

# Examination of Threats to Religious Sites in Turkey



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# ABOUT THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

## WHO WE ARE

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). USCIRF uses international standards to monitor violations of religious freedom or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and Congressional leaders of both political parties. The Commission's work is supported by a professional, nonpartisan staff of regional subject matter experts. USCIRF is separate from the State Department, although the Department's Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is a non-voting, ex officio Commissioner.

## WHAT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS

Inherent in religious freedom is the right to believe or not believe as one's conscience leads, and to live out one's beliefs openly, peacefully, and without fear. Freedom of religion or belief is an expansive right that includes the freedoms of thought, conscience, expression, association, and assembly. While religious freedom is America's first freedom, it also is a core human right that international law and treaty recognize; a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy and America's commitment to defending democracy and freedom globally; and a vital element of national security, critical to ensuring a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project examines the types of threats to religious properties in Turkey, including places of worship, religious institutions, and cemeteries. The research categorized threats and attacks including vandalization, damage, and destruction of religious properties over the last two decades and documented whether assailants were brought to justice. It also investigated the role of Turkish authorities in the protection of religious sites and the impact of government action, indifference, and negligence.

This research shows that over the last decade the number and severity of violent attacks (especially bombings and other terrorist tactics) on places of worship have decreased. Some religious communities view this trend as resulting from the provision of more effective protection by the Turkish state. They stated that local law enforcement teams have monitored terrorist threats and warned them at times of severe danger. These communities have also cooperated with authorities to protect worship halls and congregations from terrorist attacks.

In contrast, other attacks on religious sites and religious communities have not similarly declined. These include vandalism, the marking of religious sites and residences of members of some communities, physical attacks (destruction of property, breaking and entering, vandalism, attacks with assault weapons, bodily harm, and physical assaults against individuals inside places of worship), desecration of religious sites with graffiti, and treasure hunting. Given these security threats, non-Sunni Muslim and non-Muslim communities need to dedicate significant resources for the protection of their places of worship, and they often invest in installing security cameras and hiring security personnel or night guards, which puts financial strain on their resources.

Reporting and prosecuting these types of offenses remain a challenge for religious communities; in many cases, police do not apprehend assailants, and in the instances in which assailants do face arrest, they often receive lenient treatment from Turkish courts. Fears persist among religious minorities that this widespread and persistent trend of marking their residences and vandalizing their religious sites can ultimately lead to more serious offenses if not investigated and prosecuted. Some religious communities expressed fear that the government, or elements associated with the government, may be culpable in planning and executing attacks against

religious minorities, especially when the government stands to benefit from a distraction from domestic political concerns. The research also demonstrated that societal attitudes towards non-Muslim religious sites differed across geographic location, with Edirne, İzmir, and Bursa showing more acceptance for these sites and their communities.

Over the last few years, numerous cases of cemetery attacks have affected multiple religious communities, including Jewish, Armenian, Alevi, Yazidi, and Syriac communities. The government's responses to these attacks have also been inconsistent; for example, while the government condemned the 2022 attack on Istanbul's Hasköy Jewish Cemetery and caught the assailants, authorities did not devote similar attention to attacks on Alevi, Yazidi, and Syriac cemeteries. Impunity for these crimes increases the likelihood of similar such attacks in the future.

Turkey's non-Sunni Muslim and non-Muslim minorities expressed concern about government confiscation of religious properties and bureaucratic obstacles subsequently encountered in the restitution process. The current bureaucratic structure of the General Directorate of Foundations, the main government institution overseeing religious foundations, has had a detrimental effect on non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim communities' ability to sustain their populations and maintain their religious sites. The burdensome requirements of keeping the foundations active, combined with the ongoing trend of population decline in some religious communities, also put religious sites at risk of confiscation by the government.

The restoration of religious heritage sites by the Turkish government and local authorities contributes to the survival of these monuments and the memory of the religious communities that built them. In most cases, restored churches and synagogues function primarily as cultural centers or museums; in some cases, the religious communities that built these sites are also invited to hold worship at these sites, albeit only with the permission of the authorities. While these restoration projects represent positive developments in general, some cases provide better examples than others in terms of promoting an inclusive society. For example, omissions in the informational signs presenting the history and religious importance of these sacred sites sometimes present a point of contention.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 METHODOLOGY

The research team conducted interviews with religious communities and an atheist association, investigated select sites of religious heritage, carried out field surveys in eight provinces of Turkey—covering a total of 80 sites belonging to or built by Alevi, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant, Sunni Muslim, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox communities—and conducted a media survey covering 2003–2022.

The project team completed 11 interviews with representatives of various religious communities, including Alevi, Arab Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant, Syriac Orthodox, Yazidi, and atheist communities. It also conducted two expert interviews: one with a Kurdish lawmaker who initiated a group working to protect cemeteries and the dead, and another with an expert on religious freedom violations in Turkey. These inquiries were designed to gather information on recent and past incidents of vandalism, attacks, damage, and threats targeting religious properties and cemeteries over the last decade. Additionally, the project investigated how much support the government has provided to each community in terms of protection from further attacks, repairing damaged property, identifying assailants, and bringing them to justice.

Through these interviews, the project also assessed whether religious communities received government support to restore or renovate religious properties. Moreover, the interviews shed light on instances of confiscation of property by the state and other actors and investigated whether the communities' demands for restitution had been fulfilled. Interviewees were asked about challenges in reclaiming religious property (places of worship, schools, and pious endowment assets). These discussions also assessed long-term obstacles and problems with respect to the legal framework for restitution and restoration of property, as well as the impact of these processes on religious communities and their properties.

The project team visited, documented, and analyzed six key sites of religious heritage in Turkey, representing Sunni Muslim, Alevi, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox,

Armenian Apostolic, and Jewish traditions in order to investigate the primary threats against these sites as well as the Turkish government's track record in providing maintenance, restoration, and protection services. Selected key sites were St. Stephen Bulgarian Orthodox Church (Istanbul); Soumela Monastery (Trabzon); Cathedral of the Holy Cross (Van); Hacıbektaş Dervish Lodge and Shrine Museum (Nevşehir); Şeyh Mattar Mosque (Diyarbakır); and the Great Synagogue of Edirne (Edirne). The Turkish government considers each of the selected sites a heritage site, listing them either under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or under the General Directorate of Foundations—the two main institutions responsible for the upkeep and protection of heritage sites in Turkey.

The project team worked with local experts to conduct regional surveys in seven provinces of Turkey. These local experts visited, documented, and reported current conditions, threats, attacks, and other critical issues for the preservation of religious sites, worship halls, and cemeteries in Bursa, Edirne, Elazığ, Diyarbakır, İzmir, Kayseri, Mardin, and Trabzon. In total, researchers evaluated 80 sites belonging to or built by Alevi, Armenian, Baha'i, Bulgarian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Protestant, Sunni Muslim, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox communities.

Furthermore, the project team conducted a media survey of eight newspapers, covering the period of 2003–2022, to identify and analyze the types of threats and attacks that targeted religious sites over the last two decades. Researchers chose these media outlets both to cover a wide range of the Turkish political spectrum (liberal to conservative) and to represent religious communities' own publications, including *Agos*, *Avlaremoz*, *Birgün*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Diken*, *Hürriyet*, *PİRHA*, *SAT7*, *Şalom*, and *Yeni Şafak*. The project team also utilized the Association of Protestant Churches' annual Human Rights Violation Reports from 2009 to 2021<sup>1</sup> and Monitoring Reports from the Freedom of Belief Initiative (*İnanç Özgürlüğü Girişimi*).<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the project team utilized online news outlets to investigate cases of threats and attacks on religious sites, for which two factors are critical to note. First, Turkey ranked 149th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.protestankiliseler.org/?page\\_id=638](http://www.protestankiliseler.org/?page_id=638).

<sup>2</sup> <https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/category/projects/monitoring-and-reporting/monitoring-reports/>.

2022 World Press Freedom Index<sup>3</sup> due to strong government censorship and pressure on media as well as self-censorship by at-risk journalists, which may have affected the reporting of cases. Second, there are significant differences among religious communities regarding their willingness to report crimes. While some may be reluctant to report attacks on their religious sites for fear that the police may not take them seriously or that reporting may lead to further victimization, other communities are more open and willing to report their issues. These factors make it difficult to pinpoint the number and types of attacks and their targets.

## 1.2 RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES: HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES

Turkey is a majority Sunni Muslim country. Alevis constitute the largest religious minority, who recent surveys estimate compose 5 to 10 percent of the population. In addition to these Muslim groups, there are also various non-Muslim communities, namely Arab Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Baha'i, Bulgarian Orthodox, Chaldean Catholic, Georgian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, Nestorian, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Syriac Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, and Yazidi faiths. Turkey is also home to a community of nonbelievers.

Two events drastically changed the religious demographics of Turkey in the beginning of the 20th century, particularly resulting in a significant reduction of Christian populations: the Armenian Genocide of 1915<sup>4</sup> and the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey resulting from the 1923 Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations. Orthodox Christians of Turkey were deported to Greece, and Muslims of Greece were deported to Turkey, with the exception of the historical seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its flock in Istanbul, the islands of the Marmara Sea, and the Aegean islands of Bozcaada and Gökçeada. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne also provided protection and freedom of worship for the remaining non-Muslim communities. Although the treaty does not specify communities, it is generally interpreted to refer and apply to the Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish communities.

Over the last century, Turkey's non-Muslim populations have continued to decrease. This decrease came largely in response to a series of alarming incidents, such as the 1934 pogrom against the Jewish community in Thrace, the crippling wealth tax of 1942 levied against non-Muslims in Turkey, the 1955 pogrom against the Greek Orthodox community in

Istanbul, the 1964 expulsion of Greek Orthodox residents of Istanbul, and the tense political environment leading up to the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974. These trends led to drastic population declines, especially within the Greek Orthodox community, which has dwindled to less than 2,000 persons from a population of over 100,000 in 1923.

These historical trajectories have similarly had a significant impact on the preservation of religious sites, especially for those whose communities and congregations have disappeared. The ongoing trend of population decline in non-Muslim communities further makes the maintenance, protection, and sustainability of their respective religious sites especially challenging.

## 1.3 GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-MUSLIM AND NON-SUNNI MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SITES

The data collected from regional surveys in eight provinces in Turkey, and interviews with religious and atheist communities pointed to patterns of geographical differences in local communities' attitudes towards both non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim religious sites. The media survey indicated that the highest number of attacks on religious sites took place in the Marmara region, where Istanbul is located. The Marmara region also has a high concentration of non-Muslim populations, active churches, and synagogues. Thus, while the overall number of incidents is higher in the Marmara region, the frequency of attacks in comparison to population is lower. Consequently, the interviews and regional survey data illustrate that non-Muslim minorities generally feel safer in the Marmara and Aegean regions than they do in Central Anatolia.

There are different patterns in which religious minority communities and their religious sites are scattered across Turkey. Since the Treaty of Lausanne, the Greek Orthodox community has been predominantly based in Istanbul, the islands of the Marmara Sea, and the Aegean islands of Bozcaada and Gökçeada. Historical Greek Orthodox churches, however, are located throughout Turkey. The Armenian community also has numerous religious sites throughout the country, including a concentration of such sites in eastern Turkey. Greek Orthodox and Armenian churches are found in both urban and rural contexts, while the Syriac community's monasteries and churches are predominantly located in southeastern Turkey, with a noteworthy concentration around Mardin. Likewise, Yazidis

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.duvarenglish.com/turkey-ranks-149th-out-of-180-countries-in-press-freedom-index-news-60834>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>

predominantly live in southeastern Turkey, with their sites mostly located in rural contexts. The Arab Orthodox community is predominantly based in Hatay. The worship spaces and sacred sites of Alevi are found across Turkey, with major *cemevis* (Alevi places of worship) in urban centers and shrines and visitation sites found mostly in rural areas. Other religious communities such as Bahai's and Protestants have most of their worship halls in urban areas. This geographic pattern of distribution may also contribute to non-Muslim minorities feeling safer in the historically cosmopolitan Marmara and Aegean regions.

As Sunni Islam is the dominant religion in Turkey, that community's mosques are found throughout the country. Threats and attacks on Sunni places of worship are far fewer in number in comparison to those faced by other religious and non-belief groups. For example, in the media survey, the project team recorded just four instances of attacks on Sunni mosques. Other causes of damage and destruction of Sunni mosques include armed conflict, as was the case of the Kurşunlu and Şeyh Mattar mosques in Diyarbakır, which received significant damage during 2015–2016 clashes between the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkish security forces; and natural disasters such as the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 which affected ten major cities in southeastern Turkey and caused widespread destruction of both Muslim and non-Muslim sites. There have additionally been some instances of attacks targeting Shi'a Muslim sites. In 2014, there were two cases of arson against Shi'a mosques in Istanbul, following the receipt of a threat.<sup>5</sup>

Attitudes towards non-Muslim religious sites show significant geographical variation across the country. Regional surveys and interviews in Edirne, İzmir, and Bursa illustrated that there was more acceptance of the non-Muslim past and existing non-Muslim religious communities. In all three of these provinces, local communities show notable support for the restoration of non-Muslim heritage, while non-Muslim communities in these areas face fewer problems in practicing their religions and are more comfortable expressing their religious identities in public. In Edirne, the restoration of

the Grand Synagogue was received positively. Likewise, in Bursa numerous former Greek-Orthodox churches have been restored and serve as cultural centers. Locals interviewed during the field survey in Bursa voiced their approval of the restoration of two churches in Mudanya that were acquired on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The provinces of Bursa, Edirne, and İzmir were also heavily affected by the experience of the bilateral population exchange between Turkey and Greece a century ago. The descendants of Greek Orthodox "exchange" families from Greece frequently come to the region to visit the churches of their grandparents, and occasionally hold liturgies in historical churches, with the permission of the Turkish government. They are, for the most part, welcomed by the local population. These visits and interactions also contribute to a more positive and tolerant perception. All three provinces, located in western Turkey, are politically more liberal, which may contribute to the relatively positive attitude towards non-Sunni Muslim and non-Muslim religious sites.

