



# The Global Faith and Media Study

A Groundbreaking Study of Attitudes and Perceptions  
Regarding Faith and Religion in the Media



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# The Inaugural Global Faith and Media Index

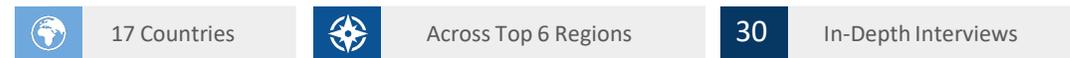
The first and largest study of its kind about the portrayal of faith and religion in the news media as seen by newsroom decision-makers and the general population, covering 18+ countries and major religions around the globe.



A partnership between The Radiant Foundation and HarrisX to create the world's most comprehensive research on faith, religion, and the media.



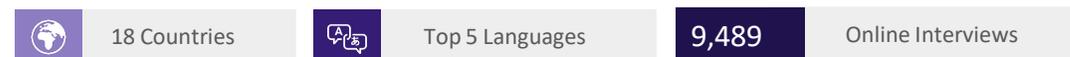
Part One of the Global Faith and Media Index study consisted of 30+ in-depth interviews with English-speaking journalists who are geographically distributed across 6 continents and write in English and/or local languages.



UK, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, Turkey, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia, Pakistan, The Philippines, India, USA, Albania

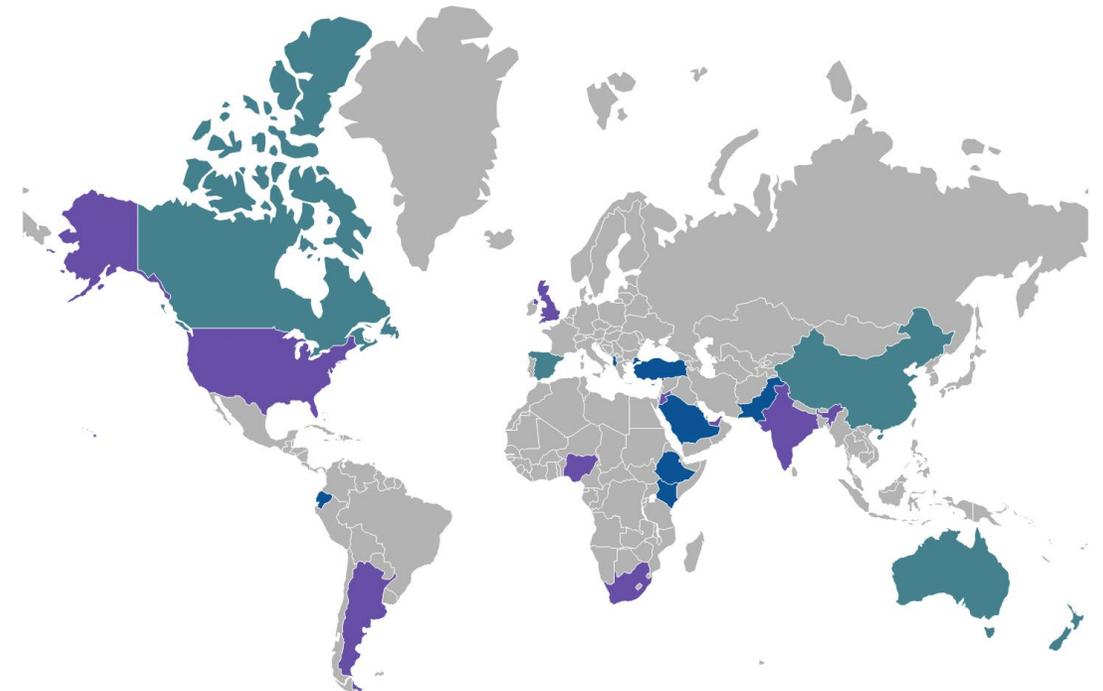


Part Two of the Index study was conducted between August 26-September 9, 2022 among 9,489 adults in 18 countries across six continents via online surveys and covers the world's major religions with translations and localizations in English, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, French and Arabic. The study included minimum benchmarks for religious and non-religious individuals to reflect the general population of each country. The results were weighted for age, gender, race, language, and religion where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population of each country. The sampling margin of error of this global poll is plus or minus 1.0 percentage points.



US, UK, Canada, Nigeria, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Spain, Argentina, Mexico, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, France, Egypt, UAE, India

English, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, French, Arabic



-  IDI's conducted
-  General Population
-  IDI & Survey conducted

# Global Faith and Media Index Methodology

9,489  
ONLINE INTERVIEWS

GENDER BREAKDOWN

Male	51%
Female	49%

AGE BREAKDOWN

18-24	10%
25-34	23%
35-44	21%
45-54	16%
55-64	13%
65+	18%

  
18  
COUNTRIES

RELIGION BREAKDOWN

	<i>n-size</i>	<i>MoE</i>
Christian	4,066	±1.5 pts
Muslim	1,198	±2.8 pts
Hindu	649	±3.8 pts
Buddhist	437	±4.7 pts
Jewish	150	±8.0 pts
Other religion	350	±5.2 pts
Atheist	367	±5.1 pts
Agnostic	285	±5.8 pts

