investing in inclusive, sustainable development" (UNDP, 2025). In the context of religious freedom, this approach is relevant for assessing the vulnerability of minority groups to violence, discrimination, and social exclusion (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Human security encompasses seven main dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security (Gasper, 2006). UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "when pursued together, through systems thinking and evidence-based decision-making, they have the potential to deliver transformative outcomes" (UNDP, 2025). Petri (2021) emphasizes that RM-VAT covers the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life and in relation to their types of religious behavior. Each dimension can be directly linked to the challenges faced by religious minorities, such as access to public services, political rights, and physical safety guarantees. Therefore, this approach opens space for a more comprehensive assessment of systemic risks.

The community security dimension is very important in this context because religious minorities often live in high social tension (Owen, 2004). Threats to religious communities can include mass violence, cultural exclusion, and restrictions on places of worship (Fox, 2008). UNDP (2025) notes that "conflict and fragility continue to heighten human insecurity across the continent," with the Sahel region among the most volatile globally (UNDP, 2025). In Indonesia, the forced disbandment of a Christian youth retreat in Cidahu, Sukabumi, reflects the vulnerability of minority communities to majority pressure and structural weaknesses in legal protection (Suhendri et al., 2026). Bouchier (2019) situates such incidents within the broader ideological shift from democratic cosmopolitanism to religious nationalism, where state institutions increasingly align with conservative religious forces. Community security assessment must include intergroup relations, representation in public institutions, and historical patterns of discrimination (Bhargava, 2013). This provides insight not only into incidents of violence but also the social structures that maintain exclusion. This analysis becomes the basis for building vulnerability indicators that are local and historical.

Furthermore, the personal security dimension refers to protection from physical violence, threats, and terror against individuals (Alkire, 2003). For religious minorities, this includes risks of attacks, state persecution, and neglect by law enforcement. Empirical data show that many violations of religious freedom are violent and carried out systematically or socially justified (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). Tanyas (2024) found that experiences of religious discrimination among youth in Turkey are characterized by exclusion and increased vulnerability to injury. Therefore, assessment tools must be able to detect forms of symbolic and structural violence, not just direct violence. The human security framework accommodates these dimensions analytically and practically.

Political security encompasses the right to participate in political processes, freedom of expression, and protection from state repression (Donnelly, 2013). In many cases, religious minority groups are not only excluded from political processes but also targeted by discriminatory policies (Fox & Sandler, 2005). In Europe, Saiya and Manchanda (2026) show that countries with discriminatory secularism create inequality in the treatment of religious groups, which increases the likelihood of physical violence against minorities. UNDP (2025) notes that "91% of national security councils in Africa are dominated by executive appointees, limiting inclusive oversight" (UNDP, 2025) - a finding relevant to the minimal political representation of religious minorities. Low

representation and exclusion from public spaces reinforce their institutional vulnerability. Therefore, the human security approach encourages strengthening community political capacity as part of the protection strategy (Kymlicka, 1995). Vulnerability assessment needs to consider whether public policies guarantee or restrict minority rights.

The economic security dimension cannot be ignored because religion-based discrimination often impacts access to employment, asset ownership, and other economic opportunities (Sen, 2000). UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "inequality due to religious exclusion creates cycles of vulnerability that reinforce marginalization," and that "access to economic opportunity, strengthening basic service delivery, and enabling more inclusive governance" are key to addressing the root causes of insecurity (UNDP, 2025). Research on the Sunda Wiwitan community in Indonesia shows that structural barriers to access to civil rights, education, and religious services create economic inequality that reinforces marginalization (Hidayat, 2026). Arizona and Cohen (2024) demonstrate how the Constitutional Court's recognition of customary land rights has begun to address these economic inequalities, though implementation remains limited. Economic inequality resulting from religious exclusion creates a cycle of vulnerability that reinforces marginalization (Gasper, 2006). Therefore, economic indicators such as unemployment rates, access to capital, and land ownership should be included in the assessment tool. Economic vulnerability also contributes to broader social instability, including increased intolerance. Thus, this dimension plays an important role in preventing social conflict.