In contrast, in Elazığ, Kayseri, and Trabzon, there is less interest in and commitment to preserving religious sites of non-Muslim communities, and those same communities feel more pressure and experience more attacks. In Trabzon, for instance, the media survey found numerous recorded attacks on churches. Representatives of a Protestant community in Trabzon explained challenges in practicing their faith there; they stated that they were unable to worship openly and that many Protestants hid their religious affiliation because of the conservative values prevalent in the region. Moreover, a Protestant representative told researchers in an interview that instances of attacks and threats toward their community in the conservative and nationalist Black Sea, Central Anatolia, and East Anatolia regions were high. They explained that Christianity was seen as a fundamental threat to conservative values and the structure of society in these regions, and this attitude contributes to threats—especially toward Christian religious sites. Elazığ, Kayseri, and Trabzon are predominantly conservative Sunni Muslim, with a strong influence of Turkish nationalist sentiment.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/7523/yine-esenyurt-yine-caferi-camii-ne-saldiri>

Diyarbakır and Mardin are demographically different, since the former has a significant Kurdish population, while the latter has both significant Arab and Kurdish populations, in addition to Syriacs and Yazidis. Although both provinces are religiously and socially conservative, Turkish nationalism is not as prominent there as in Elazığ, Kayseri, and Trabzon. The ethnic and religious diversity in these two provinces creates an environment of mutual respect and conviviality. In both areas, pro-Kurdish parties have dominated local municipal elections over the last decade, although Turkish authorities have removed from office or arrested many Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) mayors.<sup>6</sup> Especially in Diyarbakır, non-Muslim communities and their religious heritage received support from pro-Kurdish HDP municipalities as part of their inclusion policies, although after the 2015–2016 clashes in the area and the 2016 coup attempt, the political climate has deteriorated significantly. In the current context, most ethnic and religious minorities express concerns about their future and feel a sense of social and political pressure—especially if they do not openly support the current government.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/07/turkey-kurdish-mayors-removal-violates-voters-rights>.

# MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

There are denominational differences in the types of threats and attacks that religious communities face in Turkey.

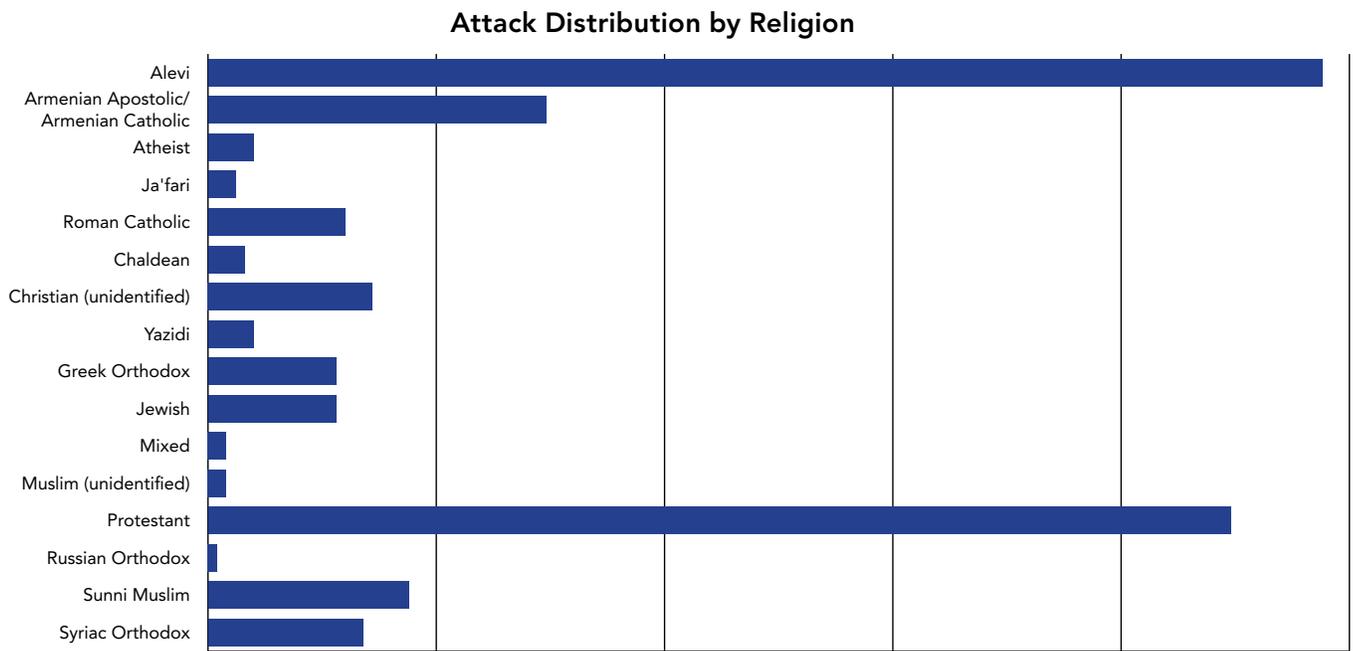
The attitudes and practices of the state and public differ significantly towards the various religious groups, as there is a marked difference in perception towards the country's historical non-Muslim religious communities, newer non-Muslim religious communities, and non-Sunni Muslim communities.

The Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish communities are often called “the Lausanne minorities” because the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne is interpreted to provide certain rights and freedoms to these communities, although their rights and freedoms are often restricted in practice. The Turkish state presents itself as protecting these communities and frames their rights and freedoms as privileges, which often impedes the demands of these communities for equality. Throughout the history of the republic, these communities have suffered discrimination, pogroms, crippling taxes, unjust legislation, desecration of their sacred sites, confiscation of their properties, and persecution. This systematic targeting by the government led members of these communities to emigrate from Turkey in large numbers and resulted in dramatic decreases in their populations over the course of the last century. For Turkey's historical non-Muslim communities, one of the most significant and imminent dangers is the possibility of confiscation of their properties by the government. The survival of a community and its religious institutions depends on its ability to operate within the parameters set by the Turkish government through the General Directorate of Foundations. With their declining populations, historical non-Muslim communities face significant challenges in fulfilling the General Directorate of Foundation's requirements and maintaining their religious sites. Their religious sites face confiscation, in most cases without warning, if they fail to meet these requirements. In such cases, the government can reallocate confiscated properties to third parties. Properties that are in urban areas with high real-estate value are more likely to be sold or demolished. Another threat that affects primarily historical non-Muslim communities is treasure hunting in or around historical churches, monasteries, synagogues, and cemeteries. This practice is widespread and normalized across Turkey, and perpetrators benefit from a culture of impunity. Although treasure hunting is most common in rural areas, there are also examples in major metropolises like Istanbul.

Newer non-Muslim communities face significant challenges in obtaining official recognition of their places of worship. They often receive threats and face close monitoring by law enforcement for their security. Ultranationalist and violent extremist groups regard them with suspicion due to their engagement in proselytism and efforts to gain new adherents. Hence, they have repeatedly been made the victims of violent crimes and regularly receive death threats. The largest non-Sunni Muslim religious minority of Turkey, the Alevi community, suffers from systematic discrimination and regular threats and attacks. As the Turkish state does not distinguish the Alevi faith as separate from Sunni Islam, Alevis struggle to obtain official recognition for *cemevis*, their places of worship. The Alevi community considers the possibility of confiscation and consequent assimilation of their religious sites as a significant threat. Since 2012, there have been over 40 instances of the marking (graffiti or other vandalization) of Alevi houses across Turkey.

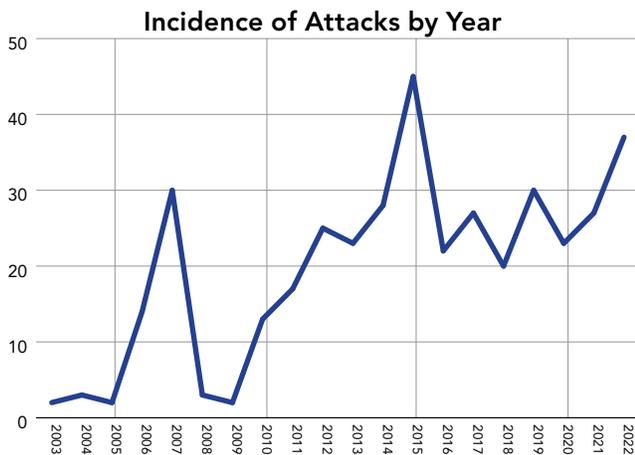
The media survey covering 2003–2022 enumerated attacks and threats reported in select media outlets on places of worship, religious sites and institutions, religious schools, and cemeteries. It is important to note that certain factors may prevent religious communities from reporting crimes, and that some groups are more likely to report attacks than others. Keeping these factors in mind, the religious community that suffered the most attacks were Alevis (122 cases), followed by Protestants (112 cases) and Armenians (34 cases) according to the media survey (See Figure 1). As the Alevi community is the largest minority group, the relatively smaller Protestant and Armenian communities suffered attacks at a disproportionately higher rate. Attacks on the Armenian community were highly concentrated in Istanbul (29 out of 34 cases), where most active churches are located. Attacks on Alevis and Protestants were distributed across Turkey.

**Figure 1: Distribution of attacks by religious affiliation, 2003–2022**



In 2015, there was a significant uptick in attacks and threats targeting religious sites, especially those belonging to minority communities (See Figure 2). Heightened political tensions and social unrest between June and November elections of that year may have contributed to that trend.

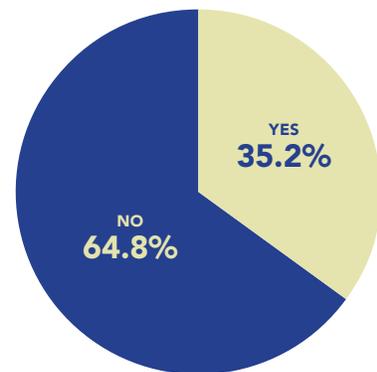
**Figure 2: Number of attacks, 2003–2022**



The media survey illustrated that only 35 percent of assailants of religious sites and places of worship were identified (See Figure 3), of which only 25 percent were reported in the press to have received a sentence and 25 percent received no penalty. In 47 percent of cases, the media did not report an outcome (See Figure 4). Assailants of violent crimes were more likely to be caught and charged.

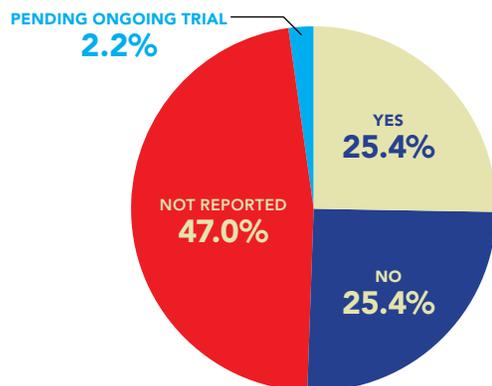
**Figure 3: Ratio of assailants identified, 2003–2022**

**Assailants Identified**



**Figure 4: Rate of penalization for assailants, 2003–2022**

**Assailants Penalized**



## 2.1 TYPES OF THREATS AND ATTACKS

Through the data collected from field research, the media survey, and interviews with representatives of religious and atheist communities, the project identified different types of threats and attacks targeting places of worship, religious institutions, and cemeteries. Threats against the security and survival of religious sites are of two types: those caused by human agents (vandalism, graffiti, treasure hunting, stone quarrying, breaking and entering, theft, violent attacks, arson, and bombing) and those caused by natural forces (wind and water erosion, vegetation, fires, and seismic activity), to which targeted neglect contributes significantly.

The interviews, field research, and media survey indicated that physical attacks on places of worship (throwing stones, breaking and entering, theft, breaking of windows and doors, damage to property, vandalism) and graffiti (either on places of worship or marking the houses of minority communities) are the most common types of attacks. The project team noted in interviews conducted during field visits and with members of targeted religious communities that neglect, treasure hunting, and confiscation of property also pose significant threats to the protection and survival of religious sites.

As for the perpetrators of attacks, there are three general categories. The first includes individuals who suffer from mental illness, are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or are juveniles. In some cases, the individual agency of these perpetrators is questionable, and they may have been encouraged or persuaded by others to carry out these attacks. In most cases, these attacks constitute minor offenses and include defacing places of worship with graffiti, breaking and entering, engaging in verbal abuse, and intimidating religious leaders and congregations. These attacks are not ideologically motivated or organized by an ideologically motivated group. The second type of perpetrators are individuals motivated by nationalism or intolerance. These perpetrators commonly commit targeted attacks on religious minorities that are intimidating and cause damage to property or entail physical assaults. The third category of perpetrators are domestic and foreign terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that are ideologically motivated and commit terrorist acts such as bombings. In interviews, non-Muslim communities told researchers that local police forces regularly collected intelligence on threats of violent attacks by ideologically motivated groups. In the case of a threat, the police informed them and increased security around their places of worship.

In certain cases, government institutions or officials are implicated in creating a climate that enables attacks on religious sites, places of worship, and religious institutions. There are multiple cases in which government officials and public figures used hate speech against religious minorities and nonbelievers. This sort of rhetoric creates a precarious environment for vulnerable religious groups, rendering them more susceptible to threats and attacks in the days and weeks following hate speech or otherwise provocative statements from public figures. Furthermore, failure by such public figures to condemn acts of violence and vandalism can serve to encourage attacks on religious minorities.

Government institutions have also failed to fulfill their responsibilities in supporting and protecting religious sites from attacks. Law enforcement and the judicial system have regularly failed to adequately investigate crimes and bring perpetrators to justice, leading to a culture of impunity. Consequently, this culture of impunity perpetuates more attacks on religious sites, places of worship, religious institutions, and cemeteries.

Types of threats and attacks differ among religious sites used for rites and worship and historical sites that are no longer in active use. Although many sites are not active places of worship, religious communities still consider them an integral part of their heritage; the decay and destruction of such sites constitute a cause of distress. Historical religious sites such as churches, synagogues, monasteries, and cemeteries, especially those located in rural areas, suffer significantly from treasure hunting. This is a widespread and destructive practice that disproportionately targets the religious sites of non-Muslim minorities. Negligence on the part of the authorities exacerbates the factors described previously in this section.

### 2.2.1 Violent Attacks

Twenty years ago, non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim communities experienced major acts of terrorism and violent attacks. Over the last ten years, however, there has been a decrease in the number of terrorist bombings and murders at religious sites. In contrast to that decline, the frequency of attacks on places of worship and religious sites including the destruction and damage of property, violent attacks with assault weapons, physical assaults on individuals at places of worship, vandalism, and graffiti has increased since 2015.

Representatives of non-Muslim communities explained that Turkish law enforcement closely monitors threats of violent attacks, especially those that may be connected to international terrorist groups. In such instances, the police inform targeted communities and take necessary precautions. In February 2023, for instance, Turkish authorities arrested

15 individuals connected to ISIS who were allegedly under orders to attack churches and synagogues in Istanbul.<sup>7</sup>

In 2022, a series of attacks targeted Alevi places of worship across Turkey. In July, four *cemevis* in Ankara were attacked on the first day of the month of Muharram, a holy month for the Alevi faith. Authorities caught the attacker, stated that he was “mentally unstable,” and indicted him in January 2023. The authorities’ claim about the accused individual and his ability to carry out four separate attacks in a single day remain dubious. This series of multiple attacks in Ankara was followed by nine independent attacks and threats against Alevi houses of worship, Alevi community leaders, and Alevi houses in Istanbul, Kahramanmaraş, İzmir, Kayseri, Adana, and Mersin.