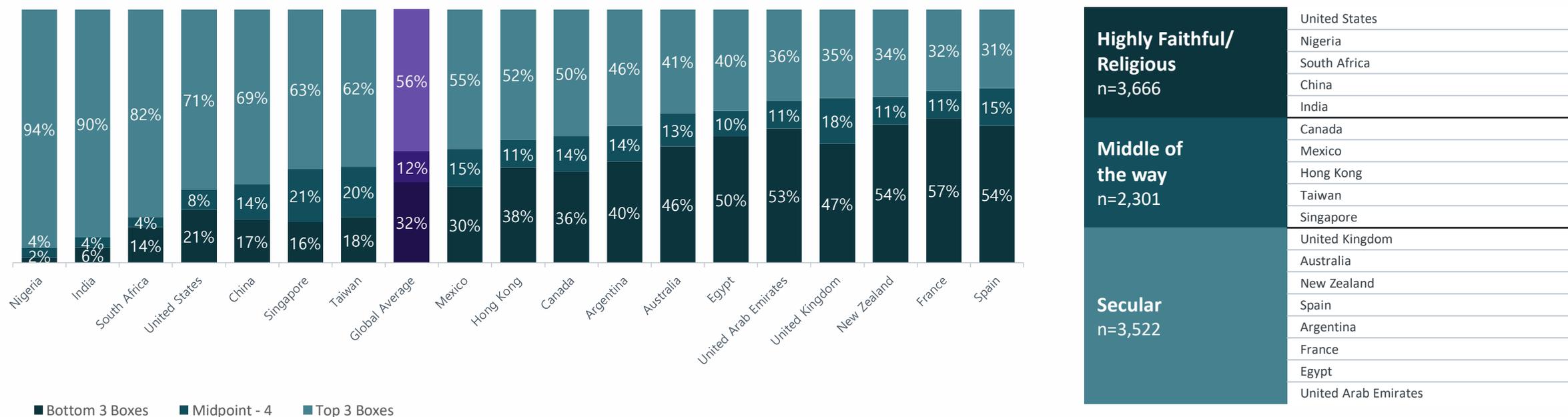
  
ACROSS  
TOP 5 LANGUAGES

	<i>n-size</i>	<i>MoE</i>
GLOBAL	9,489	±1.0 pts
US	1,560	±2.5 pts
CANADA	1,030	±3.0 pts
UK	503	±4.4 pts
NIGERIA	257	±6.1 pts
SOUTH AFRICA	252	±6.1 pts
AUSTRALIA	250	±6.2 pts
NEW ZEALAND	252	±6.1 pts
SPAIN	506	±4.4 pts
ARGENTINA	504	±4.4 pts
MEXICO	511	±4.3 pts
CHINA	842	±3.4 pts
HONG KONG	254	±6.1 pts
TAIWAN	250	±6.2 pts
SINGAPORE	256	±6.1 pts
FRANCE	503	±4.4 pts
EGYPT	501	±4.4 pts
UAE	503	±4.4 pts
INDIA	755	±3.6 pts
HIGHLY FAITHFUL/ RELIGIOUS	3,666	±1.6 pts
MIDDLE OF THE WAY	2,301	±2.0 pts
SECULAR	3,522	±1.7 pts

# Index looks at a range of countries from highly faithful/ religious to secular

> Created an index based on where the proportion of the population within a country consider themselves faithful, on a scale from 1 not a person of faith at all and 7 a strong person of faith

**SCALE: To what degree do you consider yourself to be a person of faith, with 1 being not a person of faith at all and 7 being a strong person of faith?**



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FRGP2: To what degree do you consider yourself to be a person of faith, with 1 being not a person of faith at all and 7 being a strong person of faith?

# Findings At-a-Glance

## STATE OF FAITH AND RELIGION AROUND THE WORLD



**82% of global respondents define themselves as religious, spiritual, or a person of faith**

- **74%** affiliated with a specific religion / denomination
- **72%** believe in God or other deities
- **35%** identified as a person of faith
- **31%** identified as generally religious
- **27%** identified as spiritual

## INSIDE THE NEWSROOMS



Journalists feel that coverage of faith & religion is poor, inconsistent, and becoming more marginalized. They express fear around 'getting right' religious coverage, particularly in largely secular newsrooms.

**Religious stories are not seen as a good fit for 'hard' news, easier to do 'soft' coverage and focus 'hard' news on times of controversy or scandal.**

## VIEWS ON COVERAGE



**There is a growing gap between the coverage of religion and the needs of the faithful** – global desire for better coverage, understanding and representation of faith in media.

- **53%** of respondents say the media actively ignores religion as an aspect of society and culture today.
- **59%** of respondents believe it's important that the news media covers a diverse set of faith and religious perspectives or content.
- **63%** of people globally said that high quality content on faith and religion is needed in their respective countries.

## WORK TO BE DONE



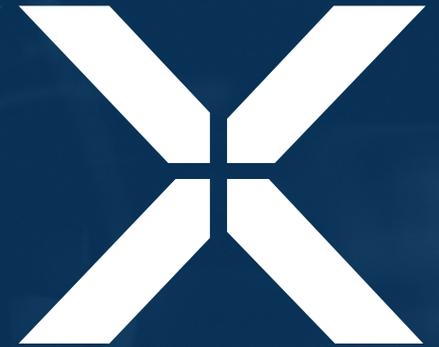
**People want faith and religious stereotypes to be addressed:**

- **61%** say media perpetuates these stereotypes rather than protects against them
- **78%** believe such stereotypes should get the same or more attention as race and gender stereotypes

**8 in 10 believe faith and religious groups must provide more relevant spokespeople:**

- **Over 85%** want more diversity and lived experiences from these representatives (among those who feel faith and media groups must do more)

# What the Media is saying



# There is universal agreement among journalists that coverage about faith & religion has become more marginalized due to a set of newsroom dynamics

## NEWSROOM ECONOMICS

Media respondents reported on **squeezed budgets** leading to a lack of specialist journalists in newsrooms. They cited a **“hollowing” out of specialisms** within the news teams leaving **generalists to cover topics** - with faith & religion included.

## FEAR OF GETTING IT WRONG

Media interviewees described a **general “fear”** in the newsroom around **covering religion**. In an era defined by some as a time when religion has become **increasingly politicized**, news coverage, often at speed, brings with it the tacit acceptance that it is **impossible to cover** the topic with a level of **nuance** and **sensitivity** given the time and resources available.

## DIVERSITY & NEWSROOM DYNAMICS

Respondents in all the regions noted that the newsroom teams **rarely represent the plurality of religious views in society**. Amongst journalists with a strong faith background, there was a feeling that they might be **negatively judged** if they covered stories relating to their beliefs out of concern it would **raise questions about their impartiality and risk damaging their reputations**.

## CLICKS FOR CONTROVERSY

Consensus that faith and religion is **not seen as a driver for reader engagement**. Editors almost never encourage stories in this area **unless they correspond to a narrative of controversy**, dissent or scandal. This runs counter to findings which suggest that 63% of people globally said that high quality content on faith and religion is needed in their respective countries.

## LACK OF SPOKESPEOPLE & STEREOTYPING

**Stereotyping** was identified by as an issue, with a **lack of diverse media sources and spokespeople** perpetuating the problem. Religion is frequently **positioned** as a **conservative or extreme force** in coverage and this framing drives the tendency to **seek out outspoken dogmatic spokespeople** over more middle-ground religious observers with mainstream views.

# Consistent themes: the newsroom environment is skewed against coverage of faith and religion

## 01

Coverage of faith and religion in media is poor and becoming more marginalized.

- Commercial realities
- ‘Hollowing out’ of specialisms

*“Religion is just peripheral to be honest. My perception is that it kind of crops up in these rather slightly kind of marginal corners of journalism” - UK*

*“In Mexico it's really focused on covering political news and covering crime...sometimes it's really selective the moments when we talk about religion” - Mexico*

*“Religiosity rarely makes it through any parts of coverage except where the correspondent has a religious background and is able to pick up some of the nuance” - UK*

## 02

There is sensitivity and even fear around religious coverage.

