



**RECOV-19: The Changing Role of Religion in Societies Emerging from Covid-19 (2022-2025)**

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<p><b>Research Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has religion and its role changed during the pandemic in our global north case study contexts? If so, how?</li> <li>2. What are the key similarities and differences across these contexts and what factors have contributed to change in particular directions in different settings?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Core Research Areas:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discourses around health, illness and science</li> <li>2. Relationships with governments and policymakers</li> <li>3. Digital innovations</li> </ol>
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The research focus was on global north contexts which can be characterised as secularising, which means that there are simultaneous signs of decline, persistence and trans-formation. Here are the religious groups studied:

	Canada	Germany	Ireland/Northern Ireland	Poland
<b>Religion I</b>	Catholic Church (29.9%)	Catholic Church (24,8%)	Catholic Church (69%/42%)	Catholic Church (90%)
<b>Religion II</b>	Protestant Churches (13%)	Protestant Church (22,6%)	Protestant Churches (4%/37%)	-
<b>Religion III</b>	Islam (4.9%)	Denominational Muslims (3,7%)	Islam (<2%/<1%)	Orthodox (0,5%)
<b>Religion IV/Philosophy</b>	(Chassidic) Judaism (0.9%)	Anthroposophical Society (no official numbers)	Humanism (no official numbers)	Jehovah’s Witnesses (0,36%)

**Some Key Findings around Core Research Areas and Secularization hypothesis**

**1. Discourses around health, illness and science**

Across contexts, Christian institutions used secular and scientific justifications alongside moral and theological ones to signal their support for public health measures, notably around discourses related to vaccination, where the Catholic Church might have been expected to voice objections due to the use of foetal cells in vaccine development. Rather, institutional voices conceived of health as a common good, offering almost unqualified support and advocacy for vaccination. This signals secularization in that Christian groups, once socially and politically influential, have re-positioned themselves as still-important societal actors that are rational and reasonable (Ganiel 2026)

**2. Relationships with governments and policymakers**

Secularization trends: religious media report a decline in membership and social influence. The first two indicators of secularization—privatization of religion and the decline of practices—seem observable in the countries studied, especially among the majority religions. As for the third indicator—separation between



religion and state—the situation is more complex. Canada and the Island of Ireland exhibit a more advanced separation, as the groups studied had to rely on interreligious bodies. The other two European countries exhibit paradoxes, maintaining constitutional ties in education and health while experiencing social secularization through critiques and declining practices (Lefebvre 2026).

### 3. Digital innovations

Religious groups displayed often ambivalent attitudes towards digital innovations in religious practices. Organizations that opposed or expressed disappointment with pandemic restrictions (ex, Polish Orthodox Church & Catholic Church across contexts) were less enthusiastic about digital media integration, while those accepting restrictions more readily (ex. Jehovah's Witnesses in Poland and Protestant churches across contexts) were more likely to embrace and utilize a wider variety of digital practices. Some religious leaders, especially Catholics, reported that digitalization was hastening secularization and therefore reduced their digital offerings once restrictions were lifted (Kołodziejka 2026).

#### => Cross-areas trends

Christian groups reacted to the crisis by attempting to adapt their language to a) a society that is perceived as secular by focusing on ethics instead of religion and b) by subordinating themselves to the dominant social systems during the coronavirus pandemic, thus secularizing themselves. Differences across contexts: low degree of religious communication by institutional churches in Germany, but high degree in Canada and Poland. In the religious media, Germany and the island of Ireland are similar. The smaller groups showed a higher degree of religious rather than ethical communication (Radde-Antweiler 2026).

### Main Outputs/Data Sets

- Qualitative analysis of *religious organisations' public documents* (MAXQDA) – 1,718 documents (Canada: 333, Germany: 583, Ireland/NI: 185, Poland: 217)
- Qualitative analysis (MAXQDA) and text-mining of *religious media* (800 articles, 200 each context)
- Text-mining of *secular media* – 10,331 articles (Canada 3135, Germany 5980, Ireland/NI 722, Poland 494).
- Online questionnaire of *religious leaders* (1,333 total responses)
- Online questionnaire of *religious members* (1,411 total responses)
- Interviews of leaders and members (80 in each context = 320 total)

### Main Outputs/Scientific Outcomes

- *Proposal for a special issue* of a journal has been accepted; 8 articles currently under review.
- *Three articles so far*: Kołodziejka, M.; Mandes, S. and Rabiej-Sienicka, K. (2024): Cultural and Theological Influences on Religious Engagement with Digital Media during COVID-19: A Comparative Study of Churches in Poland and Ireland. *Religions* 15, 354; Ganiel, G. and Ní Dhónaill, C. (2024): Religion on the island of Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic: piety in the public sphere? *Religion State Society*, 1-21; Ganiel, G. (2025): Ireland Is Post-Catholic, But Religion Still Matters. *Current History* 124 (860), 89-94.
- *Open access dissemination*: 5 research reports, [here](#).
- *Final colloquium* in Canada with partners and key players on YouTube, [here](#).
- 17 conference presentations, 6 public engagement events, 2 events for early career researchers, and 9 policy reports (which will be disseminated by the end of the project).
- Comprehensive methodological document, to be published online alongside forthcoming journal special issue (Radde-Antweiler, Lefebvre and Ganiels 2026).
- Creation of an international 'Religion and Covid-19 network' (Facebook, listserv) at the European Association for the Study of Religions Conference in Vilnius, 2023. This group was launched with a multi-project panel at the conference.