The Agape Church in Samsun, including its leader and congregation, has received multiple threats and attacks over the years. In 2020, one individual threatened to burn down the church and its congregation, after which police put in place security measures.<sup>8</sup> Arson or attempted arson is, however, a common method of attack. The gate of the historical Kasturya Synagogue in Istanbul fell victim to arson in 2021<sup>9</sup> and assailants attempted to burn the gate of the Agia Triada Greek Orthodox Church in 2015.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, an assailant burned the gate of the Dzinunt Surp Asdvadzadzi Church, justifying the attack with claims that Armenians had caused the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

Another relevant criminal act is the destruction of minorities’ revenue generating properties, which impacts both non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim minorities. The Syriac monasteries of eastern Turkey, for instance, are often dependent on their surrounding olive groves and vineyards to generate income to support their religious services. In 2019, a series of fires in the olive groves of the Syriac monasteries around Mardin raised suspicion of targeted arson.<sup>12</sup>

Non-Muslim communities vividly recall violent bombings and murders in the early 2000s as an especially fearful time. For example, the 2003 synagogue bombings in Istanbul claimed 28 lives,<sup>13</sup> which a government investigation indicated the international terrorist group al-Qaeda orchestrated along with attacks on the British Consulate General and a bank.<sup>14</sup> In the early 2000s there was also a series of murders targeting members of Christian communities.<sup>15</sup> In 2006 and 2007, there were also multiple attacks on churches in Adiyaman, Antalya, Diyarbakır, Eskişehir, Istanbul, İzmir, Kayseri, Mardin, and Mersin that included firearm warning shots, knife attacks, Molotov cocktails, and arson. The occurrence of violent and deadly attacks on churches and non-Muslim individuals across the country indicate that the wider political atmosphere possibly fueled these attacks. An increase in hate speech and physical attacks preceded the violence against non-Muslim communities and places of worship in the 2000s, as the Protestant community has retrospectively documented.

### 2.2.2. Attacks on Cemeteries

One of the most prevalent forms of vandalism is the desecration of cemeteries. In 2022, vandals desecrated the Hasköy Jewish Cemetery in Istanbul, leaving 36 tombstones broken.<sup>16</sup> Authorities identified the assailants as five neighborhood children, aged 11 to 13, took them into custody, and filed a lawsuit against them.<sup>17</sup>

In a July 2022 attack on a historical Syriac Orthodox cemetery in Mardin,<sup>18</sup> vandals destroyed graves and scattered human remains<sup>19</sup>; local law enforcement failed to identify any assailants. A similar attack on a cemetery in Aydın in March 2020 resulted in 26 Alevi gravestones being broken. The families noted that this was not the first time the cemetery had suffered such an attack. Authorities identified the assailant as an allegedly mentally ill individual, who was subsequently taken to a hospital.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/istanbulda-teror-orgutu-deasa-yonelik-operasyon-duzenlendi/2806421>; <https://www.timesofisrael.com/turkey-arrests-15-is-members-who-allegedly-plotted-to-target-istanbul-synagogues>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://haber.sat7turk.com/danimarkalilara-kizdi-turkiyedeki-kiliseyi-tehdit-etti/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.salom.com.tr/haber/117915/metruk-halde-bulunan-sinagogun-kapisi-yakilmaya-calisildi>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/165239-kadikoy-de-rum-kilisesi-nin-kapisini-yaktilar>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/404493/bakirkoyde-bir-kilisenin-kapisinin-yakilmasi-meclis-gundeminde>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/assyrians/fires-assyrian-land-raise-arson-alarm>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nevesalom.org/terorEng.html>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/el-kaide-davasinin-gerekceli-karari-6395450>.

<sup>15</sup> A Catholic priest was murdered in 2006 in Trabzon, three Christian individuals working at a Christian publishing house were brutally murdered in 2007 in Malatya, and Turkish journalist of Armenian descent Hrant Dink was assassinated in 2007.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.duvarenglish.com/jewish-haskoy-cemetery-in-istanbul-vandalized-36-gravestones-broken-news-61032>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.salom.com.tr/salomTurkey/haber/123785/lawsuit-filed-against-children-who-had-vandalized-haskoy-cemetery>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/263991-suryani-sapelindeki-mezarlara-saldiri-olulerimizi-kabirde-bile-rahata-birakmiyorlar>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.persecution.org/2022/07/09/ancient-christian-cemetery-desecrated-turkey/>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.avlaremaz.com/2020/03/28/aydinda-alevi-mezarina-ve-mardinde-ezidi-mezarina-saldiri-neden-hep-mezar-saldirisi/>.

In February 2019, vandals targeted the tomb of Yazidi saint Sara Gin in Batman, disturbing her tomb and scattering her remains.<sup>21</sup> In March 2020, a historical Yazidi cemetery in Nusaybin, Mardin was also attacked.<sup>22</sup> Assaultants broke tombstones and desecrated the sacred figures of peacocks that adorned the tombstones. Local authorities, who failed to identify the desecrators, suggested that the damage may have been caused by powerful winds,<sup>23</sup> an unlikely scenario as the relief sculptures appeared selectively attacked and damaged.

In May 2022, assaultants broke tombstones at a Kurdish cemetery in Lice, Diyarbakır.<sup>24</sup> This incident followed 47 similar attacks between 2015 and 2020 targeting cemeteries in which members of the outlawed PKK are buried.<sup>25</sup> In contrast with the case of the Hasköy Cemetery, authorities did not launch investigations to identify who desecrated the Syriac and Kurdish cemeteries.

Although the cases of cemetery attacks share some similarities, the responses of Turkish government officials have varied widely. Government authorities—including the Minister of Interior, Istanbul governor, and the metropolitan police commissioner—immediately denounced the attack on the Hasköy Jewish Cemetery, and police identified the perpetrators within a 24-hour period. The attacks on the Syriac and Yazidi cemeteries in Mardin, the tomb of Sara Gin in Batman, the Alevi cemetery in Aydın, and the Kurdish cemetery in Diyarbakır, however, did not receive the same level of attention despite the near identical nature of the crimes.

### 2.2.3 Vandalism

The media survey, field research, and interviews with religious communities illustrated that vandalism (graffiti, breaking of doors and windows, damaging religious artifacts and paraphernalia, throwing stones, etc.) is the most common type of attack on religious sites, worship halls, and religious institutions. In many cases, victims do not report acts of vandalism to the police, who in turn rarely catch assaultants involved in graffiti or other minor acts of damage to property,

even if the vandals are caught on security footage. Such vandalism can then have a secondary effect of intimidating congregations and discouraging communal worship.

Graffiti is one of the most common types of attacks on religious sites, institutions, and cemeteries, for which there are a variety of examples. In 2021, “Allah 1” (God is one) was written on the wall of the Anatolian Protestant Church in Kadıköy, Istanbul,<sup>26</sup> in two separate incidents, “Satan” and “Bastard Christian” were written on the Surp Garabet Church in Istanbul.<sup>27</sup>

Other minor acts of vandalism are also common. For instance, in 2021, vandals damaged the sign of the Jewish cemetery in Akhisar on two occasions.<sup>28</sup> In 2020, an assaultant climbed the wall of the Surp Krikor Armenian Church in Istanbul and broke its cross.<sup>29</sup> In the Latin Catholic Church’s cemetery in Trabzon, a wooden cross placed as a grave marker was broken.<sup>30</sup> In yet another incident, an assaultant broke tiles of the Eyüp Sultan mausoleum because he thought they depicted a “devil motif.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, another individual vandalized the Bursa Grand Mosque (*Ulu Cami*) by attacking window railings that he believed featured crosses.<sup>32</sup>

The field research and interviews indicated that Turkish authorities fail to prosecute a wide array of vandalism cases, either because the assaultants remain at large or, in the cases in which they are caught, authorities do not move forward with prosecution. In many cases, the assaultants apologize and have their charges dropped, which further contributes to a culture of impunity and allows for the continuation of such crimes.

### 2.2.4 Intimidation and Threats

Through the media survey and interviews with members of religious communities, the project documented that threats aiming to prevent people from practicing and living according to their beliefs are common, frequent, and widespread. In this respect, there are several intimidation strategies, ranging from verbal assaults to kidnapping. In many cases, these threats come from individuals and groups with Islamist and ultranationalist backgrounds.

<sup>21</sup> <https://yeniyaamgazetesi4.com/ezidi-mezari-tahrip-edildi/>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/290320204>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://gazetekarinca.com/mardinde-ezidilere-ait-mezarlik-tahrip-edildi/>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/261271-diyarbakir-da-mezarlara-saldiri-hicbir-toplumda-kabul-gormez>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://ahvalnews.com/tr/kurtler/bes-yilda-47-kez-mezarlara-saldiri-oldu>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/kadikoyde-kilise-kapisina-allah-1-yazisi-supheli-serbest-birakildi-1896999>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/iog-din-inanc-veya-inancsizlik-temelli-nefret-suclari-2021.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.salom.com.tr/haber/117641/akhisar-musevi-mezarliginin-tabelasi-tekrar-yenilendi>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.diken.com.tr/kilisenin-hacini-kirip-yere-atan-saniga-verilen-hapis-cezasi-iptal-edildi/>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.birgun.net/haber/hristiyan-yurttasin-mezarina-gerici-saldiri-mezarinin-basina-yerlestirilen-tahta-hac-i-sokup-yaktilar-288117>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.diken.com.tr/eyup-sultan-turbesindeki-tarihi-cinilere-cekicli-saldiri-nefret-sucu-ve-cahillik/>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/bursada-ulu-camiye-balyozlu-saldiri-gozaltina-alindi-1828550>.

The communities receiving threats consider whether to file a report and inform the authorities. Representatives told the project team that, in some cases, they chose not to publicize the incident to ensure their safety by not inflaming the situation and drawing the sort of increased attention that could result in further attacks. There were also cases in which law enforcement attempted to discourage communities from filing a report following threats.

One common form of intimidation over the last decade has been the “marking” of Alevi households. These markings are particularly concerning as they sometimes precipitate violent acts. Based on the media survey, between 2012–2022 alone, the project team recorded 41 cases in which multiple Alevi households were marked in Adana, Adıyaman, Amasya, Ankara, Aydın, Balıkesir, Bursa, Elazığ, Erzincan, İstanbul, İzmir, Kocaeli, Malatya, Manisa, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, and Yalova. In most cases, the houses were marked with red crosses, or another mark was made with paint; some of those markings included graffiti with warnings such as “Alevi go away!”<sup>33</sup> The frequency and wide geographical distribution of these house markings indicate a larger pattern of threats targeting Alevi individuals and their families. Since the Alevi community has suffered from pogroms and violent attacks in the past, this trend is particularly worrisome.

Alevi places of worship are frequently the target of graffiti, hate speech, and intimidating attacks. The Kestel Cemevi in Bursa, for instance, was covered with hate speech accusing the community of involvement with the PKK<sup>34</sup> while the Garıpdede Cemevi’s signpost in İstanbul was marked with graffiti reading “şirk!” (idolatry).<sup>35</sup> There are also instances of significant property damage against Alevi sites, such as the Habipler Cemevi in İstanbul where assailants broke its windows and threw a flaming bucket inside, causing a fire in the worship space in 2017.<sup>36</sup>

Newer religious communities such as Protestants frequently receive threats as well. In an interview with one Protestant, the interviewee told researchers that locals often exhibit resistance to the establishment of a new Protestant church in a given town. In some cases, threats and criminal acts are also persistent and recurring. In Samsun, for instance, a Protestant church leader was subjected to 17 instances of intimidation and threats between 2007 and 2020, including death threats, assaults on his vehicle while in traffic, physical assault, and the attempted kidnapping of his son. The Artvin

Arhavi Protestant community and its leader also received multiple threats throughout 2021 and 2022, which prevented the community from establishing a church. These threats intensified after a political party’s district chair shared a social media post declaring, “we will destroy them.”<sup>37</sup> There have also been multiple instances in which assailants have verbally threatened congregations, either at the entrances of churches or blending into a group of worshipers and making insults and threats during religious ceremonies, and on occasion assaulting members.

The nonbeliever community has similarly received multiple threats and online attacks. On several occasions, far-right dailies published the identity and home addresses of the association’s members. Although the group reported the threats and online attacks, law enforcement failed to properly address the issue and never identified the perpetrators.

In certain cases, members of law enforcement agencies have engaged in acts that some perceive as threatening or that suggest culpability in the intimidation of religious communities. For example, members of the atheist community, like many other non-Muslim groups, regularly informs the police and local administration ahead of their public gatherings to ensure their protection. The group has reported incidents in which the police have leaked that information, leading to its publication in far-right dailies. The police have also frequently dispersed the group’s annual picnic gatherings under the pretense of security concerns. A member of the nonbeliever community explains this dynamic as a conundrum: on one hand, they need to inform the authorities for the group members’ safety, and on the other, the very authorities whom they inform have been suspected of using that information to stop their gatherings or endanger their lives by leaking it.

## 2.2.5 Political Context and the Patterns of Attacks

Ethnic and religious nationalism, antisemitism, and anti-immigrant sentiments have been on the rise in Turkey over the last decade. The threat to religious minorities becomes even more severe when the higher echelons of Turkish politics use discriminatory, marginalizing, and scapegoating rhetoric. This creates a precarious context for non-Muslim, non-Sunni Muslim, and ethnically non-Turkish communities in the country. Interviews with non-Muslim religious communities and atheists suggested that there may be a link between Turkey’s political climate and the frequency and severity of

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.birgun.net/haber/izmir-de-alevi-ailenin-evi-isaretlendi-277971>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/351636/kestel-cemevine-irkci-saldiri>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://pirha.org/garip-dede-turbesi-tabelasina-gerici-saldiri-sirk-yazildi-113052.html/18/03/2018/>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/sultangazideki-habibler-cemevine-tasli-saldiri-863173>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.protestankiliseler.org/?p=1075>.

the attacks they experience. These communities feel most vulnerable when Turkish officials at the highest levels make hateful and discriminatory public statements. Their religious sites and properties are particularly vulnerable to vandalism, attacks, and assaults in the days and weeks following such statements.