Cultural and spiritual security, although not explicitly mentioned in the initial UNDP definition, has become increasingly important in the context of multiculturalism (Taylor, 1994). Religious freedom is not just about ritual expression but also includes recognition of the values and spiritual identity of groups (Bielefeldt et al., 2016). UNDP (2025) recognizes the importance of this dimension through its acknowledgment that "human security is deeply rooted in African norms, governance traditions, and institutional history," including concepts such as Ubuntu in Southern Africa ("I am because we are") and Harambee in East Africa ("pulling together") which reflect a long-standing ethos of collective dignity and communal interdependence (UNDP, 2025). Modood and Sealy (2021) argue that a "multiculturalised secularism" must recognize the public good dimension of religion and support the accommodation of minority faith communities

through institutional inclusion rather than exclusionary secularism. This approach resonates with Bhargava's (2013) concept of "contextual secularism" and "principled distance," which allows the state to support disadvantaged religions while protecting citizens' rights. When religious identity is suppressed or removed from public space, spiritual security is disrupted (An-Na'im, 2008). Tanyas (2024) notes that Alevi participants reported intense pressure to assimilate into Sunni majority practices, as well as persistent rejection of Alevi theology as a "true" belief system. This contributes to feelings of alienation and social fragmentation, which deepen vulnerability. Therefore, vulnerability assessment must include indicators of recognition and preservation of religious identity.

In developing the assessment tool, a participatory approach is very important so that minority communities are involved in formulating indicators relevant to their experiences (Chambers, 1997). UNDP (2025) explicitly calls for "inclusive governance and participatory policymaking mechanisms" including "participatory budgeting, citizen feedback platforms, and social audits" that allow communities to shape priorities, monitor implementation, and hold institutions accountable for equitable delivery (UNDP, 2025). Petri (2021) emphasizes that RM-VAT measures threats in relation to types of religious behavior, rather than merely applying predetermined questionnaires, thus allowing adjustment to local contexts. This aligns with the spirit of human security that places individuals as subjects, not objects of protection (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). Participation not only increases data validity but also empowers communities to understand and address their own vulnerabilities (Narayan et al., 2000). This process also encourages accountability from public institutions. In the context of religious minorities, participation means recognition of voices that have long been marginalized.

Finally, the human security approach in vulnerability assessment must be synergized with transitional justice principles and minority protection in international law (Oberoi, 1995; OHCHR, 2013). This includes recognition of past violations, guarantees of non-repetition, and restoration of minority community rights. UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "building long-term resilience" requires not only infrastructure restoration but also "strengthening institutions, livelihoods, and the social contract over time" (UNDP, 2025). As shown by studies on state recognition of local belief communities (Hidayat, 2026), legal recognition without structural transformation tends to result in mere symbolic recognition. Arizona and Cohen (2024) similarly show that while

Constitutional Court decisions have been significant, implementation remains limited by bureaucratic resistance. This synergy ensures that assessment is not merely technocratic but also ethical and transformative (Teitel, 2000). Thus, the human security approach becomes not only an analytical framework but also an action framework for justice and protection. This strengthens the research objective of producing a vulnerability assessment tool that is relevant, fair, and applicable.

3.3. Implementation Cases: Empirical Evidence from Diverse Contexts

The theoretical framework developed above finds empirical grounding in several distinct contexts, each illustrating different dimensions of religious minority vulnerability.

3.3.1. The Indonesian Case: Structural Discrimination and the Politics of Recognition

In Indonesia, the Sunda Wiwitan indigenous belief community exemplifies how state recognition operates as a mechanism of both inclusion and exclusion. Hidayat (2026) demonstrates that despite the 2017 Constitutional Court decision (Case No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016) permitting indigenous belief adherents to include their beliefs on national identity cards, discrimination persists through bureaucratic resistance, social stigma, and institutionalized religious hierarchy. Members of the Sunda Wiwitan community continue to face administrative barriers in obtaining identity cards, marriage certificates, and accessing public services because the state's official religion paradigm privileges six recognized religions while marginalizing indigenous belief systems. This "politics of differentiation," as Hidayat terms it, positions indigenous belief adherents as "second-class citizens" whose rights remain conditional on conformity to dominant norms.