- Fear of getting it wrong is more pronounced as religion is increasingly politicized

*“I don't cover such stories, because you never know when you are offending someone” - Kenya*

*“Religion is so personal; I'm doing a job for public good. Why do I have to explain something about religion? I mean, reader doesn't need that. For that they can just download the Bible or Quran and read it” - Turkey*

*“My job I feel is to maintain as much harmony as possible. And make sure that perceptions are very clear...without clouding anyone's judgement, without preaching as well” - Pakistan*

## 03

Stereotyping is a feature of religious media coverage.

- Religion is often positioned primarily as a conservative or even extreme force in the media
- Ignores the more mainstream, middle-ground religious observance

*“It's usually covered as a feature of conservative politics” - United States*

*“We are unintentionally creating a stigma or a bad stereotype, particularly on our Muslim brothers and sisters in the Philippines” - Philippines*

*“It's also frequent to read a lot of things about capitalism but not from other religions that are from other countries...unless that there's like some attack or something violent related to it” - Mexico*

## 04

Journalists are explicitly and implicitly discouraged from exploring religious/faith stories.

- Secular cultures: topic is not seen as a driver of engagement
- Religious cultures: do not pursue these stories for fear of disturbing the local religious or political orthodoxy and placing themselves in danger

*“People don't talk about their faith in the newsroom. Journalists try and protect their reputations and being openly religious invites scrutiny” - UK*

*“I am religious, but I would never let that intrude on my story because its so important to be seen as impartial” - India*

# Consistent themes: religious and faith-based content is better engaged with through a human, cultural and 'lifestyle' lens

## 05

A distinction is drawn between the coverage of faith and religion as 'Hard' or 'Soft' news.

- More experienced journalists favor reporting 'Hard' news over 'Soft'
- Religion is a factor in political coverage but when done so is covered purely factually or briefly and not interrogated fully

*"When we cover religion we keep to the facts" - Saudi Arabia*

*"Religion is a part of many stories but we will **report without opinion**" - Mexico*

*"Here we consider our news to be your politics, or maybe crime. So it's like more of the most serious type of things that's going on. **Religious festivals, religious gatherings** would not be seen in the same way. If we interview a pastor speaking about families, and how modern day families need to love or be spiritually active that would **fall under soft use** probably under a wellness feature or a **lifestyle feature**, it wouldn't be considered as hard news, not at all" - South Africa*

## 06

Positive stories around faith and religion are not seen as a good fit with the 'Hard' news agenda.

- Religion only seems to enter the 'Hard' news agenda when things go wrong, or when there is dissent or scandal

*"The **religious stories** we run are **usually negative** because people need to know about double-standards" - Turkey*

*"You don't usually hear from the most popular Pastors because they like to control their own media...but **when they are corrupt** or one of their **followers breaks the law** in their name then there is a **big story**" - Nigeria*

*"The majority of religious stories we cover are **negative**. That is where the **real news around religion is seen to be**" - UK*

## 07

The most positive stories about faith and religion reside around 'Soft' news.

- References to religious stories often covered as part of a travel, culture, history or 'lifestyle' content. Coverage in this context does not carry the same risk of controversy
- The human celebration of faith, the spectacle of the spiritual - makes for impressive pictures either in TV or in print

*"Think of the Haj or the Pope's motorcade or a festival by the sacred river in India...**those make good pictures for TV**" - UK*

*"People **like to read about religious festivals** and see the colour and the **human stories**...but it would be **related to culture or travel**" - Mexico*

*"We recently ran a story about the art of Islam and focused on calligraphy...that ran in our lifestyle section" - Argentina*

# Consistent themes: the ambition to explore faith-based topics is hindered by news media's current success metrics and a lack of diversity in the newsroom

## 08

Data driven measures of news media story success encourage the short-term, the sensational and the controversial.

- The news agenda is shaped by KPIs – by sales, clicks or likes
- A constant feedback loop exists where journalists have real-time feedback concerning their output. This feeds the sense that immediate and sensational creates most interest, acting as a circuit-breaker on slow-burn topics

*“I get **feedback** every week about how my last story performed. This **sets me a target** for what I do this week” - Ecuador*

*“The **news** that creates **traction is crime and politics**...It is made clear to me from my editor that these are the paper’s priorities and they have **numbers to back them up**” - South Africa*

## 09

Cultural homogeneity of the journalist reduces the sensitivity to explore alternative realities.

- In all regions the journalists rarely represent the plurality of religious views present in society
- Becomes self-limiting in exploring a diverse faith agenda

*“**You can’t service what you don’t see.**” - United States*

*“In our team right now, we **do not have** any person who is a Muslim or **any person who is another faith**...not that we hate them, or we don't want to recruit them. But it's just because they are not people who apply for jobs” - Kenya*

*“I was asked to write a piece **because I was the only Muslim on staff**” - UK*

## 10

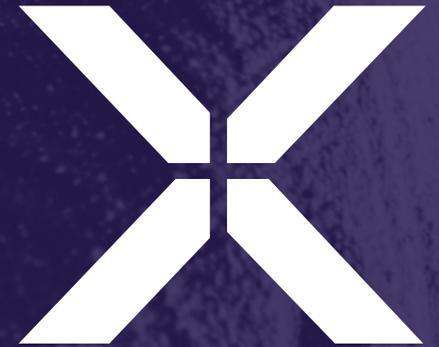
Social media has both a positive and negative influence.

- Speed and scale of responses to stories means it can act as a brake on the more contemplative, but can also be positive where coverage is incorrect or poor to call out bad practice quickly
- Can be an echo chamber and reduces the ability for a pluralistic viewpoint to be communicated
- Podcast has become a place for long form debate and discussion but often these have low awareness and accessibility

*“**Social media is not all bad.** Now if there is a poorly researched or written story you can immediately call it out” - UK*