A member of the atheist community expressed that that community was targeted following public statements from officials, such as when in 2016 Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated in reference to PKK members that “they burned our mosques, these are atheists, these are Zoroastrians.”<sup>38</sup> On May 4, 2020, Erdoğan used the phrase “terrorist leftovers of the sword,” a reference to survivors of the Armenian Genocide and an inflammatory remark. Assaultants subsequently attacked the Dzinunt Surp Asdvadzadzin Armenian Church<sup>39</sup> on May 8 and the Surp Krikor Armenian Church<sup>40</sup> on May 23, both of which are located in Istanbul, while the Hrant Dink Foundation received death threats.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, in 2019, during a diplomatic spat between President Erdoğan and Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu, the former criticized the latter’s policies toward Palestinians by saying, “Do not incite us. We have never persecuted any Jews.” The Jewish community at the time was concerned that such remarks in bilateral relations could make Jewish individuals and sites in Turkey the target of hate crimes.<sup>42</sup>

Developments in global politics can also trigger violence. Tensions with Israel, especially concerning disputes regarding al-Aqsa Mosque, often have repercussions in the form of threats and intimidation towards Turkey’s Jewish community and attacks on synagogues. In July 2017, the ultranationalist Alperen Ocakları kicked the door of and threw stones at the Neve Shalom Synagogue following Israel’s installation of metal detectors at al-Aqsa.<sup>43</sup> A few days later, the Great Ottoman Association surrounded the Ahrida Synagogue in Istanbul and chanted antisemitic slogans.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the Armenian community of Istanbul was affected by the 2020 clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Three Armenians were harassed and attacked in

Kumkapı,<sup>45</sup> and a convoy of cars decorated with Azerbaijani flags circled the Armenian Patriarchate.<sup>46</sup> These incidents appear to be triggered by developments outside Turkey.

## 2.3 SAFETY, SECURITY, AND THE FUTURE OF PLACES OF WORSHIP

### 2.3.1 Official Recognition of Places of Worship

The Directorate of Religious Affairs, or Diyanet,<sup>47</sup> is a state agency in charge of Islamic religious affairs that pays for mosque repairs, maintenance, clergy, staffing, and utility bills. Since 2002, officially recognized churches and synagogues are eligible to receive compensation from Diyanet for their utility bills.<sup>48</sup>

In principle, worship halls of historical religious minorities in Turkey such as the Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish communities have official recognition as such. This recognition was accorded to some non-Muslim religious minorities in Turkey through the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>49</sup> However, newer religious communities do not necessarily have the same rights, as most worship spaces established by communities in the 20th and 21st centuries—such as Protestant churches and Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Halls—do not have official recognition as places of worship. To mitigate this problematic status, many non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim communities have established foundations or associations or have utilized an existing religious minority foundation. Doing so allows them to rent or purchase property to use as a place of worship in the name of a foundation, an association, or an individual. However, in many cases, local authorities can impede this process.

The Protestant community utilizes apartment flats, office spaces, or rented historical churches as their worship spaces. In several cases, local authorities or neighbors have prevented the Protestant community from establishing a place of worship, with the former claiming that police could not provide security due to ongoing threats, or the latter complaining about the proximity of a Protestant church. In Artvin, authorities pointed to the constant threats from locals

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/erdogan-bunlar-ateist-bunlar-zerdust-541650>

<sup>39</sup> <https://bianet.org/bianet/azinliklar/224051-bakirkoy-ermeni-kilisesi-nin-kapisi-yakilmak-istendi>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.diken.com.tr/kilisenin-hacini-kirip-yere-atan-saniga-verilen-hapis-cezasi-iptal-edildi/>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/27249/hrant-dink-vakfi-na-tehdit-davasinda-karar>.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.avlaremaz.com/2019/03/14/erdogan-konusmasinda-yahudi-vatandaslari-koz-olarak-ortaya-koydu/>.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.avlaremaz.com/2017/07/20/neve-salom-sinagoguna-antisemit-saldiri/>.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.avlaremaz.com/2017/07/22/neve-salom-ardindan-ahridaya-antisemit-saldiri-serdar-korucu/>.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/24355/kumkapi-da-ermenistanli-bir-genc-azerbaycanlilarin-saldirisina-ugradi>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/24614/kumkapi-da-ermeni-patrikhanesi-yakininda-azerbaycan-bayrakli-gosteri>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.diyaret.gov.tr/en-US/Institutional/Detail/1/establishment-and-a-brief-history>.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.enerjigunlugu.net/kilise-ve-havralarin-elektrigi-diyaretten-3245h.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i\\_-\\_political-clauses.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_-_political-clauses.en.mfa).

toward the Protestant community as an excuse to prevent the establishment of a church. In Trabzon, Protestants worship in private due to security concerns and fears of attacks.

In other instances, local authorities have worked with the Protestant community to find an accommodation. When locals complained about a newly established church in Sinop, the governor strategically allotted an alternate location, which both calmed the local community and allowed the church to have a more secure place. These types of accommodations are positive developments and contribute to the safety and sustainability of the community and their places of worship.

The Armenian Protestant community in Diyarbakır had turned their church over to the government due to security concerns in the 1980s, at a time when the region was experiencing terrorist attacks and armed clashes.<sup>50</sup> Although the community has since sought the return of their church multiple times, the government has not restituted this property. In 2021, the General Directorate of Foundations rented the facility to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for use as a library.<sup>51</sup> Such cases represent arbitrary decisions that leave communities without a stable and safe place of worship.

The Turkish government does not recognize Alevi *cemevis* as legitimate places of worship. The Alevi community has raised this issue for decades, consistently underlining the fact that this lack of recognition amounts to discrimination, and it has brought multiple cases to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).<sup>52</sup> In more recent years, the Turkish government has devised a system in response to some of these demands. Currently, a *cemevi* can file a petition to the office of the local governor or initiate a legal case to receive financial compensation for electricity bills (in this formulation, no other utilities are covered). Each case is decided independently, and the petition requires regular renewal. This process is bureaucratically cumbersome and, in many cases, takes an exceptionally long time to complete. To date, only nine Alevi institutions have managed to successfully file for and receive this financial compensation for their electricity bills. In addition, the government does not guarantee continuous service and demonstrates a failure to accord *cemevis* the same level of state support as Sunni places of worship.

In November 2022, the Turkish government established by presidential decree the Alevi-Bektaşî Culture and Cemevi Directorate under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.<sup>53</sup> This was done without consulting Alevi religious leaders or organizations. Various Alevi institutions objected to the establishment of an Alevi directorate under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism instead of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyamet), reflecting in their opinion the Turkish government's consideration of Alevism as a culture and not a legitimate religion. Alevi institutions expressed concern that this development represented an attempt by the Turkish state to promote its own version of Alevism and could lead to assimilation culminating in the state takeover of their *cemevis*. At present, this division not only defines the Alevi faith as a cultural practice, but also denies official recognition to *cemevis* as Alevi demand.<sup>54</sup>

Government recognition of places of worship is a crucial step to ensuring the future of religious communities and their religious sites. Without official recognition, religious communities face legal and financial limitations when it comes to establishing, operating, and maintaining places of worship. Consequently, this affects the protection of religious sites and their security. Government policy that allocates a substantial budget to Diyanet equivalent to nearly 1.9 billion USD in 2023—which comes from Turkish taxpayers irrespective of their religious affiliation but only benefits Sunni Muslims—is also discriminatory and impacts the ability of non-Sunni Muslim communities to support and maintain their own religious sites.

## 2.4 CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY BY THE GOVERNMENT

One of the most prominent threats faced by non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim religious communities is the confiscation of their property by the state, which can take place gradually, occur as an act of retaliation by the government, or result from the government taking advantage of bureaucratic mishaps. Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, there has been a sustained government takeover of non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim properties, including places of worship, educational institutions, revenue generating assets, and cemeteries.<sup>55</sup> The Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the compulsory population exchange of 1923,

<sup>50</sup> <https://stockholmcf.org/armenian-protestant-church-transformed-into-library-in-se-turkey/>.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/441379/diyarbakirda-ermeni-kilisese-kutuphane-yapildi-vakfin-malini-geri-verin>.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, *Alevi Ocağı* publishes annual reports of cases brought over to the ECtHR; for their annual reports see <http://aleviocagi.org/dava-takipleri>.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/cumhurbaskanligi-kararnamesi-ile-alevi-bektasi-kultur-ve-cemevi-baskanligi-kuruldu/2733130>.

<sup>54</sup> *Turkey Religious Freedom-Alevi Issues, Implementation of ECtHR Judgements Monitoring Report-V*, Alevi Philosophy Center, Istanbul, November 2022.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Mehmet Polatel (et al.) *2012 Declaration: The Seized Properties of Armenian Foundations in Istanbul* (Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları, Istanbul, 2012) for an extensive list of confiscated Armenian properties and their stories. This publication focuses specifically on the properties in Istanbul, which is only a fraction of all Armenian properties across Turkey. <https://hrantdink.org/attachments/article/90/2012beyanname-hepsi.pdf>.

which decimated both the Armenian and Greek Orthodox communities, left a significant number of Armenian and Greek Orthodox churches, monasteries, cemeteries, schools, institutions, and revenue generating properties without their constituents. In 1936, the Turkish government required non-Muslim minorities to submit a list of properties under their foundations within the short window of a few months. Because communities prepared these lists hurriedly, it was not uncommon for them to make mistakes in the spelling of property names or their addresses. The state took over any property not reported by the deadline. Such mistakes have posed a major impediment to communities seeking to reclaim these properties, even when they have documentation proving their ownership. Consequently, many rural churches and monasteries were left to decay, and unclaimed religious structures in urban areas were either demolished or converted for other use. The confiscation of properties continued throughout the 20th century.

In regions where non-Muslim minorities have been in steep decline, it has proved difficult for those communities to keep minority foundations active and to keep their records up to date. As a result, the General Directorate of Foundations or local authorities may take over the properties. Such confiscation can be gradual and occur without the knowledge of the community. For instance, Armenian, Jewish, and Greek cemeteries across Turkey have diminished in size due to various types of encroachment over the last century. Especially in urban centers, where non-Muslim communities no longer have active congregations, cemeteries gradually disappear during construction projects or are destroyed through processes of urban transformation. A member of the Alevi community explained that especially in places like Istanbul, where property prices are extremely high, the state gradually seized historical Alevi cemeteries and other properties.

Confiscation can also be used as a form of retaliation. Turkish authorities confiscated the Prinkipo Greek Orthodox Orphanage in Büyükada, Istanbul, in response to political tensions between Greece and Turkey regarding Cyprus in 1964. Upon taking over the wooden building, Turkish authorities closed it down and let it decay. In 2005, the Ecumenical Patriarchate brought the restitution case of the orphanage to the ECtHR which ruled in 2018 to return the site to the community. However, after 60 years of abandonment, the building had sustained significant

damaged and fallen into disrepair. The burden is on the Greek Orthodox community to repair and preserve the site at considerable financial cost.

Bureaucratic mishaps and the inability of religious communities to fulfill demanding bureaucratic requirements set by the General Directorate of Foundations to keep foundations active can also result in confiscation. The Arab Orthodox Church of Arsuz, Hatay, for instance, is an exemplary case. The Arab Orthodox community in Arsuz is a small and diminishing community. Over the last decade, the church went a few years without clergy, during which time the board of the Mar Yuanna Orthodox Church Foundation failed to file its paperwork. In response, the General Directorate of Foundations took over the church and its nine revenue generating properties in the early 2000s. The Directorate changed the name of the foundation and then rented the church back to its own community.<sup>56</sup> This has created a precarious situation for the community and its church, as the General Directorate can end the rental contract at any time. The community filed a lawsuit but was unable to reclaim ownership of its church and properties.

In 2017, the Turkish government revoked the Syriac Orthodox community's ownership of at least 110 properties.<sup>57</sup> A large proportion of the Syriac population living in southeastern Turkey left the country in the 1980s due to the post-military coup oppression and fighting between Turkish armed forces and the PKK.<sup>58</sup> Many church property deeds (encompassing cemeteries, churches, monasteries, vineyards, and olive groves) were registered under individuals' names due to bureaucratic obstacles that minority foundations faced in registering these properties under foundations. After a protracted legal case, the government returned 55 properties to the Syriac community,<sup>59</sup> but the dispute for an additional 70 confiscated properties, including monasteries and their revenue generating lands, continues. Of the returned properties, many are religious structures such as churches and monasteries; in many cases, revenue generating properties such as olive groves and agricultural lands are not returned.<sup>60</sup>

The state took over many Alevi and Bektashi worship halls, sacred sites, mausolea of saints, pilgrimage sites, and cemeteries either through legal action (such as the 1925 decree banning dervish lodges) or through gradual assimilation and Sunnification. The Hacı Bektaş Veli Dervish Lodge and Mausoleum, a revered religious site for the Alevi and Bektashi

<sup>56</sup> <https://nehna.org/arsuz-vakif-baskani-deniz-mulkumuz-yok-kullandigimiz-kilise-bile-bizim-degil/>.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/legal-limbo-turkeys-syriac-christian-properties-still-unresolved/>.

<sup>58</sup> *Report on the Situation of the Syriacs in Turkey, 2022*, European Syriac Union, Brussels, September 2022.

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/06/turkey-returns-confiscated-syriac-church-property-deeds/>.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/06/turkey-returns-confiscated-syriac-church-property-deeds/>.

faiths, is an important case to highlight. Following a violent takeover by the Ottomans in the 19th century, the lodge was given to a Sunni religious order that built a mosque within the dervish complex. In 1925, the site was closed pursuant to the decree shuttering dervish lodges and was only reopened as a museum in 1964. Even as a museum, however, the site still represents an important pilgrimage site and place of immense spiritual importance for Alevi and Bektashi communities. Alevis continue to demand its return to the community.<sup>61</sup> In 2022, a decision to sell some immovable property belonging to the Hacibektaş Municipality around the Hacı Bektaş Veli Dervish Lodge and Museum to the General Directorate of Foundations raised alarm. The Hacibektaş Association stated that the move constituted a threat to the lodge, as it paved the way for the possibility of the General Directorate to allocate the land to a Sunni foundation.<sup>62</sup>

A major problem facing many non-Muslim communities is the diminishing human resources needed to sustain their foundations. The continuing decline of Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish,<sup>63</sup> and Arab Orthodox populations presents a significant problem for the operation of minority foundations. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive and political framework protecting the property rights of minorities makes it harder for non-Muslim communities to prevent state confiscation of their foundation properties. The existing legal framework, as such, leaves the properties of minority communities vulnerable to state seizure.

## 2.5. HISTORIC RELIGIOUS SITES: RESTORATION, NEGLIGENCE, THREATS

### 2.5.1 Restoring Religious Sites

Without conservation and restoration efforts, historic religious sites fall prey to natural processes of decay, vandalism, and other forms of destruction. Restoration efforts not only ensure the survival of historical religious heritage but also preserve the memory of religious communities in these lands—especially where the communities that built these religious sites are no longer present. The work of such restoration can fall to either the communities themselves or to the government, through the General Directorate of Foundations, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, or local governments. In all cases, the responsible party is

still dependent on Turkish authorities to classify the site as historical and meriting restoration.

Over the last two decades, the Turkish government has restored select iconic sites of religious heritage. The most well-known cases are the restoration of the Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Surp Khach, on Akdamar Island in Van and the Greek Orthodox Panagias Soumela Monastery in Trabzon. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism restored both sites as prestige projects. Starting in 2011, when Turkey's membership in the European Union was a government priority, the authorities invited the Armenian Apostolic and Greek Orthodox churches to organize annual liturgies at these sites, as evidence that Ankara embraced the country's religious minorities. The acknowledgment of the importance of these sites for their respective religious communities was widely viewed as a gesture of tolerance and goodwill.