Arizona and Cohen (2024) provide complementary evidence through their analysis of Constitutional Court rulings on customary land rights. In Decision Number 35/PUU-X/2012, the Court separated customary forests from state forests, recognizing indigenous land rights that had been denied since the colonial era. This decision, inspired by international environmental law and the UNDRIP, altered the concept of colonial law inherent in national forestry law. However, as of 2022, the Minister of Environment and Forestry had only designated 148,488 hectares of customary forests for 105 indigenous

communities, far below the 26 million hectares of indigenous territories recorded by civil society organizations. This gap between judicial recognition and administrative implementation illustrates the persistent structural barriers facing indigenous communities.

Bourchier (2019) contextualizes these struggles within Indonesia's broader ideological shift from democratic cosmopolitanism to religious nationalism. The 2010 Constitutional Court decision upholding the Blasphemy Law, the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election where the incumbent governor was charged with blasphemy and sentenced to prison, and the increasing alignment between conservative nationalist and Islamist forces have created an environment where pluralism and minority rights are increasingly constrained. This ideological shift has direct implications for religious minorities, as the state increasingly assumes the role of arbiter of religious orthodoxy.

3.3.2. The Turkish Case: Youth Experiences of Religious Discrimination

Tanyas (2024) provides empirical evidence from Turkey, examining the experiences of Jewish, Christian, and Alevi youth. The study found that participants experienced social exclusion, increased vulnerability to injury, and pressure to assimilate into Sunni majority practices. Alevi participants particularly noted persistent rejection of their theology as a "true" belief system. These findings illustrate how vulnerability operates at both the individual and community levels, shaped by religious identity that intersects with ethnic and political dimensions. The "continuous minor forms of harassment" and "cultivated mistrust" that Tanyas documents demonstrate the importance of capturing subjective experiences of discrimination that are often overlooked by quantitative datasets focusing on legal restrictions.

3.3.3. The European Case: Discriminatory Secularism and Violence

Saiya and Manchanda (2026) offer a cross-national analysis of European states between 2003 and 2017, demonstrating that higher levels of discriminatory secularism—state restrictions on minority religious practices justified on secularist principles such as women's rights, children's rights, and animal rights—are strongly associated with increased violence against religious minorities. Their analysis shows that restrictions on public wearing of religious dress, ritual animal slaughter, and infant male circumcision create an uneven religious playing field that fosters a culture of hostility. The incidence

rate ratios indicate that each additional unit of discriminatory secularism is associated with over 60% increases in anti-minority violence. This challenges the conventional assumption that secularism promotes tolerance, revealing how secularist principles can be weaponized to legitimize discrimination and violence.

Modood and Sealy (2021) provide the theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics, arguing that European moderate secularism must be "multiculturalised" to accommodate religious diversity. They distinguish between liberal accommodationist approaches (such as Taylor's "open secularism" and Laborde's "minimal secularism") and more robust pro-diversity approaches (such as Stepan's "positive accommodation," Bhargava's "contextual secularism," and Mahajan's "deep diversity"). Modood and Sealy argue that multiculturalised secularism recognizes the public good dimension of religion, supports institutional connections between state and religious organizations, and seeks to "equalise upward" through the inclusion of minority faith communities rather than "equalise down" through the removal of religious symbols and institutions.

4. Discussion

4.1. Proposed Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Religious Minorities

Efforts to protect religious minorities require a systematic, contextual, and human rights-based assessment tool (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). This assessment tool needs to be developed to detect vulnerability indicators across the seven dimensions of human security, as outlined by UNDP (1994). The UNDP (2025) report reinforces this urgency by stating that "tools must evolve alongside risks" and that "Africa needs dynamic, forward-looking instruments—like the proposed human security policy tool—that support foresight, risk analysis, and evidence-based decision-making" (UNDP, 2025). Petri (2021) developed the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) which covers the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life and in relation to their types of religious behavior. In general, this tool must be participatory and capable of capturing the direct experiences of minority communities (Chambers, 1997). UNDP (2025) recommends that assessment tools be "built on existing national data platforms and planning processes" and "tailored to the priorities and operating environments of African countries" (UNDP, 2025). Evaluation should involve quantitative and qualitative indicators to comprehensively describe the situation

(Narayan et al., 2000). The aim is to provide data that can be used by policymakers, NGOs, and local communities in preventing and addressing religious persecution.