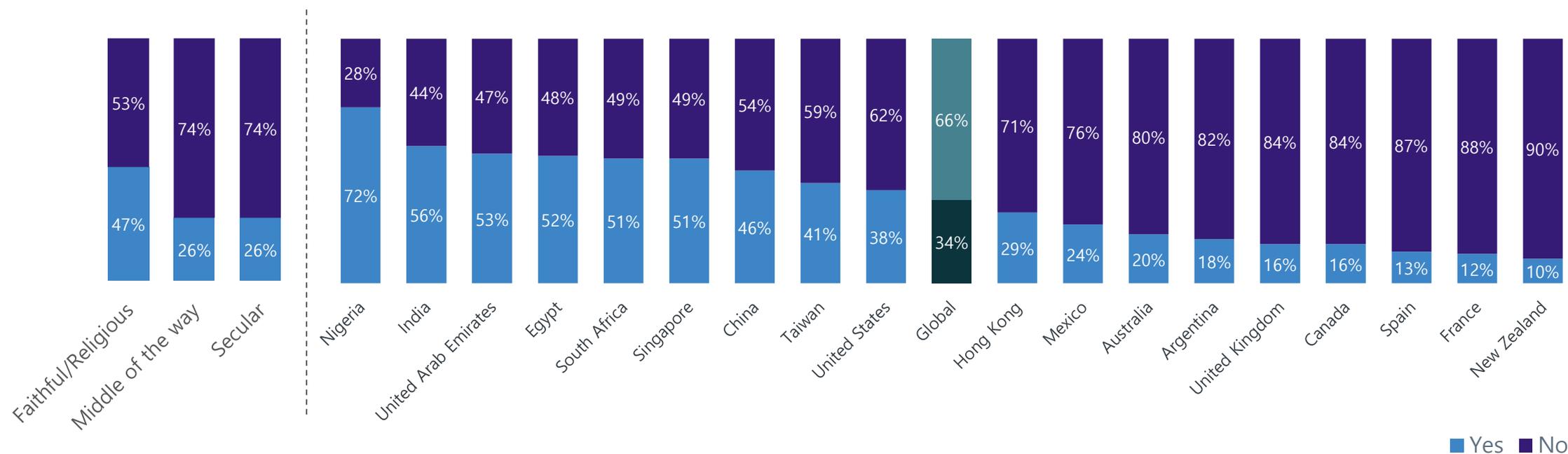
*“Social media means we **have more reach than ever before** but it does **simplify the story** you are trying to tell” - Luxembourg*

# What People are saying



# Around 1 in 3 global respondents follow media sources focused on faith-based news; number increases to 47% in highly faithful/religious countries

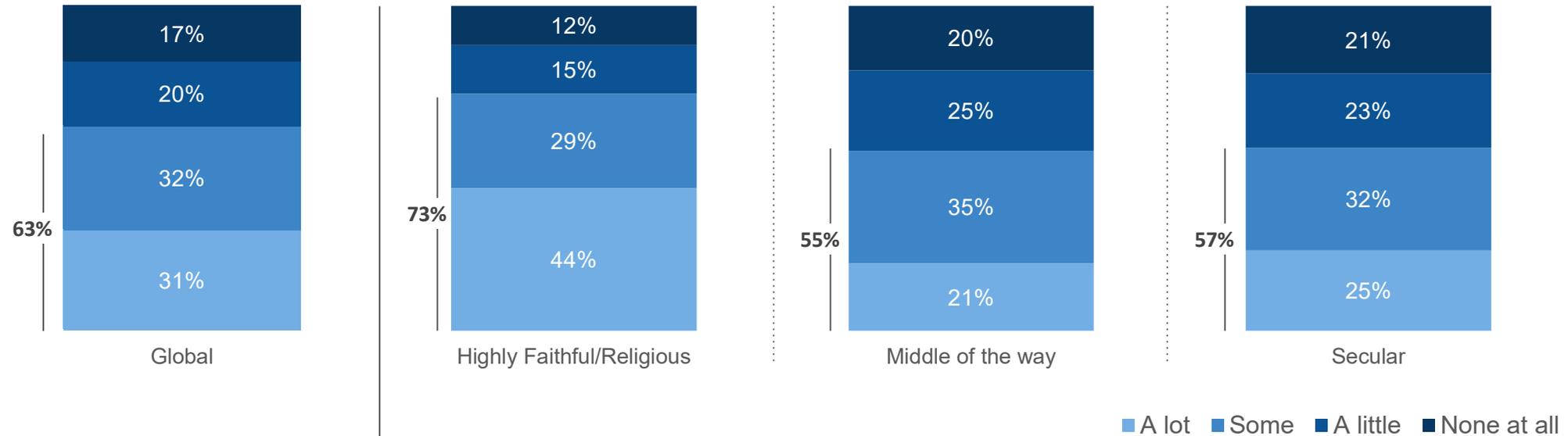
Follow Media Sources Focused on Faith-based News



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022.  
 FMT5: Do you follow any media sources that are focused on faith-based news?

# 63% say there is need for high quality content on faith and religion

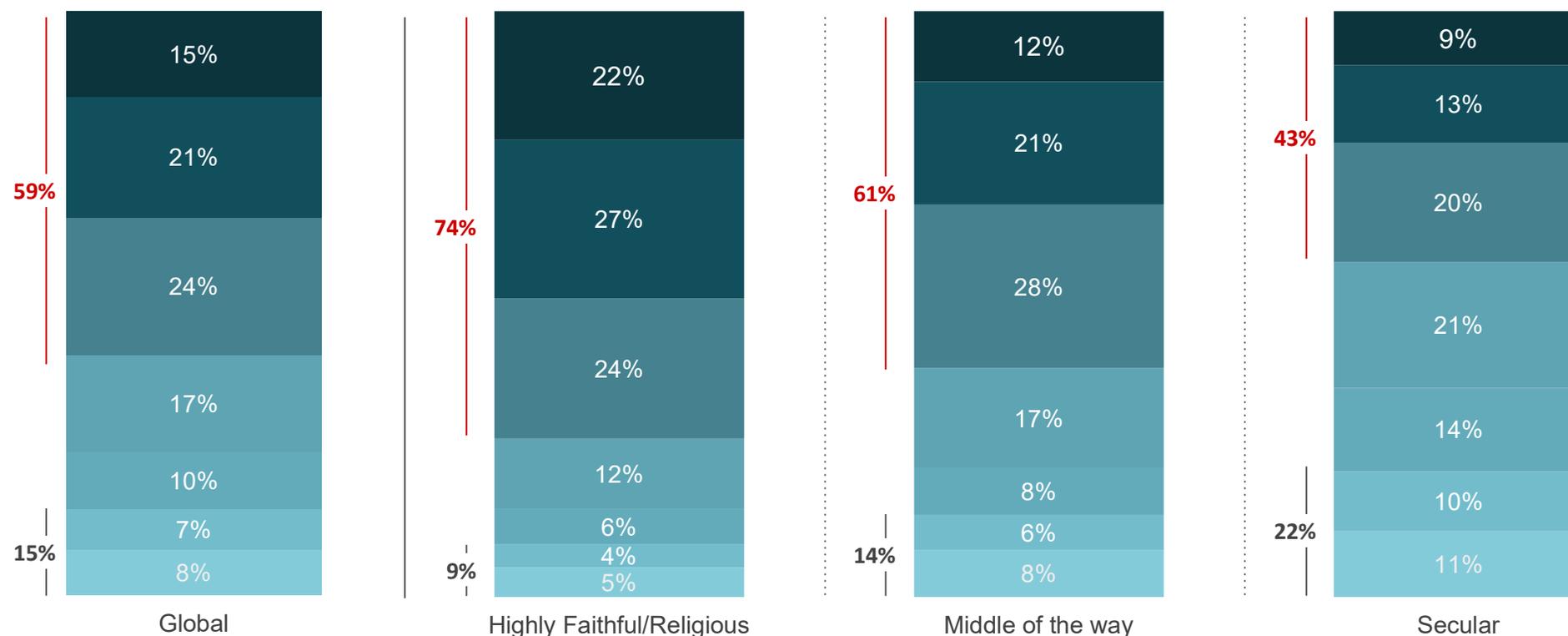
## Need for High Quality Content on Faith and Religion



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022.  
 RAD1: How much would you say high quality content on faith and religion is needed in your country?