The General Directorate of Foundations has increasingly invested substantial resources to restore non-Muslim heritage sites over the last decade. The restoration of Kal Kados Ha Godal (the Great Synagogue) in Edirne and the Great Synagogue of Gaziantep are two examples. After the loss of their respective congregations, the General Directorate took over both sites; however, in the case of the Grand Synagogue of Edirne, it invited the Jewish community of Istanbul to take part in the opening, which has since held Shabbat prayers, Jewish holidays, and weddings in the synagogue.<sup>64</sup> The building serves both as a local community center and a religious site. The ongoing involvement of the Jewish community and the positive efforts of the municipal authorities and the local community have made this synagogue a hub for positive interfaith interaction. In contrast, the Gaziantep Synagogue opened as a cultural center in 2014, where the Jewish community participated in a Hannukah celebration in 2019.<sup>65</sup> However, since there is no local Jewish community, the synagogue has not become a similar space for such interfaith exchange.

An interviewee from the Jewish community underlined the importance of these restoration projects and stated that, if done right, such sites contribute significantly to developing a positive perception of non-Muslim communities and help to overcome negative stereotypes. The interviewee remarked on the positive contribution of the Edirne Synagogue and noted that although the Gaziantep Synagogue did not achieve the

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/haci-bektas-veli-dergahina-yapacagi-ziyaret-oncesi-alevi-orgutlerinden-erdogana-cagri-bu-ziyareti-de-samimi-1968565>.

<sup>62</sup> <https://pirha.org/haci-bektas-veli-dergahinin-bir-kisim-tasinmazinin-vakiflar-bolge-mudurlugune-satilmasina-itrizada-bulunuldu-345407.html/15/10/2022/>.

<sup>63</sup> For example, the Jewish population of Turkey has decreased significantly over the last two decades. In the beginning of the 2000s, the population was around 20,000. By 2015 that number had dropped to 17,300. In 2023 it is estimated to be around 14,300. This steep decline corresponds to the precarious political environment marked by systematic discrimination, rising antisemitism, and increasing hate speech and hate crimes against minorities. These conditions affect all non-Muslim and non-Sunni religious communities in Turkey.

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber/94611/edirne-sinagogu-acildi-sevgilimize-kavustugumuz-gundur>.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.duvarenglish.com/culture/2019/12/27/gaziantep-synagogue-reopens-after-40-years>.

same positive result, it was still an important step to recognize Jewish history in the region. Consequently, these restoration projects can have a positive impact on the long-term protection of these sites, particularly as locals become more familiar with their respective religious communities and are more likely to take an active role in their protection.

A Greek Orthodox interviewee expressed similar sentiments. The restoration of churches by local authorities in the Black Sea region and Cappadocia, for instance, are seen as a positive development. Over the last decade, local municipalities across Turkey have invested in restoring historical Greek Orthodox and Armenian churches, all of which were left in a derelict state without their congregations in the early 20th century. Many of these restored churches now serve as community centers, concert venues, libraries, or exhibition halls. For local municipalities, these sites also serve as an important tourism attraction, thanks to Greek and Armenian tourists visiting the homeland of their ancestors. The same Greek Orthodox interviewee described these trends as a positive development in preserving the memory of Christian communities in this region. However, in most of these examples of restoration, local authorities undertook the work without the involvement of the Greek Orthodox community. The interviewee further recognized that such restorations were unthinkable only a few decades ago, especially in the conservative and nationalist Black Sea region.

Nevertheless, the Turkish government impedes some efforts of non-Muslim communities to undertake similar restoration work. In the province of Bursa, the Ecumenical Patriarchate purchased two abandoned historical Greek Orthodox churches in Mudanya in 2011, both of which had been under the ownership of local Muslims.<sup>66</sup> The Patriarchate intended to turn them into local cultural centers that would occasionally hold worship services. However, the Turkish government has delayed the restoration project for a decade by demanding multiple changes to the architectural plans. Despite this apparent stalling tactic, interviews with the predominantly Muslim community in Bursa suggested that the local population positively perceives the planned restoration of these two churches, with the expectation that the projects would contribute to tourism and the local economy.

The restoration of non-Muslim and non-Sunni religious heritage by the Turkish state is an important positive step. These projects can be funded through different institutions.

The religious buildings restored through the General Directorate of Foundations, as some interviewees pointed out, are carried out from an earmarked pool of funds collected from confiscated non-Muslim foundations. As noted above, many non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim communities consider state seizure of property a significant threat to their religious sites. Consequently, the utilization of funds generated from seized properties for the restoration of non-Muslim religious heritage is a point of contention.

## 2.5.2 Urban Development

The field study, interviews, and media survey included references to multiple examples of religious sites that were left without their respective religious communities throughout the 20th century. Some of these sites were left to the elements and disappeared entirely due to decay, vandalism, stone quarrying, and treasure hunting. Of those that remain, many have been repurposed as grain silos, warehouses, industrial sites, stables, cowsheds, penitentiaries, gyms, movie theaters, and other functions. Numerous churches have also been converted into mosques, some instances of which took place immediately after the 1923 population exchange; they appear to represent the structurally best-preserved sites.

Aggressive and uncontrolled urban development is a threat to religious sites across Turkey. This is especially evident in the cases in which religious properties are taken over and destroyed for urban development projects in sprawling cities. The plans to construct housing blocks in Muş in 2014, for instance, threatened the Armenian Meryem Ana Church.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the Armenian Surp Minas Church in Erzurum at one point faced possible destruction resulting from an urban renewal construction project.<sup>68</sup>

The research documented examples of non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim cemeteries that have gradually decreased in size, especially in provinces where non-Muslim populations have faced steep decline. One prominent example is Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul—the focus of country-wide protests in 2013 against its urban development—which was once part of an Armenian cemetery destroyed in the 1930s and subsequently taken over by urban sprawl.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, the Armenian Catholic cemetery and its chapel in Ulus, Ankara, were in a derelict state for most of the 20th century, and parts of it similarly fell to urban development over the years. In 2021, construction activity by Turkey's Public Housing Administration (TOKI) uncovered human

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.bursahakimiyet.com.tr/bursa/bas-melekler-metropolite-satildi-25704>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/7867/mus-kilisesi-yikima-direniyor>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/26516/erzurum-surp-minas-kilisesi-nasil-kurtulur>

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/2794/gezi-parki-nin-yani-basindaki-ermeni-mezarligi>; for more examples of confiscated Armenian properties across Istanbul, see 2012 Declaration: *The Seized Properties of Armenian Foundations in Istanbul* (Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları, Istanbul, 2012). <https://hrantdink.org/tr/bolis/yayinlar/31-kulturel-miras/90-2012-beyannamesi>.

remains at the site.<sup>70</sup> Similar cases of the destruction of non-Muslim cemeteries as part of an ongoing process of urban development remain common across Turkey.<sup>71</sup>

Non-Sunni Muslim religious communities in Turkey are already under significant financial burden to serve their congregations, sustain their places of worship, and ensure their security. Caring for their historical religious sites, especially in regions where their numbers are in decline or where no community is left, can be untenable and daunting. In most cases, neglect by the authorities compounds the damage to these historic structures and cemeteries. In the absence of government support, they face destruction or severe damage.

### 2.5.3 Treasure Hunting

Treasure hunting is one of the most widespread, normalized, and destructive threats to non-Muslim historical religious sites and cemeteries. The research noted multiple examples of this activity, which targets the sites of nearly all non-Muslim communities across Turkey. In general, abandoned churches, monasteries, and cemeteries in rural areas are particularly susceptible to treasure hunting. However, treasure hunters have been known to target worship halls and cemeteries even in a busy metropolis like Istanbul.

In Trabzon, the research team encountered and documented numerous examples of illicit digs at churches and monasteries. Treasure hunters often damage religious buildings by digging multiple and substantial holes inside and outside the structure; smashing architectural elements bearing decorations such as columns, capitals, and decorated altars; defacing icons and frescoes; and removing stones from walls and pillars. Their actions not only cause massive damage to the religious buildings, but also make them structurally instable and more susceptible to decay and destruction by the elements. The normalization of treasure hunting is alarming. The local authorities, for instance, suggested that the research team directly contact known treasure hunters, because the treasure hunters would best know the location of churches and monasteries in the area.<sup>72</sup>

Another case involved the Surp Garabed Armenian Catholic Church. In 2021, the Diyarbakır Bar Association's Environment and Urban Law Commission filed a criminal

complaint about damage at the church caused by treasure hunting, under provisions of laws on Destroying Cultural and Natural Property and Damaging Places of Worship and Cemeteries. Although the investigation found that a search for treasure had indeed caused the damage at the site, it failed to account for any religiously biased motivations on the part of the perpetrators.<sup>73</sup>

A further example is the Surp Sarkis Church in Diyarbakır, which is on the brink of collapse and has suffered intense treasure hunting activity in and around its edifice.<sup>74</sup> Members of the political opposition have argued that local authorities have failed to take necessary precautions to prevent such activity as part of a policy of purposeful neglect.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, treasure hunters have heavily damaged the St. Ioannis Prodromos Greek Orthodox Church in Istanbul, which is under the jurisdiction of the General Directorate of Foundations, despite its conspicuous location in the middle of a metropolis. The Armenian cemetery in Sincan, Ankara, has also faced repeated damage from treasure hunters.<sup>76</sup>

Although treasure hunting disproportionately targets non-Muslim religious buildings and cemeteries, it is extremely challenging to demonstrate its conduct as a targeted and intentional destruction of a particular community's heritage. Furthermore, the legal framework regarding treasure hunting remains ambiguous, and in many cases, it provides no adequate means of holding offenders accountable.

### 2.5.4 Destruction and Damage in Armed Conflict

Armed conflict between outlawed PKK militants and the Turkish military in Diyarbakır in 2015 damaged the Surp Giragos Armenian Apostolic Church, the Mar Petyun Chaldean Church, the Surp Sarkis Armenian Apostolic Church, the Şeyh Mattar Mosque, and the Kurşunlu Mosque, among other religious buildings.<sup>77</sup> The epicenter of the six-month armed conflict was the historic Sur district where many religious heritage sites, belonging to a variety of religious groups, are located. The use of heavy artillery and small arms not only harmed the external architecture of the Surp Sarkis, Surp Giragos, and Mar Petyun churches but destroyed their interior furnishings as well.

The Armenian community in Diyarbakır and the wider Armenian diaspora had restored Surp Giragos only four years

<sup>70</sup> <https://medyascope.tv/2021/03/26/ankara-ulusta-uzerine-toki-insaati-yapilan-ermeni-katolik-mezarligi-ve-sapelinin-hikayesi-baskentin-yerli-hiristiyanlarina-ait-son-kilise/>.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/7988/bir-garip-mezarlik-ve-yok-edilen-hafiza>.

<sup>72</sup> The research team neither contacted nor had any interaction with known treasure hunters during fieldwork.

<sup>73</sup> *Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief or Non-Belief in Turkey, 2021 Report Summary Findings*, p. 9; <https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/hate-crimes-motivated-by-bias-based-against-religion-belief-or-non-belief-in-turkey-2021.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/391277/diyarbakirda-surp-sarkis-kilisesi-onlem-alinmazsa-tarihi-kilise-yikilacak>.

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.duvarenglish.com/culture/2020/09/26/surp-sarkis-church-in-diyarbakir-raided-by-treasure-hunters-due-to-govt-failure-to-protect-it>.

<sup>76</sup> <https://medyascope.tv/2020/08/26/ankarada-defincedilerin-hedefindeki-ermeni-mezarligi-ermeni-deyince-zengin-zannedip-talan-edyorlar/>.

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/19181/diyarbakir-kiliseleri-hala-ibadet-kapali>.

earlier with the support of the local government. Members of the Surp Giragos Armenian Church Foundation had organized an international fundraising campaign to finance the cost of the restoration, after which the site resumed functioning as a worship hall.<sup>78</sup> In 2015, the church hosted a centennial commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>79</sup> Until armed clashes erupted later that same year, Surp Giragos had not only served the religious needs of the Armenian community but represented a beacon of hope for reconciliation as well.

In the months following those armed clashes in 2015, government authorities closed off the Sur district. The Armenian community had no access to its religious sites during that time, and Surp Giragos faced damage not only from the conflict but from vandalism.<sup>80</sup> In April 2016, the Turkish government announced its decision to expropriate the Sur district, inclusive of Surp Giragos and other churches, as part of an urban renewal program.<sup>81</sup> Communities had to subsequently file to reclaim ownership of their sites.<sup>82</sup> The Surp Giragos Church Foundation reclaimed ownership of its church following a legal suit.<sup>83</sup> The Turkish Government funded the restoration of the Kurşunlu and Şeyh Mattar Mosques and the Surp Giragos and Mar Petyun Churches through the General Directorate of Foundations.<sup>84</sup> In April 2023, Surp Giragos hosted an Easter Liturgy for the first time in eight years.<sup>85</sup> The Diyarbakır Armenian community joined the Armenian Patriarchate in expressing its gratitude to the government for its support in restoring the church.

## 2.6 PROTECTING PLACES OF WORSHIP AND RESPONDING TO ATTACKS

### 2.6.1 Community Responses to Protect Places of Worship

Data from the field research, interviews, and media survey indicate that the Turkish government's efforts to protect religious properties and places of spiritual importance fall short in discouraging threats and preventing attacks. Almost all non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim communities included in this study have faced a variety of attacks and threats. All these groups, including atheists, expressed concern about the effectiveness of the state providing

proper protection to places of worship, cemeteries, religious institutions, and schools.

To protect against attacks, some communities installed their own security systems. In the aftermath of the 2003 synagogue bombings in Istanbul, the Jewish community invested in sophisticated security systems with cameras at all their places of worship, institutions (schools, social clubs, youth centers, etc.), and cemeteries across Turkey. These systems are centrally controlled and monitored. Entry to synagogues in Istanbul requires visitors to pass through double blast doors and metal detectors. Visitors must present photo identification, and international visitors must provide their passports. The Jewish community pays for these security systems, which constitutes a substantial annual budget item.

Protestant communities, meanwhile, work closely with law enforcement to ensure their safety. Community leaders in each city make an effort to build personal relations with the police and in many cases have their cell phone numbers to reach them directly in the event of a problem. They also often invest in security cameras for their places of worship. Likewise, the Arab Orthodox community works closely not only with the police force but with other local authorities as well to ensure their security. The Arab Orthodox community lives in a province that borders Syria and considers attacks by designated terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS a significant threat. For protection against terrorist attacks, the community depends on intelligence from government agencies.