First, personal security indicators include incidents of violence against individuals or groups based on religious identity. This includes physical attacks, threats, property destruction, and forced evictions (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). Tanyas (2024) found that experiences of discrimination among religious minority youth in Turkey are characterized by social exclusion and increased vulnerability to injury, indicating that personal security is a critical dimension of vulnerability. This data can be collected from police reports, media, and victim testimonies (Fox, 2008). Indicators also need to capture the existence of impunity, for example when perpetrators are not legally prosecuted (Bielefeldt, Ghanea, & Wiener, 2016). Personal security is the most direct barometer of minority existence in social space.

Second, community security indicators should measure intergroup relations, access to places of worship, and social participation (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Discrimination against religious symbols, restrictions on community activities, and erasure of cultural heritage are important indicators (Bhargava, 2013). The case of the forced disbandment of the Christian youth retreat in Cidahu, Indonesia, shows how majority pressure and structural weaknesses in legal protection can threaten the security of minority communities (Suhendri et al., 2026). UNDP (2025) emphasizes the importance of "interministerial coordination mechanisms and joint planning frameworks" to address cross-sectoral risks like this (UNDP, 2025). Strained social relations increase the likelihood of escalation of religion-based conflict (Fox & Sandler, 2005). Therefore, this approach also needs to consider the role of local actors such as religious leaders and civil society organizations (An-Na'im, 2008). Community resilience is a vital element in long-term risk mitigation.

Third, political security indicators include minority group representation in decision-making processes, both formal and informal (Donnelly, 2013). Access to voting rights, public office, and complaint mechanisms are benchmarks for political participation (OHCHR, 2013). In many countries, religious minorities lack adequate representation channels, which worsens marginalization (Kymlicka, 1995). Saiya and Manchanda (2026) show that in Europe, discriminatory secularism creates structural inequality in the treatment of religious groups, which reinforces the political exclusion of minorities. UNDP (2025) notes that "91% of national security councils in Africa are

dominated by executive appointees," limiting "inclusive oversight" (UNDP, 2025)—a structural challenge also faced by religious minorities in accessing political representation. Assessment tools need to identify structural and cultural barriers to such participation (Gasper, 2006). Thus, political rights become an important indicator in realizing justice and equality.

Fourth, in the economic security aspect, indicators used include access to employment, household income, and discriminatory treatment in the workplace (Sen, 2000). Religious minorities often face barriers in both informal and formal economies (Oberoi, 1995). UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "access to economic opportunity, strengthening basic service delivery, and more inclusive governance" are key to addressing the root causes of insecurity and that "economic inequality due to religious exclusion creates cycles of vulnerability" (UNDP, 2025). Research on the Sunda Wiwitan community in Indonesia shows that structural barriers to access to civil rights, education, and religious services create economic inequality that reinforces marginalization (Hidayat, 2026). Discrimination in business licensing, access to capital, and land ownership should also be analyzed (Fox, 2008). Arizona and Cohen (2024) demonstrate that the Constitutional Court's decisions on customary forests have begun to address these economic inequalities, though implementation remains limited by bureaucratic and political resistance. This inequality not only causes economic loss but also reinforces community dependence and powerlessness (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). Economic data should be combined with social analysis to obtain a complete picture.

Fifth, cultural and spiritual security indicators are very important for measuring recognition and preservation of religious identity (Taylor, 1994). Elimination of religious practices, prohibition of symbols, and cultural repression should be key indicators (Bielefeldt et al., 2016). Tanyas (2024) notes that Alevi participants reported persistent rejection of Alevi theology as a "true" belief system, reflecting a threat to cultural and spiritual security. UNDP (2025) recognizes the importance of this dimension through its acknowledgment of Ubuntu and Harambee philosophies as foundations of human security in Africa (UNDP, 2025). Modood and Sealy (2021) argue that multiculturalised secularism provides a framework for recognizing and accommodating such cultural and spiritual dimensions through institutional inclusion rather than exclusion. Spiritual security is closely related to a sense of belonging and integration into the broader society (An-Na'im, 2008). In this context, the state's role as protector and facilitator of religious

freedom must be critically examined (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). The existence of affirmative policies or special protections can increase cultural security scores.