# There is strong agreement that the news media needs to cover a diverse set of faith and religious perspectives or content

Importance of News Media Covering Diverse Set of Faith & Religious Perspectives or Content



■ Top 3 Boxes

■ Bottom 2 Boxes

Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022.

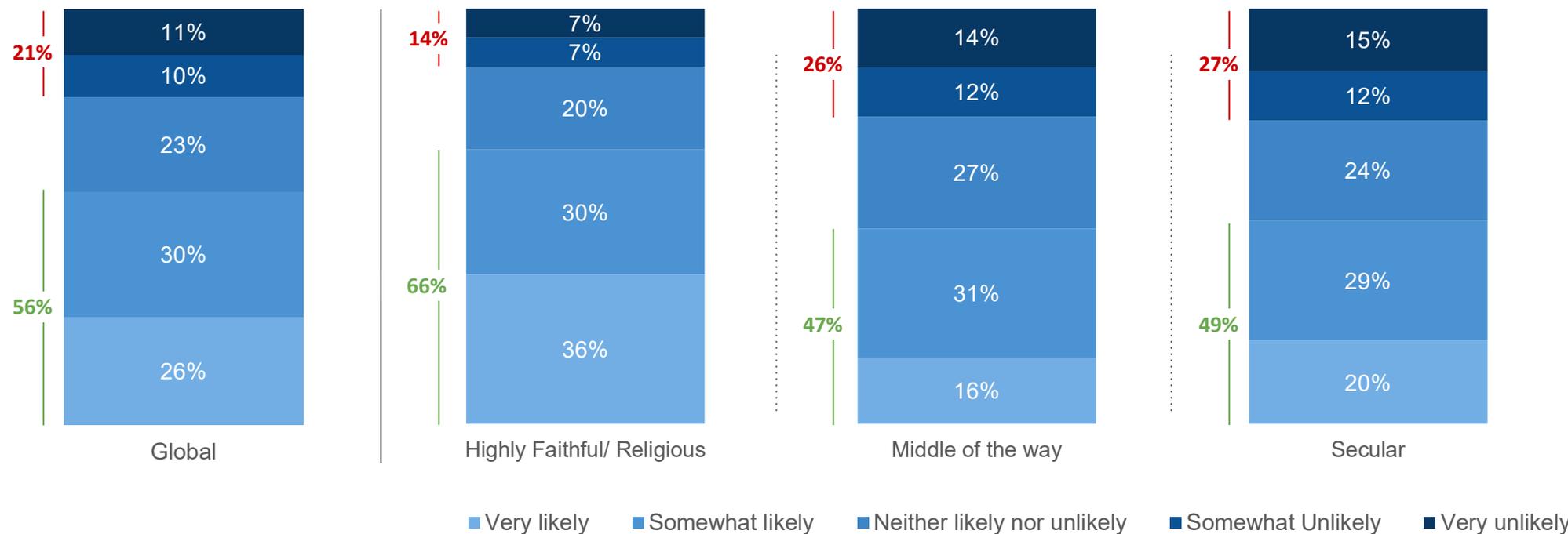
FMI1: How important or unimportant is it to you that the news media covers a diverse set of faith and religious perspectives or content?

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■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 ■ 6 ■ 7

# 56% say they are more likely to engage with a publication with high-quality faith and religious reporting

Likelihood to Engage With Publication With High Quality Faith and Religion Reporting

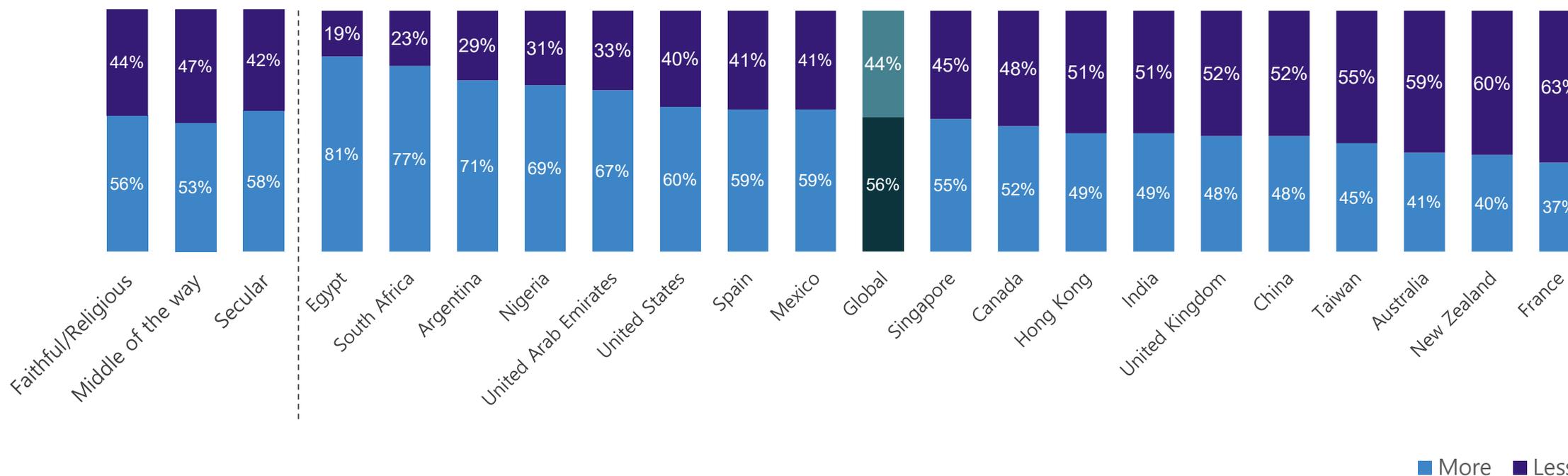


■ Unlikely NET    ■ Likely NET

Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. RAD3: How likely or unlikely are you to read, subscribe or get email updates from a publication that has high quality faith and religion reporting?