In general, Christian communities regularly inform the police and local authorities, namely provincial and sub-provincial governors, in advance of major public gatherings and religious holidays. Likewise, atheists inform law enforcement agencies and local authorities before their annual picnics and other public activities. Although this is a regular practice to ensure the safety of these communities, it highlights an ingrained religious inequality, as the Sunni Muslim community does not similarly feel the need to inform police ahead of its public worship or religious holidays.

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/11871/surp-giragos-church-wins-europa-nostra-award-for-conservation>.

<sup>79</sup> <https://armenianweekly.com/2015/05/01/armenian-genocide-commemorated-in-diyarbakir/>.

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/12/armenian-church-plundered.html>.

<sup>81</sup> <https://armenianweekly.com/2016/03/28/breaking-expropriated-properties-in-diyarbakir/>.

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/14862/agos-manset-yangindan-mulk-kacirma>.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/18162/surp-giragos-kamulastirmasina-durdurma>.

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/22090/surp-giragos-ve-mar-petyun-kiliseleri-bakanlik-tarafindan-yenilenecek>.

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/bittersweet-easter-for-turkish-city-s-dwindling-armenian-community-/7043456.html>.

Regular monitoring by law enforcement is crucial to the safety of religious groups. At the same time, however, religious communities have expressed concern that these agencies also exploit this necessity in order to surveil their communities and activities.

### 2.6.2 Police Responses to Protect Places of Worship

In most major cities, an officer within the local police force is assigned to manage the protection of places of worship. These officers evaluate, investigate, and document threats and attacks on religious communities and their properties. In cases for which they receive intelligence about possible attacks or harm to worship halls or their congregations, they inform religious communities. They may increase security around churches, synagogues, and other places of worship in the event of a significant threat, like a terrorist attack.

A member of the Protestant community shared that they have sometimes had a hard time convincing the police about the veracity of possible threats and incidents that they report (e.g., suspicious people hanging out near religious sites, insults, graffiti, throwing things at churches or houses). In some cases, only the prospect of media interest or involvement has convinced police officers to document or investigate an incident. Members of the atheist community, too, voiced their concern that police are reluctant even to acknowledge a crime or its seriousness if it did not involve significant damage to property or human lives.

These concerns highlight the importance of reporting in order to stop, apprehend, and appropriately punish assailants. Law enforcement agencies are often the first responders in the aftermath of an attack or incident, and police officers are responsible for crime scene investigation, documenting evidence, interviewing witnesses, and evaluating the severity of a threat or attack. Their failure to take reports seriously can lead to a breach of trust with these communities that already often feel vulnerable and under threat.

According to the Turkish Criminal Code, attacks on places of worship and cemeteries are classified as criminal offenses with a prison sentence of up to four years, or up to 12 years if an incident is determined to constitute a hate crime. However, it remains difficult to achieve a hate crime determination due to lack of adequate training for police officers to recognize a hate crime and the reluctance of victims to report such crimes. Individuals may prefer not to report crimes due to fears of ostracization or that authorities will not take their claims seriously. Moreover, religious minority communities themselves may not be aware of the procedures to make a hate crime determination.

Although police officers are typically quick to respond to cases that are reported, rigorous prosecution rarely follows this initial step. The media survey indicated that, from among reported cases, only 25.4 percent resulted in penalties for the perpetrators (Figure 4).<sup>86</sup> In some cases, investigators determined that assailants were minors or mentally unwell, and did not pursue their investigations further. In other cases, victims withdrew their complaints after assailants apologized.

In summary, attacks on religious places rarely receive a commensurate penalty, and police often fail to conduct investigations in a manner that is sufficient to identify and prosecute culprits to the fullest extent of the law. These trends serve to foster a broader culture of impunity that contributes to the perpetuation of crimes against minority groups and their religious properties.

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<sup>86</sup> Please note that the media survey carried out covered eight media outlets for two decades and includes only published cases of attacks on religious sites. This number does not reflect a numerical study of cases from legal documents and archives. As noted in an expert interview under the current Turkish legal system, crimes against religious communities and their religious sites are not categorized as such. This situation creates a major challenge in providing statistical data for investigating whether assailants receive adequate punishment.

# CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, acts of vandalism have become the most prominent form of attack on religious sites in Turkey. However, if a given crime does not involve firearms or significant physical harm to individuals or property, many religious communities either do not report the crime or withdraw their complaints after receiving an apology from the assailants. In many cases, the assailants are either deemed not at fault due to mental illness or released because they are minors. Only a small percentage of assailants face prosecution and, of those, a much smaller percentage receives penalties. Turkey's culture of impunity, resulting from non-reporting of incidents and failures of the law enforcement system, further exacerbates the frequency and severity of attacks on religious sites. Proper measures should be taken to end impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of attacks on religious sites, worship halls, religious institutions, and cemeteries.

Turkish security forces actively monitor many religious sites that belong to religious minority communities. When they receive intelligence of potential or planned violence, especially of major attacks by domestic and international terrorist groups, they indeed take steps to inform the targeted communities and take necessary security precautions. Religious communities expressed that, in many cases, they have regular communication with local police departments, which they view as a positive development. Communities would benefit from initiatives that provide religious literacy and sensitivity training to civil servants, members of law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary, and support the proper reporting of such crimes.

The Turkish government's work to restore historical places of worship belonging to non-Muslim communities is beneficial in curbing threats and attacks, since these places then become hubs of positive interaction between majority and minority religious communities. This sort of interaction directly contributes to overcoming negative stereotypes, building empathy, and promoting pluralism. However, these restoration projects are too few at present to make such positive interactions sufficiently widespread across Turkish society.

The discriminatory practices of the General Directorate of Foundations put non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim religious sites at greater risk. When the General Directorate confiscates non-Muslim religious sites and their revenue generating properties, the ensuing decrease in revenue from such properties—which is crucial to fund security measures to protect religious sites—makes such sites more vulnerable to threats and attacks.

The Turkish government's negligence of non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim religious heritage sites is a critical issue. Additionally, treasure hunting and illicit excavations in historical churches, synagogues, and non-Muslim cemeteries remain disturbingly common and normalized.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr. Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir** is the coordinator of Anti-Defamation League’s Task Force on Middle East Minorities. She is also a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute and the co-chair of International Religious Freedom Roundtable’s Middle East Working Group. Dr. Tanyeri-Erdemir’s research focuses on minority rights in the Middle East, heritage management of sacred sites, converted and contested religious buildings, and re-utilization and museumification of religious heritage. She has carried out extensive field research on religion and policy as part of numerous international interdisciplinary research projects, including “Antagonistic Tolerance: A Comparative Analysis of Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites” funded by the National Science Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the European Commission-funded “RELIGARE: Religious Diversity and Secular Models in

Europe,” where she was the leader of the Turkish team. Dr. Tanyeri-Erdemir is the co-author of *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Sacred Sites and Spaces* (Routledge, 2016) and various scholarly articles published in *History and Anthropology*, *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and *Journal of Field Archaeology*, among others. Her op-eds have appeared in *Hürriyet Daily News*, *Kathimerini English*, *Newsweek*, *Providence*, *The Conversation*, and *The Globalist*.

In the research and writing of this report, Dr. Tanyeri-Erdemir worked with a Turkey-based team, who prefer to remain anonymous given the threats faced by scholars working on human rights and freedom of religion or belief issues in the country.

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**1.1 LIST OF SITES VISITED AND RECORDED FOR THE PROJECT**

Site Name	County
<b>BURSA</b>	
Agia Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church	Mudanya
St Panteleimon Church (Gölyazı Cultural Center)	Nilüfer
Agios Georgios Greek Orthodox Church (Uğur Mumcu Culture Center)	Mudanya
Özlüce Agios Georgios Greek Orthodox Church	Nilüfer
Armenian Catholic Church	Yıldırım
Trilye Dünder House	Mudanya
Panagia Pantobasilissa Church	Mudanya
Nilüfer Cemevi	Nilüfer
Taksiarhis (Başmelekler) Church	Mudanya
Geruş Synagogue	Osmangazi
Mayor Synagogue	Osmangazi
<b>DIYARBAKIR</b>	
Surp Sarkis Armenian Church	Sur
Diyarbakır Protestant Church	Sur
St Mary Syriac Orthodox Church	Sur
Surp Giragos Armenian Church	Sur
Mar Petyun Chaldean Church	Sur
Armenian and Syriac Cemetery	Sur
Pir Sultan Abdal Association / Diyarbakır Cemevi	Bağlar
<b>EDİRNE</b>	
Sveti George Bulgarian Church	Center
Sveti Constantin and Elena Bulgarian Church	Center
Edirne Cemevi	Center
Italian Church	Center
St. John Prodromos Church	Uzunköprü
The Has Yunus Bey Shrine (Agios Evplos Chapel)	Enez
The Enez Fatih Mosque (Hagia Sophia Church)	Enez
Tatarlar Shrine	Süloğlu
Jewish Cemetery	Center
Kasımpaşa Mosque	Center
<b>ELAZIĞ</b>	
Ahmet Bey Masjid	Harput
Armenian Cemetery	Center
Dabakhane Masjid	Harput
Surp Gatoğige Church	Kovancılar
St Mary Syriac Church	Harput
Khule Vank Monastery	Center
Surp Garabed Church	Harput
Surp Agop Church	Harput
Tadım Monastery Surp Asdvadzadzin Church	Center
Elazığ Protestant Church	Center

Site Name	County
<b>IZMIR</b>	
Algazi Synagogue	Konak
Bikur Holim Synagogue	Konak
Etz Hayim Synagogue	Konak
Narlıdere Cemevi	Narlıdere
Rabbinat	Konak
Yabets Synagogue	Bergama
Agia Fotini Orthodox Church	Konak
St John Church	Konak
Portugal Synagogue	Konak
St Maria Catholic Church	Konak
<b>KAYSERI</b>	
Ağırnas Agios Prokopios Church	Melikgazi
Taxiarchis Church	Melikgazi
Surp Stephanos Church	Melikgazi
Agia Triada Church	Endürlük
Panagia Church / Yamandede Mosque	Talas
Agios Dimitrios Church	İncesu
Panagia Church	Reşadiye
Zincidere Protestant Church	Talas
Kayseri Protestant Church	Melikgazi
Surp Asdvadzadzin Church	Melikgazi
<b>MARDIN</b>	
Monastery of Mor Efrem	Artuklu
St Mary Syriac Catholic Church	Artuklu
Monastery of Mor Abay	Savur
Monastery of Mor Dimet	Savur
Monastery of Mor Theodute	Savur
<b>TRABZON</b>	
Santa Maria Catholic Church	Ortahisar
Catholic Cemetery	Ortahisar
The Agia Sophia Mosque (Agia Sophia Church)	Ortahisar
Maidens' Monastery	Ortahisar
St Anna (Küçük Ayvasıl) Church	Ortahisar
Surp Amenapırgiç Armenian Church / Kaymaklı Monastery	Ortahisar
Hızırbey Primary School / St John Church	Ortahisar
St Michael Church	Akçaabat
Chapel	Akçaabat
St Philip Church / Kutbettin Mosque	Ortahisar
Hüsni Köktuğ Pasha Mosque	Ortahisar
Fatih Mosque	Ortahisar
Aya Gorğor Church / Mosque	Maçka
Agios Ioannis Church	Maçka
Verizana Church	Maçka
Agios Georgios Church / Yazlık Neighborhood Mosque	Maçka

# MODULE II: LIST OF SITES VISITED AS KEY SITES OF RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

## 2.1. PANAGIAS SOUMELA / SÜMELA MONASTERY, MAÇKA, TRABZON



**City/province/locality:** Trabzon, Maçka

**Date of construction:** 4th Century

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Greek Orthodox

**Original Function:** Monastery

**Current Function:** Museum

**Religious Community:** Greek Orthodox, Pontic

**Current Owner:** General Directorate of Foundations (temporarily transferred to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture)

**Current Listing:** Designated as a national historical monument in 1972; 'archaeological conservation area' of first and third degree in 1981; included as part of the Altındere Valley as a national park in 1987.

## 2.2. CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY CROSS / SURP KHATCH, AKDAMAR ISLAND, VAN



**City/province/locality:** Van, Gevaş

**Date of construction:** 10th century AD

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Armenian Apostolic

**Original Function:** Monastery

**Current Function:** Museum

**Religious Community:** Armenian Apostolic

**Current Owner:** State Treasury

**Current Listing:** Officially registered in 1979, Ministry of Culture and Tourism

### 2.3. HACI BEKTAŞ DERVISH LODGE AND SHRINE, NEVŞEHİR



**City/Province:** Nevşehir, Hacıbektaş

**Date of construction:** 13th Century

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Alevi - Bektashi

**Original Function:** Shrine

**Current Function:** Museum

**Current Owner:** Ministry of Culture and Tourism

**Current Listing:** Ministry of Culture and Tourism

### 2.4. SEYH MATTAR MOSQUE AND THE FOUR-PILLARED MINARET, DIYARBAKIR



**City/province/locality:** Diyarbakır, Sur

**Date of construction:** 16th Century

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Sunni Islam

**Original Function:** Mosque

**Current Function:** Mosque

**Religious Community:** Sunni Islam

### 2.5. GRAND SYNAGOGUE / KAL KADOS HA GODAL, EDİRNE



**City/Province:** Edirne, Central Province

**Date of construction:** 1909

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Jewish

**Original Function:** Synagogue

**Current Function:** Synagogue, Cultural Center

**Current Owner:** General Directorate of Foundations

**Current Listing:** General Directorate of Foundations

### 2.6. SVETI STEFAN CHURCH / ST STEPHAN CHURCH / IRON CHURCH, ISTANBUL



**City/province/locality:** Istanbul, Fatih

**Date of construction:** 1898

**Original Religious Affiliation:** Bulgarian Orthodox

**Original Function:** Church

**Current Function:** Church

**Religious Community:** Bulgarian Orthodox

**Current Owner:** Foundation of Bulgarian Orthodox Churches

**Current Listing:** General Directorate of Foundations

# MODULE III: LIST OF SITES VISITED FOR REGIONAL SURVEYS

## 3.1. BURSA

- Agia Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church
- St Panteleimon Church (Gölyazı Cultural Center)
- Mudanya Greek Orthodox Church
- Agios Georgios Church
- Armenian Catholic Church
- Agios Ioannis Church / Trilye Dünder House
- Panagia Pantobasilissa Church (Kemerli Church, Trigleia Monastery)
- Nilüfer Cemevi (Alevi Cultural Associations Bursa Branch)
- Taxiarchis Church
- Geruş and Mayor Synagogues

## 3.2. DIYARBAKIR

- Surp Sarkis Armenian Church
- Diyarbakır Protestant Church
- Meryem Ana Syriac Church
- Surp Giragos Church
- Mar Petyun Chaldean Church
- Diyarbakır Armenian-Syriac Cemetery
- Diyarbakır Cemevi and Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association