Sixth, for the environmental security dimension, assessment focuses on whether minority communities have access to a safe and decent environment (Owen, 2004). UNDP (2025) notes that "Africa is facing an intensifying wave of climate-related disasters—from droughts to floods, cyclones, wildfires, and extreme heat events" that "exacerbate poverty, displace populations, degrade ecosystems, and undermine hard-won development gains" (UNDP, 2025). This includes risks of eviction from ancestral lands, restrictions on the construction of places of worship, and environmental pollution due to unjust policies. Arizona and Cohen (2024) demonstrate how the colonial forestry legal regime continues to affect indigenous communities' access to land and resources, with the Indonesian Constitutional Court's 2013 decision marking a significant step toward decolonizing these laws. However, implementation remains limited, with only 148,488 hectares of customary forests designated out of 26 million hectares claimed. Forced displacement or refuge due to religious persecution is also part of the assessment. In many cases, religious conflict and resource conflict overlap (Narayan et al., 2000). Therefore, assessment must involve a cross-sectoral approach.

Seventh, health security indicators assess whether minority communities receive equal health services, especially in emergencies (Alkire, 2003). UNDP (2025) notes that "Africa has faced a series of public health emergencies over the past two decades—from Ebola and Zika to the COVID-19 pandemic—that have exposed deep vulnerabilities in health systems" (UNDP, 2025). Discrimination in health services or lack of facilities in minority areas are important indicators (UNDP, 1994). Data should include access to vaccines, maternal and child services, and infectious disease management (Gasper, 2006). Health is a basic right that directly impacts community dignity and productivity (Donnelly, 2013). Health inequality often escapes attention because it is not explicitly visible as a religious issue.

Eighth, the assessment tool must be designed flexibly and locally, based on participatory and context-sensitive principles (Chambers, 1997). Petri (2021) emphasizes that RM-VAT measures threats in relation to types of religious behavior, rather than merely applying predetermined questionnaires. UNDP (2025) emphasizes that the proposed policy tool "would help policymakers test policy pathways across integrated risk domains, visualize trade-offs and synergies among proposed reforms,

prioritize interventions based on risk clusters, and track early-warning signs" (UNDP, 2025). Quantitative models such as vulnerability indices can be combined with narrative and ethnographic studies (Narayan et al., 2000). Each indicator should have a measurement scale adjustable to region and time (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). Indicator validation is conducted with communities and local actors to ensure relevance and sustainability (UNDP, 1994). Thus, this tool can be used longitudinally and comparatively across various regions.

Ninth, the development of this assessment tool should consider synergy with international instruments such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the International Religious Freedom Report. Kloczek and Petri (2023) emphasize the importance of measuring subnational variations in FoRB violations, which are often overlooked by nationally scaled instruments. UNDP (2025) recommends "investment in interoperable data systems, foresight and scenario planning capacities, and integrated risk assessments that inform national development strategies and peacebuilding efforts" (UNDP, 2025). Integration of local and global data will strengthen advocacy and policy interventions (OHCHR, 2013). Furthermore, collaboration with academic institutions, civil society, and religious institutions is needed to expand the scope and accuracy of assessment (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). The human security framework makes vulnerability a cross-sectoral issue, not just a religious issue (Gasper, 2006). With this tool, efforts to protect religious minorities can be enhanced systemically and sustainably.

4.2. Challenges and Policy Implications

One of the main challenges in protecting religious freedom for minorities is institutional resistance from the state, which often prioritizes national stability over civil rights (Fox, 2008). Countries with dominant ideologies or legal systems biased toward the majority religion tend to ignore minority claims (An-Na'im, 2008). Saiya and Manchanda (2026) show that discrimination against religious minorities in Europe is often justified on the basis of secularist principles rather than religious ideology, creating a more subtle and difficult-to-challenge form of discrimination. UNDP (2025) notes that "over 70% of African countries still operate under security legislation inherited from colonial systems," which "emphasize regime protection over public accountability" (UNDP, 2025)—an institutional challenge also faced by many countries outside Africa in protecting religious minority rights. Bouchier (2019) demonstrates how in Indonesia,

the ideological shift from democratic cosmopolitanism to religious nationalism has institutionalized discrimination against minorities through the Constitutional Court's validation of the Blasphemy Law and the increasing alignment between conservative nationalist and Islamist forces. When government policies reflect bias toward a particular religion, the vulnerability of minority groups increases structurally (Bielefeldt, Ghanea, & Wiener, 2016). Policies such as restrictions on the establishment of places of worship or prohibition of religious attributes reflect institutional discrimination (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). This demands legal reform grounded in non-discrimination principles and constitutional protection.