# 56% of respondents want more coverage of complex religious issues, showing that a robust market exists for in-depth coverage of religion among the world's media orgs

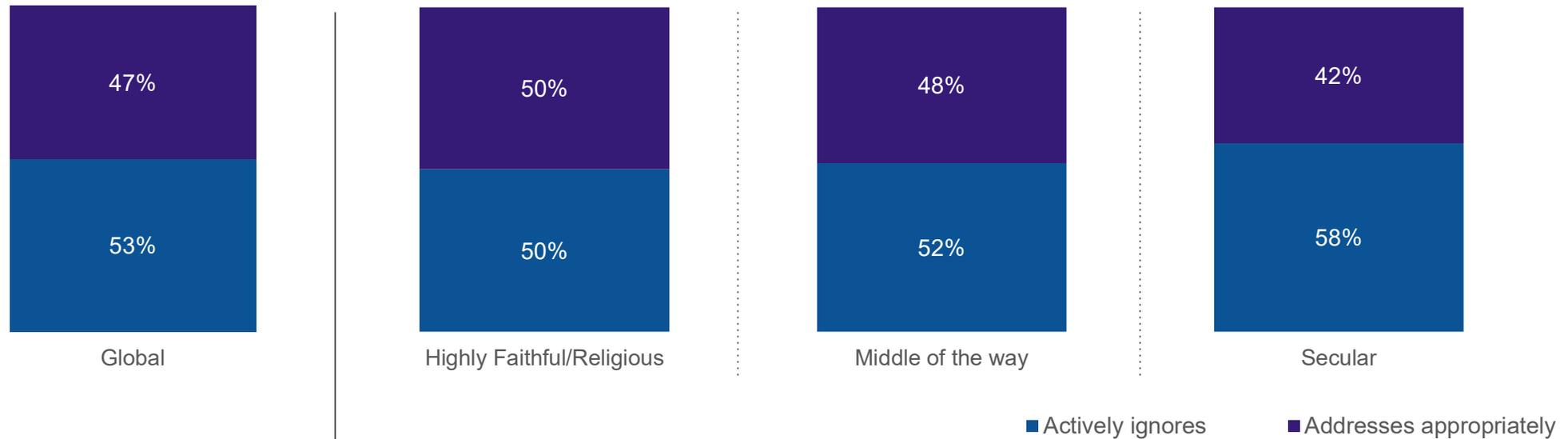
Desire for Coverage of Complex Religious Issues



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. ER6: Do you think there should be more or less coverage of complex religious issues? by BANNER

# 53% of respondents believe the media actively ignores religion rather than appropriately addressing it

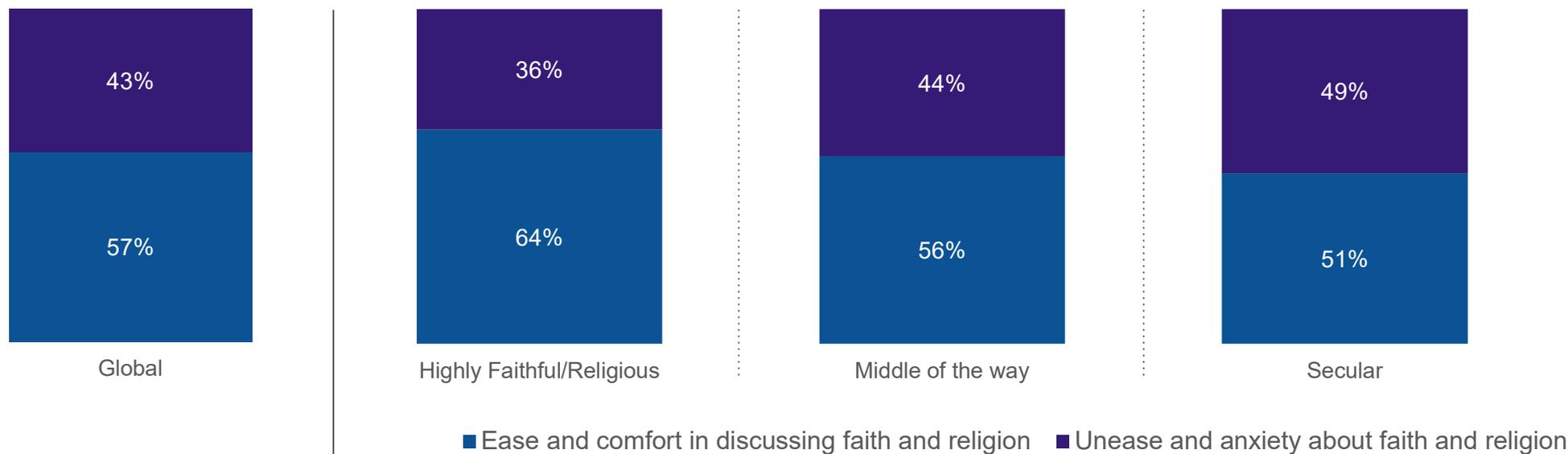
Perception of Media Actively Ignoring Religion vs. Addressing Appropriately



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FMT17B: Do you think the media actively ignores religion as an aspect of society and culture today or does it address it appropriately?

# 43% feel that the media's current approach to faith and religious coverage creates unease and anxiety, even more so among secular nations