Another challenge is the weak capacity of law enforcement officials in responding to incidents of religion-based violence or discrimination (UNDP, 1994). Many reports show that police and local officials are not neutral or even participate in social exclusion practices. UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "dependence on external support" and "lack of domestic investment" in security and governance institutions have limited state capacity to respond effectively (UNDP, 2025). In Indonesia, the Cidahu case shows how structural weaknesses in legal protection—including legal ambiguity, convoluted bureaucracy, majority pressure, and digital amplification—worsen the vulnerability of religious minorities (Suhendri et al., 2026). This incapacity results in impunity and reinforces fear within minority communities (Fox & Sandler, 2005). Therefore, capacity building and human rights-based training are urgent needs (OHCHR, 2013). UNDP (2025) recommends "strengthening national and regional capabilities for risk anticipation and early warning" and "investment in implementation capacity, particularly at the local level" (UNDP, 2025). Officials must be empowered to understand religious freedom issues as part of human security protection.

The third challenge is the lack of accurate and comprehensive data on the condition of religious minorities in various regions (Narayan et al., 2000). Available data are often general and not sensitive to local contexts (Chambers, 1997). Kloczek and Petri (2023) emphasize that although cross-national ForB measurement instruments have provided important insights, they often overlook subnational variations that are crucial for understanding vulnerability dynamics more accurately. UNDP (2025) calls for "investment in interoperable data systems, foresight and scenario planning capacities, and integrated risk assessments" as well as "development of participatory and decentralized monitoring systems" (UNDP, 2025). The absence of data makes policy

formulation not evidence-based and vulnerable to bias (Gomez & Gasper, 2013). Therefore, it is important to build participatory and decentralized monitoring systems (UNDP, 1994). Collaboration between government, research institutions, and civil society is crucial in this regard.

Furthermore, the plurality of religious understandings within society also poses its own challenges in formulating inclusive policies (Taylor, 1994). When conservative understandings dominate public space, minority voices are often delegitimized (Bhargava, 2013). Tanyas (2024) found that Alevi youth in Turkey face persistent rejection of their theology as a "true" belief system, reflecting how the dominance of majority religious understanding can delegitimize minority identities. UNDP (2025) emphasizes the importance of "public education on tolerance and diversity" and "interfaith dialogue" as part of the human security strategy, noting that "values such as Ubuntu and Harambee" can serve as foundations for social cohesion (UNDP, 2025). Modood and Sealy (2021) argue that "multiculturalised secularism" requires not only legal reform but also a remaking of national citizenship so that all can enjoy a sense of belonging. This encourages the importance of public education on tolerance and diversity as part of the human security strategy (Donnelly, 2013). Interfaith education and interreligious dialogue must be systematically facilitated (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). This strategy functions not only as conflict prevention but also as an effort to build social cohesion.

From the policy implications side, the human security approach demands multidimensional reform in legislative, educational, and development frameworks (Gasper, 2006). Governments need to align sectoral policies so that responses to minority vulnerability are integrative and sustainable (Alkire, 2003). UNDP (2025) recommends "strengthening national and regional capabilities for risk anticipation and early warning," "embedding human security in policy and budget cycles," and "developing and piloting a dynamic policy tool to support scenario planning and anticipatory governance" (UNDP, 2025). For example, social protection programs should include religion-based vulnerability indicators (Sen, 2000). UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "mainstreaming minority rights into development policy is a concrete form of the human security approach." The report also notes that "countries that prioritize human development, gender equality, and social cohesion tend to experience greater stability and long-term growth" (UNDP, 2025). Hiariej and Stokke (2022) demonstrate how citizenship in

Indonesia is shaped by competing interpretations of religious legitimacy, generating unequal access to rights and recognition across communities. Responsive policies will strengthen community trust in the state.