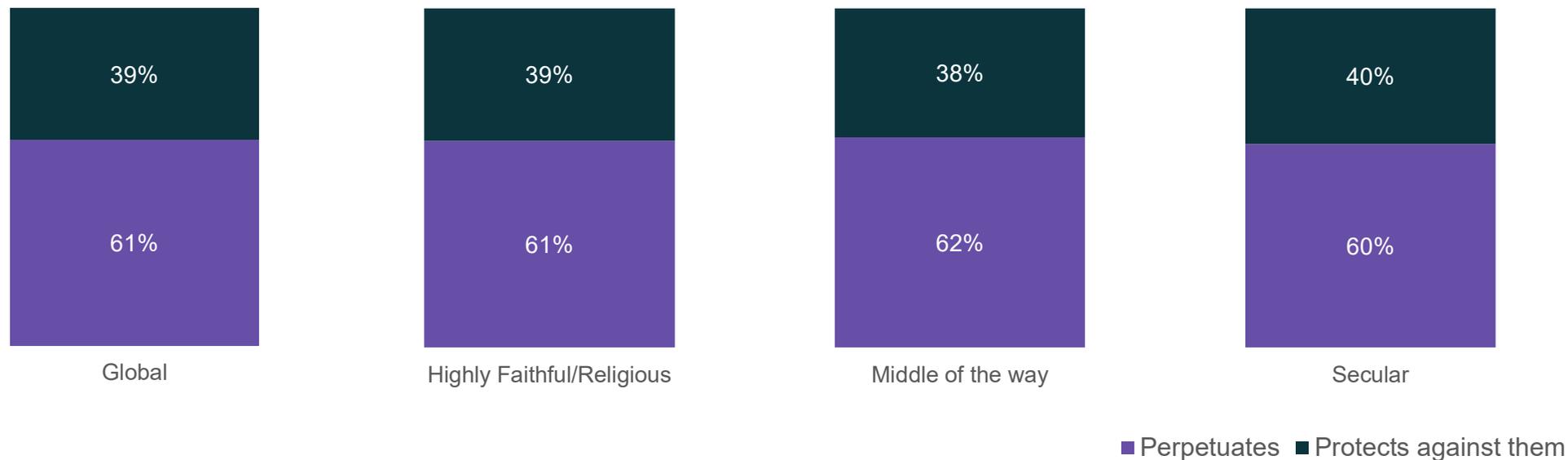
Media's Impact on Ease & Unease with Discussing Faith and Religion



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FMT17A: Do you think the media's approach to faith and religion generates mostly ease and comfort in discussing faith and religion or unease and anxiety about faith and religion?

# There is a strong perception that the media perpetuates faith-based stereotypes, with similar findings across secular, middle of the way, and highly faithful/religious groups

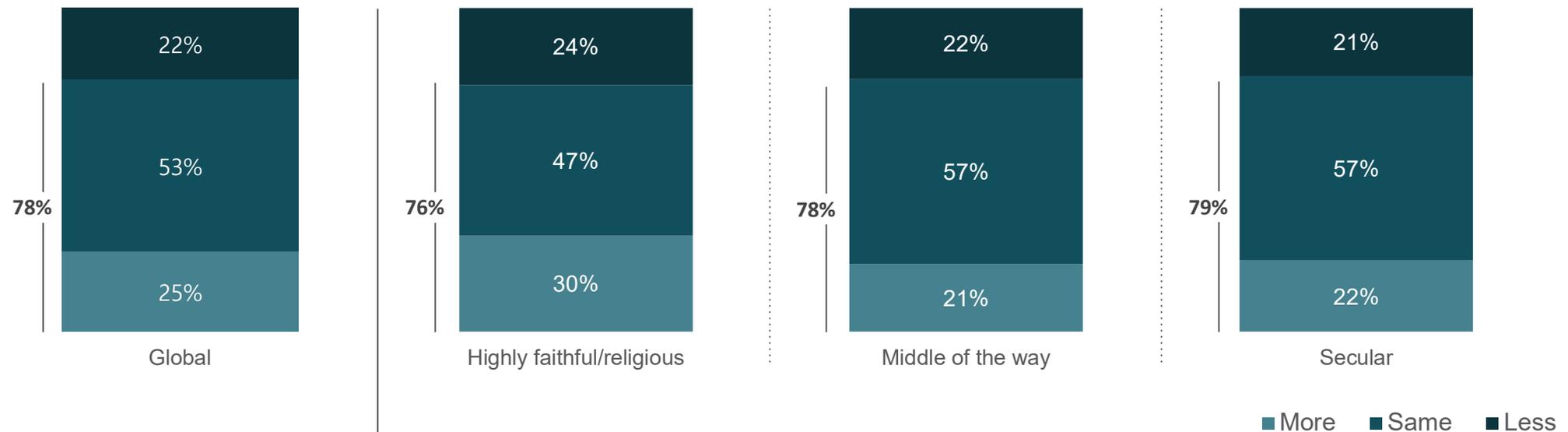
## Media Impact on Faith-related Stereotypes



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FMT15: Does the media mainly perpetuate faith-related stereotypes, or does it mainly address and protect against them?

# Majority think that religious stereotypes should get the same or more attention as race and gender stereotypes

Attention Religious Stereotypes Should Receive vs. Race and Gender Stereotypes



■ TOP 2 Box: Same or More

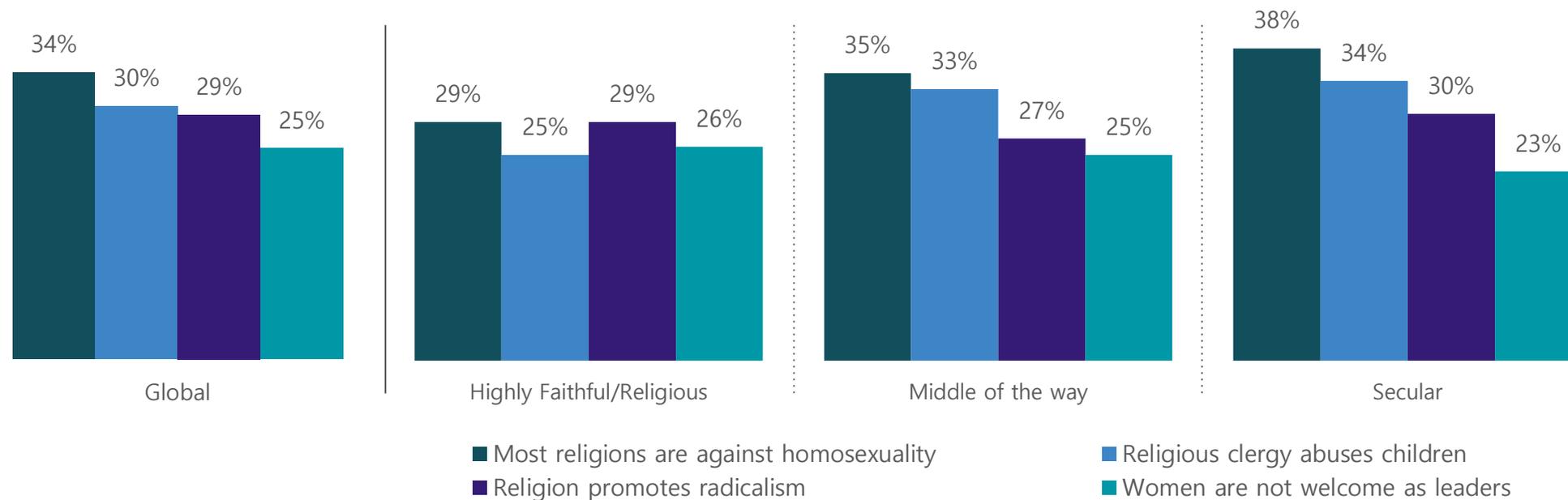
Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FMT15B: Should religious stereotypes get the same level, more or less attention as race and gender stereotypes?

# Most perpetuated stereotypes: most religions are against homosexuality; abuse children; promote radicalism; hinder women

## Top Stereotypes Perpetuated

81%

Said the media perpetuated at least one of the stereotypes tested

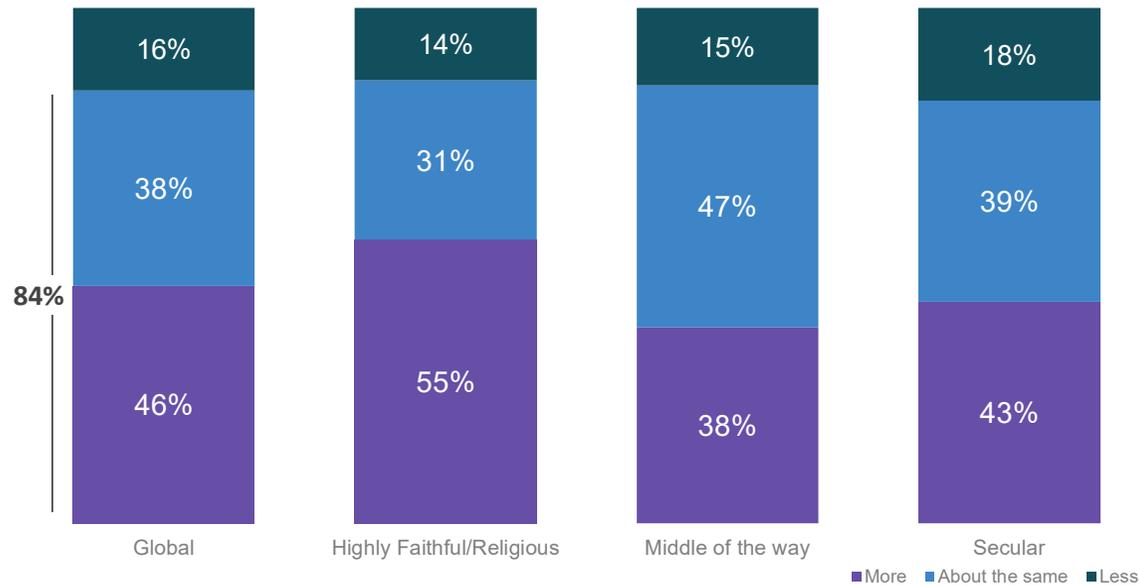


Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022. FMT15A. What stereotypes does the media perpetuate the most?

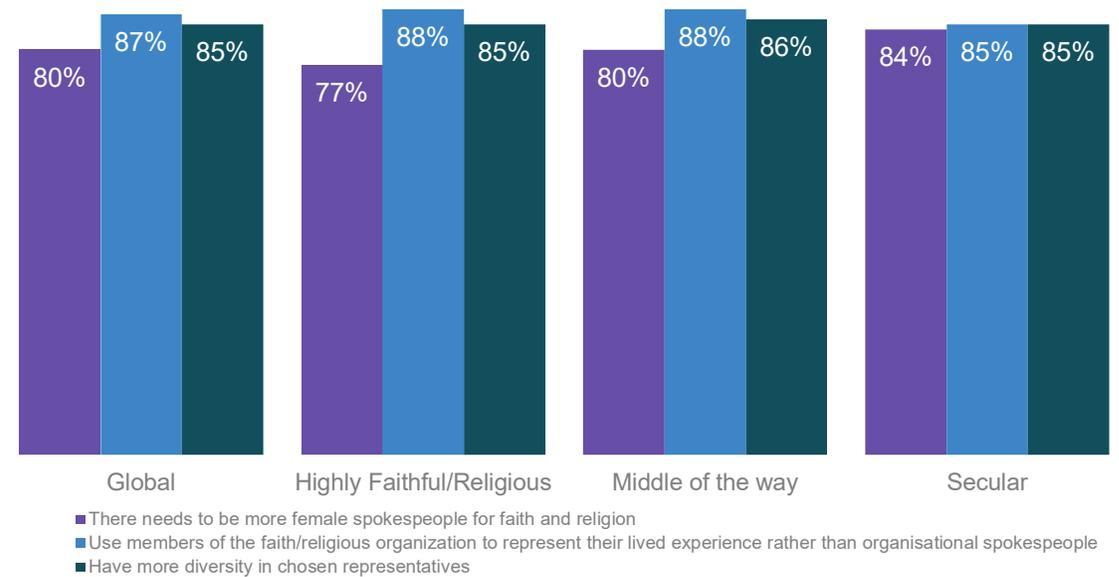
# 84% say faith and religious groups need to provide the media with relevant spokespeople, particularly representatives with lived experience

## Need & Strategies for Faith and Religious Group Media Spokespeople

> Should faith/religious groups do more/less/the same to provide the media with a relevant spokesperson?



Among those respondents who believe faith/religious groups should do more:



Source: "The Global Faith and Media Index" Study by HarrisX (The Faith and Media Initiative commissioned a global online survey of among 9,489 adults in 18 countries), Aug 26 – Sep 9, 2022.

LHS: FMI10A: Do you think faith and religious groups need to do more, less or about the same to provide the media with a relevant spokesperson?

RHS: FMI10B: When considering what faith and media groups can do to provide the media with a more relevant spokesperson, which of the following do you agree or disagree with?

# The inaugural Global Faith and Media Study reveals a worldwide deficit in the coverage, treatment and quality of understanding faith and religion in modern society

## OPPORTUNITY

Universal consensus (**63%**) that high quality content on faith and religion is needed in the respective countries surveyed

...and majority **56%** are likely to engage with high-quality faith and religious reporting

Strong agreement (**59%**) that it's important the news media covers a diverse set of faith and religious perspectives and content

Global agreement (**56%**) that there should be more coverage of complex religious issues

## CHALLENGE

Media is perceived as actively ignoring rather than appropriately addressing religion by **53%** of respondents

Many (**43%**) feel that the media's current approach to faith and religious coverage creates unease and anxiety about faith and religion

Perception that the media perpetuates faith-based stereotypes rather than addresses and protects against them among **61%** of those surveyed

## PATH FORWARD

Majority of **78%** think that religious stereotypes should get the same or more attention as race and gender stereotypes

...Most perpetuated stereotypes: most religions are against homosexuality (**34%**); abuse children (**30%**); promote radicalism (**29%**)

Strong agreement (**84%**) faith and religious groups need to provide the media with spokespeople, particularly people with lived experience