Finally, for the success of policies favorable to religious minorities, partnerships between the state and non-state actors such as religious institutions, NGOs, and local communities are needed (An-Na'im, 2008). Petri (2021) emphasizes that RM-VAT can be a valuable instrument for assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities in ways and at levels not previously observed, and for supporting the building of resilience within these groups. UNDP (2025) explicitly calls for "partnerships between the state and non-state actors such as religious institutions, NGOs, and local communities" and emphasizes that "their involvement will strengthen policy legitimacy and ensure implementation at the grassroots level" (UNDP, 2025). Their involvement will strengthen policy legitimacy and ensure implementation at the grassroots level (Marshall, Shea, & Hill, 2008). This participation also enables policies to be adaptive and contextual to local dynamics (Chambers, 1997). UNDP (2025) affirms that "human security must be locally-informed, nationally-led and regionally-anchored" and that "development partners should align with African-defined priorities and act as allies in a shared agenda for inclusive, long-term transformation" (UNDP, 2025). Thus, the human security strategy in religious freedom is not mere rhetoric but becomes a concrete instrument of protection (Bielefeldt et al., 2016). Only with a collaborative and justice-oriented approach can these challenges be effectively addressed.

5. Conclusion

The human security approach offers a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding and responding to the vulnerability of religious minorities in the context of religious freedom. By placing individuals as the main subjects of protection, this approach transcends the traditional limitations of state security that tend to ignore the rights of vulnerable groups. The UNDP (2025) report affirms that "human security is not a rhetorical ideal but a practical, solution-oriented approach for navigating today's turbulent times and fostering a more peaceful and prosperous future" (UNDP, 2025). The development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT) by Petri (2021) shows that this approach can be systematically operationalized to measure the human security threats faced by religious minorities across various domains of life. This

study shows that the vulnerability of religious minorities is multidimensional, encompassing political, social, economic, and cultural aspects. Empirical findings from various contexts—including discrimination against religious minority youth in Turkey (Tanyas, 2024), discriminatory secularism in Europe (Saiya & Manchanda, 2026), and structural discrimination against local belief communities in Indonesia (Hidayat, 2026)—reinforce the argument that the human security approach is needed to capture the complexity of vulnerability not visible through normative legal instruments. Arizona and Cohen (2024) demonstrate how judicial recognition can begin to address these vulnerabilities, though implementation remains limited. UNDP (2025) emphasizes that "governance, development, and security must be understood not as separate tracks but as mutually reinforcing pillars of resilience" (UNDP, 2025). Therefore, response strategies must be holistic and intersectional. Modood and Sealy (2021) argue for "multiculturalised secularism" as a framework that recognizes the public good dimension of religion and supports the accommodation of religious diversity through institutional inclusion. The human security approach can serve as a strong ethical and policy foundation for driving reform and inclusivity.

The proposed vulnerability assessment tool based on human security principles can help governments and civil society design more targeted interventions. RM-VAT represents a valuable instrument for assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities in ways and at levels not previously observed, and for supporting the building of resilience within these groups and increasing awareness of their situation worldwide. In line with this, UNDP (2025) proposes the development of a Human Security Policy Tool—a web-based platform that "would help policymakers test policy pathways across integrated risk domains, visualize trade-offs and synergies, prioritize interventions based on risk clusters, and track early-warning signs" (UNDP, 2025). This tool enables systematic identification of risk factors and formulation of evidence-based policy priorities. Although there are various challenges, especially from political, institutional, and cultural perspectives, this approach remains promising in promoting fair protection of religious minorities. As emphasized by Kloczek and Petri (2023), more accurate measurement of subnational variations in FoRB violations is essential for designing more effective interventions. UNDP (2025) affirms that "with bold leadership, aligned action, and the right tools, human security can provide a framework to support African policymakers in reframing the conversation around an integrated approach to peace, security, and

development toward greater dignity, resilience, and shared prosperity for all Africans" (UNDP, 2025). Multi-stakeholder involvement is key to the successful implementation of this tool in complex local contexts. Ultimately, the guarantee of religious freedom is not only an indicator of democracy but also a reflection of the successful protection of comprehensive human security.

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