## 3.3. EDİRNE

- Sveti Georgi Bulgarian Church
- Sveti Constantine and Helena Church
- Edirne Cemevi
- St Anthony Italian Church
- St. John Prodromos Church
- Has Yunus Bey Shrine / Agios Evplos Chapel
- The Enez Fatih Mosque (Hagia Sophia Church)
- Tatarlar Shrine
- Edirne Jewish Cemetery

## 3.4. ELAZIĞ

- Harput Ahmet Bey Masjid
- Elazığ Armenian Cemetery
- Dabakhane Chapel/Masjid
- Surp Gatogige Church
- Church of the Virgin Mary
- Khule Vank Monastery/Surp Kevork Church
- Surp Garabed Church
- Surp Hagop Church
- Tadım/Yalavuz Venk Church (Church of the Virgin Mary)
- Armenian Protestant Church

## 3.5. IZMİR

- Algazi Synagogue
- Bikur Holim Synagogue
- Etz Hayim Synagogue
- Narlıdere Cemevi
- The Rabbinate
- Yabets Synagogue
- Agia Fotini Greek Orthodox Church (Former Dutch Flemek Protestant Church)
- St John's (Yuhanna) Church
- Portuguese Synagogue
- Santa Maria Church

## 3.6. KAYSERİ

- Ağırnas Prokopios Church
- Taxiarchis Church
- Efkere Surp Stephanos Church
- Agia Triada Church
- Talas Panagia Church / Yaman Dede Mosque
- Agios Dimitrios Church
- Reşadiye Panagia Church
- Zincidere Protestant Church
- Kayseri Protestant Church
- Surp Asdvadzadzin Church

### 3.7. MARDIN

- Monastery of Mor Efrem
- Monastery of Mor Abay

### 3.8. TRABZON

- Santa Maria Catholic Church
- Trabzon Catholic Cemetery
- Hagia Sophia Mosque
- Maidens' Monastery (Panagia Theotokos)
- St Anne / Küçük Ayvasıl Church
- Surp Amenapirgich Armenian Church (Kaymaklı Monastery)
- Hızırbey Primary School / St John Church
- St Michael Church / Ortamahalle Museum
- Ortamahalle Chapel
- St Philippos Church / Kudrettin Mosque
- Hüsnü Göktuğ Pasha Mosque
- Ortahisar Fatih Mosque / Panagia Chrysokephalos Church
- Aya Gorğor Church
- Agios Ioannis Church
- Verizana Church
- Yazlık Neighborhood Mosque / Agios Georgios Church

# MODULE VI: MEDIA SURVEY

## DEFINITIONS

**Gun/Knife Assault/Murder Attempt:** Using a weapon to kill or scare during an attack

**Arson / Fire:** Attacks using fire with or without certainty of arson

**Bombing:** Realized bomb attacks

**Hate Speech/Graffiti/Inscriptions:** Attacks on a sanctuary or a place of worship by writing words of hate speech discriminatory phrases, or graffiti directed towards a certain group

**Marking houses:** Marking the places of residence (commonly by inscribing an “X”) where certain religious groups/people live

**Murder:** Killing of individuals

**Other:** Mobbing, acts of humiliation, kidnapping, illicit excavations/treasure hunting in sacred places, cyber-attacks, website blocking, armed conflict, inappropriate behavior in places of worship, attempt to take down/close the sign of the religious site.

**Physical attack:** Attacks that involve breaking glass, windows, doors, breaking in, breaking with stones to intimidate

**Police attack:** A physical police intervention in the religious site

**Robbery:** Cases of sacred items stolen from a religious site

**Threats:** Verbal or written statements by individuals or a group of people or government agency representatives to places of worship, religious representatives or members of a particular religion, suggesting the possibility of future destruction, physical assault or murder

## 4.1. LIST OF INCIDENTS FROM MEDIA SURVEY 2003-2022

Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
1	2003	Beth İsrail Synagogue and Neve Şalom Synagogue	Jewish	İstanbul	Bombing	Found	Yes
2	2003	Rosa Maria Mogem and Candan Saraçoğlu	Protestant	Eskişehir	Police Harrassment	N/A	N/A
3	2004	Melki Ürek	Syriac Orthodox	Adıyaman	Threat	Found	Unknown
4	2004	A.U.S. Christian	Protestant	Gaziantep	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
5	2004	Agos Newspaper	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Unknown
6	2005	İzmit Protestant Church	Protestant	Kocaeli	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
7	2005	International Protestant Church	Protestant	Ankara	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
8	2006	Epiphany Ceremony	Greek Orthodox	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Unknown
9	2006	Kamil Kiroğlu	Protestant	Adana	Physical Attack	Found	No
10	2006	Santa Maria Catholic Church	Catholic	Trabzon	Murder	Found	Yes
11	2006	Saint Hellen Catholic Church	Catholic	Izmir	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
12	2006	Surp Krikor Lusavorich Church	Armenian	Kayseri	Armed Assault	Not Found	No
13	2006	Saint Polycarp Church	Catholic	Izmir	Bombing	Not Found	No
14	2006	Catholic Church	Catholic	Mersin	Physical attack	Found	Yes
15	2006	Syriac Church	Syriac Orthodox	Diyarbakır	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
16	2006	St John Liturgy	Greek Orthodox	Izmir	Threat	Found	No
17	2006	Pierre Françoisse Rene Brunissen	Catholic	Samsun	Murder Attempt	Found	Yes
18	2006	Syriac Cemetery	Syriac Orthodox	Adıyaman	Physical Attack	Unknown	No
19	2006	An American Missionary and Five Evangelists	Protestant	Unknown	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
20	2006	Ödemiş Sevgi Protestant Community	Protestant	Izmir	Bombing	Not Found	No

Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
21	2006	Priest of the Eskişehir Church	Christian	Eskişehir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
22	2007	Hrant Dink	Armenian	Istanbul	Murder	Found	Yes
23	2007	Agos Newspaper	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Yes
24	2007	Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
25	2007	Agos Newspaper	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Yes
26	2007	Çayırılı Cemevi	Alevi	Erzincan	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
27	2007	St Mary Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Armed Assault	Found	Yes
28	2007	Yusuf Türker	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Bombing	Not Found	No
29	2007	Zirve Publishing House	Protestant	Malatya	Murder	Found	Yes
30	2007	Four Missionaries	Protestant	Istanbul	Police Harrassment	N/A	N/A
31	2007	Mehmet Şahin Çoban	Protestant	Izmir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
32	2007	Orhan Pıçaklar's Son	Protestant	Samsun	Kidnapping Attempt	Not Found	No
33	2007	Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation	Protestant	Eskişehir	Bombing	Not Found	No
34	2007	Mehmet Şahin Çoban	Protestant	Izmir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
35	2007	Radio Shema	Christian	Ankara	Threat	Not Found	No
36	2007	Ahmet Güvener	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
37	2007	Antalya Bible Church	Protestant	Antalya	Physical Attack	Found	No
38	2007	Kocamustafapaşa Agape Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
39	2007	Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation	Protestant	Kocaeli	Physical Attack	Found	No
40	2007	Diyarbakır Protestant Church	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Arson	Found	Unknown
41	2007	Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation	Protestant	Kocaeli	Arson	Found	Yes
42	2007	Agos Newspaper	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Yes
43	2007	Andreas Rombopulos	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
44	2007	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Not Found	No
45	2007	Sivas Massacre (2nd July) Mausoleum	Alevi	Ankara	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
46	2007	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Kidnapping Attempt	Found	Unknown
47	2007	Edip Daniel Savcı	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Kidnapping	Found	Yes
48	2007	Adriano Francini	Catholic	Izmir	Murder Attempt	Found	Yes
49	2007	Samsun Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	Unknown
50	2007	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	No
51	2007	Ramazan Arkan	Protestant	Antalya	Murder Attempt	Found	Yes
52	2008	Ankara Kurtuluş Churches	Protestant	Ankara	Armed Assault	Unknown	Unknown
53	2008	Two Missionaries	Christian	Rize	Police Harrassment	N/A	N/A
54	2008	Bektashi Cemetery	Alevi	Istanbul	Construction	N/A	N/A
55	2009	Söz Bookstore	Christian	Adana	Physical Attack	Found	Yes
56	2009	Kadıköy International Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
57	2010	Buca Baptist Church	Protestant	Izmir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
58	2010	Ankara Kurtuluş Churches	Protestant	Ankara	Physical Attack	Found	No
59	2010	Alevi Graves	Alevi	Denizli	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
60	2010	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Murder Threat	Not Found	No
61	2010	Luigi Padovese	Catholic	Hatay	Murder	Found	Yes
62	2010	Mor Yakup Church	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Inscription	Not Found	No
63	2010	Alevi Yol Cultural Association Cemevi	Alevi	Izmir	Arson	Not Found	No
64	2010	Karataş Christian Community	Protestant	Izmir	Threat	Found	No

	Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown
65	2010	Ümraniye Protestant Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
66	2010	Kuşadası Protestant Church	Protestant	Aydın	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
67	2010	Karacaören Village Cemevi	Alevi	Istanbul	Bombing	Unknown	Unknown
68	2010	A Church Leader	Christian	Istanbul	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
69	2010	Yeni Yaşam Church	Protestant	Gaziantep	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
70	2011	Santa Maria Church	Catholic	Trabzon	Threat	Not Found	No
71	2011	Işık Church Association	Protestant	Yalova	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
72	2011	Protestant Church	Protestant	Bursa	Bombing	Not Found	No
73	2011	Diriliş Church	Protestant	Izmir	Murder Attempt	Found	Unknown
74	2011	St Pavlus Catholic Church	Catholic	Adana	Physical Attack	Found	Yes
75	2011	Bible Information Association	Protestant	Ankara	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
76	2011	Şammas Demir	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Murder Attempt	Unknown	Unknown
77	2011	Samsun Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	No
78	2011	Catholic Church	Catholic	Bursa	Arson	Not Found	No
79	2011	Orhan Pıçaklar's Son	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	No
80	2011	Işık Church Association	Protestant	Yalova	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
81	2011	Muslim Cemetery	Muslim	Denizli	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
82	2011	Zeynel Odabaş	Alevi	Istanbul	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
83	2011	Bible Information Association	Protestant	Ankara	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
84	2011	Yeni Doğuş Church	Protestant	Aydın	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
85	2011	Işık Church Association	Protestant	Yalova	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
86	2011	Malatya Church Member	Protestant	Malatya	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
87	2012	Pastor Engin Duran	Protestant	Izmir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
88	2012	Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical Attack	Found	No
89	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adıyaman	Marking Houses	Not Found	No
90	2012	Söz Bookstore	Christian	Adana	Threat	Not Found	No
91	2012	Mor Yohannon Church	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Robbery	Unknown	Unknown
92	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Izmir	Marking Houses	Not Found	No
93	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Gaziantep	Marking Houses	Not Found	No
94	2012	Avcılar Village	Alevi	Erzincan	Marking Houses	Not found	No
95	2012	Grace Church Pastor	Protestant	İstanbul	Physical Attack	Not found	No
96	2012	An Alevi House	Alevi	Aydın	Marking Houses	Not found	No
97	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Aydın	Marking Houses	Not found	No
98	2012	Sıtkı Baba Cemevi	Alevi	Mersin	Inscription	Not Found	No
99	2012	Denizli Laodicea Church	Protestant	Denizli	Attempt to move the church	N/A	N/A
100	2012	An Alevi Family	Alevi	Malatya	Physical attack	Not found	No
101	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Balıkesir	Marking houses	Not found	No
102	2012	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Police harrassment	N/A	N/A
103	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
104	2012	A Christian Woman	Protestant	Batman	Police harrassment	N/A	N/A
105	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Mersin	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
106	2012	Agios Georgios Church	Greek Orthodox	Antalya	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
107	2012	Two Protestants	Protestant	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
108	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown

Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
109	2012	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Found	Unknown
110	2012	Marista Küçük	Armenian	İstanbul	Murder	Found	Yes
111	2012	Diriliş Church	Protestant	Izmir	Threat	Found	No
112	2013	Emre Karaali	Protestant	Kocaeli	Murder Attempt	Found	Unknown
113	2013	Karşıyaka Cemetery	Alevi	Ankara	Physical attack	Not found	No
114	2013	Yeni Umut (New Hope) Church	Protestant	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
115	2013	Agios Ioannis Church	Greek Orthodox	Istanbul	Physical attack	Found	No
116	2013	Agape Protestant Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical attack	Found	No
117	2013	Surp Hovhannes Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Armed Assault	Found	Unknown
118	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Istanbul	Marking houses	Not found	No
119	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Amasya	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
120	2013	Armenian Cemetery	Armenian	Tekirdağ	Construction	N/A	N/A
121	2013	Alevi Citizens	Alevi	Hatay	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
122	2013	Sultangazi Pir Sultan Cemevi	Alevi	Istanbul	Armed Assault	Unknown	Unknown
123	2013	Alevi Graves	Alevi	Izmir	Physical attack	Not found	No
124	2013	Mor Barsom Church	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Robbery	Found	Unknown
125	2013	Orhan Pıçaklar	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	No
126	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adıyaman	Marking houses	Not Found	No
127	2013	A Member of the Protestant Community	Protestant	Malatya	Threat	Not Found	No
128	2013	Kurtuluş Church	Protestant	Ankara	Physical attack	Not Found	No
129	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adıyaman	Marking houses	Found	Unknown
130	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adıyaman	Marking houses	Found	Unknown
131	2013	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Malatya	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
132	2013	Kurtuluş Church	Protestant	Ankara	Robbery	Not Found	No
133	2013	An Armenian Women	Armenian	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
134	2013	D.G	Protestant	Mardin	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
135	2014	Ataşehir Yeni Umut (New Hope) Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Threat	Not Found	No
136	2014	Çevreyolu Cemetery	Muslim	Antalya	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
137	2014	Kadıköy International Fellowship Church	Protestant	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	No
138	2014	Agia Paraskevi Holy Spring	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Physical attack	Not Found	No
139	2014	Agios Georgios Church	Greek Orthodox	Antalya	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
140	2014	Church Leader	Protestant	Mardin	Threat	Found	No
141	2014	Atheism Association	Atheist	Istanbul	Threat	Not Found	No
142	2014	Onpınar Cemevi	Alevi	Muş	Murder	Unknown	Unknown
143	2014	Bahçelievler Grace Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Threat	Not Found	No
144	2014	Diyarbakır Church Website	Protestant	N/A	Cyber	N/A	N/A
145	2014	Allahu Ekber Mosque	Caferi	İstanbul	Arson	Not Found	No
146	2014	Gaziantep Cemevi	Alevi	Gaziantep	Armed Assault	Not Found	No
147	2014	St. Etienne Church	Catholic	İstanbul	Knife Assault	Not Found	No
148	2014	A Christian Student	Christian	Kayseri	Threat	Not Found	No
149	2014	Muhammediye Mosque	Caferi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
150	2014	Muhammediye Mosque	Caferi	İstanbul	Arson	Unknown	Unknown
151	2014	Ortaköy Synagogue	Jewish	İstanbul	Physical attack	Not Found	No
152	2014	Göktürk Synagogue	Jewish	Istanbul	Threat	Not Found	No

	Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown
153	2014	Agos Newspaper and Fatih Akin	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Unknown
154	2014	Alevi Graves	Alevi	Izmir	Physical attack	Not Found	No
155	2014	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Istanbul	Marking houses	Not Found	No
156	2014	A Group of Foreign Nationals	Christian	Izmir	Police harrassment	N/A	N/A
157	2014	Neve Shalom Synagogue, Istanbul	Jewish	Istanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
158	2014	Kadıköy International Fellowship Church	Protestant	İstanbul	Arson	Found	Unknown
159	2014	Ataşehir Yeni Umut (New Hope) Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical attack	Not Found	No
160	2014	Bible Church and Bible Church Association	Protestant	Antalya	Police harrassment	N/A	N/A
161	2014	Diyarbakır Protestant Church Mardin Representation	Protestant	Mardin	Physical attack	Not Found	No
162	2014	Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	Unknown
163	2015	Halil Kara	Christian	Antalya	Police harrassment	N/A	N/A
164	2015	Hasan Alaparmak Mosque	Sunni	Gaziantep	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
165	2015	Alevi Neighborhood	Alevi	Malatya	Marking houses	Not Found	No
166	2015	Atheism Association	Atheist	Istanbul	Access ban to the website	N/A	N/A
167	2015	Agia Pareskevi Kilisesi	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Robbery	Found	Unknown
168	2015	Protestant Church	Protestant	Balıkesir	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
169	2015	Agos Newspaper	Armenian	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Yes
170	2015	Sedat Bilgin	Alevi	Hatay	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
171	2015	Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical attack	Found	No
172	2015	Agape Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
173	2015	Mobilium Shopping Mall	Christian and Jewish	Bursa	Threat	N/A	N/A
174	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adiyaman	Marking houses	Not Found	No
175	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adiyaman	Marking houses	Not Found	No
176	2015	Agia Triada Church	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Arson	Found	Unknown
177	2015	Alevi Associations	Alevi	Adiyaman	Marking houses	Not Found	No
178	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Kocaeli	Marking houses	Not Found	No
179	2015	Iskenderun Bible Church	Protestant	Hatay	Physical attack	Not Found	No
180	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Elazığ	Marking houses	Not Found	No
181	2015	Sivas Massacre (2nd July) Mausoleum	Alevi	Ankara	Physical attack	Not Found	No
182	2015	An Alevi Family	Alevi	Kahramanmaraş	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
183	2015	An Alevi Family	Alevi	Bursa	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
184	2015	Gazi Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Police attack	N/A	N/A
185	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
186	2015	Maksutuşağı Village	Alevi	Erzincan	Marking houses	Not Found	No
187	2015	Zeynel Odabaş	Alevi	Istanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
188	2015	Baki Düzgün and Doğan Demir	Alevi	İstanbul- Ankara Highway	Armed Assault	Unknown	Unknown
189	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
190	2015	Camp Armen	Armenian	İstanbul	Physical attack	Not Found	No
191	2015	Apostle Petrus Monastery	Armenian	Muş	Fire	Not Found	No
192	2015	Alevi Graves	Alevi	Istanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
193	2015	Kulan Village Cemetery	Alevi	Muş	Construction	N/A	N/A
194	2015	Kırk Göze Sacred Site	Alevi	Tunceli	Bombing	Unknown	Unknown
195	2015	Leader of Torbalı Baptist Church	Protestant	Izmir	Armed Assault	Not Found	No

Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
196	2015	Batkent Bereket Church	Protestant	Ankara	Physical attack	Not Found	No
197	2015	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Ankara	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
198	2015	Kadı Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
199	2015	Nasuh Paşa Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
200	2015	Fatihpaşa Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
201	2015	Şeyh Mattar Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
202	2015	Arap Şeyh Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
203	2015	Hasırlı Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
204	2015	Hacı Hamid Mosque	Sunni	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
205	2015	Surp Giragos Church	Armenian	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
206	2015	Mar Petyun Church	Chaldean	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
207	2015	Armenian Catholic Church	Armenian Catholic	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
208	2016	Kalfayan Armenian Primary School	Armenian	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
209	2016	Yusuf Akbulut	Syriac Orthodox	Diyarbakır	Armed Conflict	N/A	N/A
210	2016	Hagop Yakup Demirci	Armenian	İstanbul	Murder	Found	Yes
211	2016	Yüreğir Church	Protestant	Adana	Threat	Found	Unknown
212	2016	Ahmet Güvener	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Threat	Not Found	No
213	2016	Samsun Protestant Church	Protestant	Samsun	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
214	2016	Protestant Communities	Protestant	Ankara	Threat	Not Found	No
215	2016	Hatay Jewish Cemetery	Jewish	Hatay	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
216	2016	Protestant Church	Protestant	Malatya	Physical attack	Not Found	No
217	2016	Santa Maria Church	Catholic	Trabzon	Physical attack	Not Found	No
218	2016	Four People	Christian	Gaziantep	Police attack	N/A	N/A
219	2016	Antakya Orthodox Church	Greek Orthodox	Hatay	Takbir	Not Found	No
220	2016	Surp Haç Armenian High School	Armenian	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
221	2016	Syriac Cemetery	Syriac Orthodox	Adıyaman	Physical attack	Not Found	No
222	2016	Alevi Kültür Association Cemevi	Alevi	Gaziantep	Bombing threat	Not Found	No
223	2016	Kalfayan Armenian Primary School	Armenian	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
224	2016	Baki Düzgün	Alevi	İstanbul	Takbir	Unknown	Unknown
225	2016	Syriac Cemetery	Syriac Orthodox	Adıyaman	Physical attack	Not Found	No
226	2016	Alevi Bektashi Federation	Alevi	Ankara	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
227	2016	Bomonti Mihitaryan High School	Armenian	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
228	2016	Pastor of Esenlik Church	Protestant	Çanakkale	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
229	2016	Christmas Celebrations	Christian	All Turkey	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
230	2017	Ganiefendiçiftliği Village Cemevi	Alevi	Erzincan	Fire	Found	No
231	2017	Radio Shema	Protestant	Ankara	Threat	Not Found	No
232	2017	Ezidi Cemetery	Ezidi	Şanlıurfa	Physical attack	Not Found	No
233	2017	Nene Hatun Mosque	Sunni	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
234	2017	Neve Shalom Synagogue	Jewish	İstanbul	Physical Attack	Found	Yes
235	2017	Yeni Doğuş Church	Protestant	Izmir	Physical Attack	Not Found	No
236	2017	Ahrıda Synagogue	Jewish	İstanbul	Threat	Found	Unknown
237	2017	Esentepe Mosque	Sunni	Samsun	Physical Attack	Found	Unknown
238	2017	Balıkesir Church	Protestant	Balıkesir	Hate inscription on the walls	Found	No
239	2017	Balıkesir Church	Protestant	Balıkesir	Physical Attack	Found	No

	Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown
240	2017	Hubyar Sultan Lodge	Alevi	Tokat	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
241	2017	Ömerler Village Mosque	Sunni	Bolu	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
242	2017	Russian Church	Russian Orthodox	Erzurum	Arson	Unknown	Unknown
243	2017	Latin Catholic Church	Catholic	İstanbul	Robbery	Found	Unknown
244	2017	Surp Krikor Lusavoriç Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Robbery	Found	Unknown
245	2017	Surp Hovhannes Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
246	2017	Habipler Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Arson	Found	Unknown
247	2017	Cemal Gürsel Neighborhood	Alevi	Malatya	Marking houses	Found	Unknown
248	2017	Kurtuluş Churches Association	Protestant	Malatya	Physical Attack	Found	No
249	2017	Armutlu Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Police attack	N/A	N/A
250	2017	Bahçelievler Lütüf (Grace) Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
251	2017	Alihocacı Cemetery	Alevi	Adana	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
252	2017	An Atheist Family	Atheist	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
253	2017	Kadıköy International Fellowship Church	Protestant	Istanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
254	2017	Balıkesir Church	Protestant	Balıkesir	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
255	2017	An Alevi House	Alevi	Manisa	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
256	2017	Christmas Celebrations	Christian	All Turkey	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
257	2018	Hubyar Sultan Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Hate speech	Unknown	Unknown
258	2018	Santa Maria Church	Catholic	Trabzon	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
259	2018	Garip Dede Lodge	Alevi	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
260	2018	Ahmet Güvener	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Threat	Found	No
261	2018	Surp Takavor Armenian Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Found	No
262	2018	Hacı Bektaş Veli Cultural Center and Cemevi	Alevi	Bursa	Hate inscription on the walls	Found	Yes
263	2018	Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association Kartal Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Not Found	No
264	2018	Hasret Gültekin Park	Alevi	Ankara	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
265	2018	Profitis İlias Greek Church	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
266	2018	Mardin Protestant Church	Protestant	Mardin	Physical attack	Not Found	No
267	2018	Mardin Protestant Church	Protestant	Mardin	Threat	Found	No
268	2018	An Alevi Family	Alevi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
269	2018	Garip Dede Lodge	Alevi	İstanbul	Inappropriate behaviour	Found	Unknown
270	2018	Küçükarmutlu Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Police attack	N/A	N/A
271	2018	Diriliş Church	Protestant	Izmir	Threat	Found	No
272	2018	Panagia Greek Orthodox Church	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Suspicious digging	Unknown	Unknown
273	2018	Demirtaş (Timurtaş) Mosque	Sunni	Edirne	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
274	2018	An Alevi House	Alevi	Izmir	Marking houses	Not Found	No
275	2018	Protestant Church	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Physical attack	Found	No
276	2018	Christmas Celebrations	Christian	All Turkey	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
277	2019	Cankurtaran Church Association	Protestant	İstanbul	Removing the church's signboard	N/A	N/A
278	2019	Pîrê Zîrav Cemetery Sara Gin's Grave	Ezidi	Batman	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
279	2019	Surp Hreşdagabet Armenian Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
280	2019	Bolu Church	Christian	Bolu	Close down the church	N/A	N/A
281	2019	New Life Center Community	Protestant	Gaziantep	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
282	2019	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Izmir	Physical attack	Not Found	No

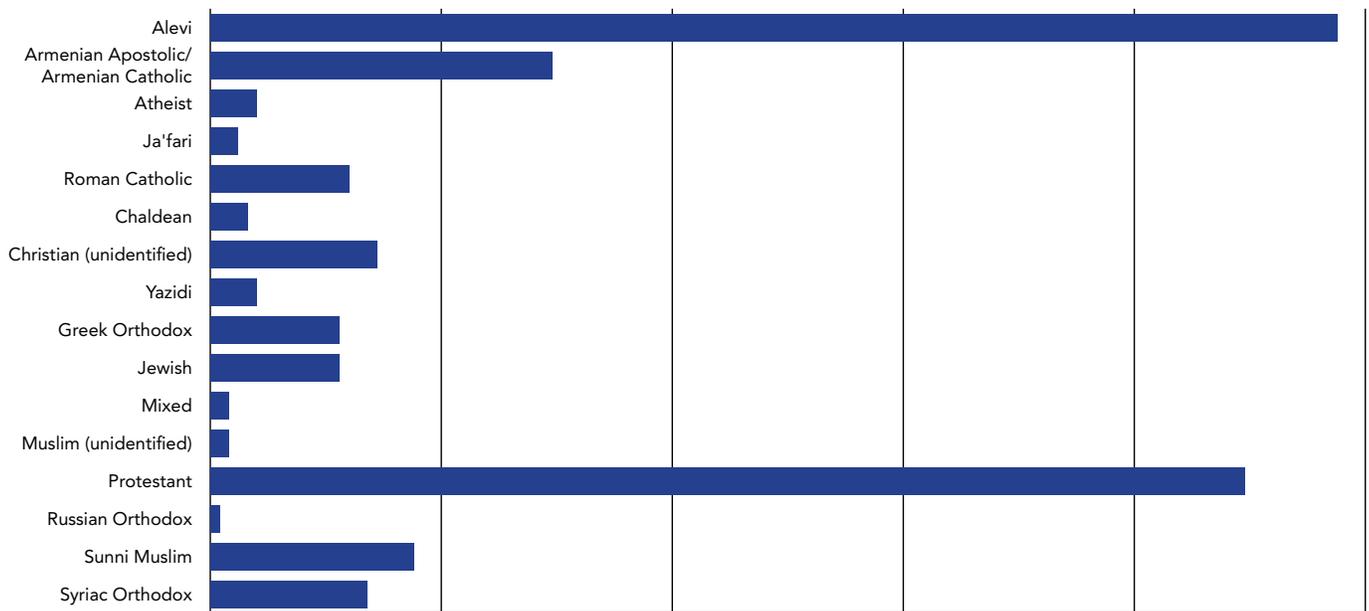
Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
283	2019	Suruç Kardeşler (Brothers) Church Association	Protestant	Gaziantep	Threat	Not Found	No
284	2019	Beth Israel Synagogue	Jewish	Izmir	Bombing	Found	Yes
285	2019	Pirha News Agency	Alevi	N/A	Cyber attack	Not Found	No
286	2019	Zafir Pinaris	Greek Orthodox	Çanakkale	Murder	Found	Yes
287	2019	Arpine T.	Armenian	İstanbul	Physical attack	Not Found	No
288	2019	Aşağı İçmeler Sacred Site	Alevi	Kahramanmaraş	Arson	Not Found	No
289	2019	Eyüp Sultan Cemetery	Alevi	İstanbul	Destruction	N/A	N/A
290	2019	Pir Sultan Abdal House	Alevi	Sivas	Destruction	N/A	N/A
291	2019	Y.E.	Christian	Kocaeli	Physical attack	Not Found	No
292	2019	Deyrulzafaran Monastery	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Arson	Not Found	No
293	2019	Gültepe Neighborhod Cemetery	Alevi	Hatay	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
294	2019	Saint Paul Church	Christian	Antalya	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
295	2019	Ali Öztürk House	Alevi	Bursa	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
296	2019	Hakkı Aradağ	Alevi	Tunceli	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
297	2019	Kurtuluş Churches Association	Protestant	Malatya	Threat	Found	No
298	2019	An Alevi House	Alevi	Izmir	Marking houses	Not Found	No
299	2019	Verde Gökmen	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Threat	Found	No
300	2019	Jin-Wook Kim	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Murder	Found	Yes
301	2019	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Izmir	Marking houses	Not Found	No
302	2019	Akbelen City Cemetery	Sunni	Mersin	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
303	2019	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Istanbul	Marking houses	Found	Unknown
304	2019	Yezidi Families	Ezidi	Batman	Physical attack	Found	Yes
305	2019	Ceyhan Cemevi	Alevi	Adana	Physical attack	Not Found	No
306	2019	Christmas Celebrations	Christian	All Turkey	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
307	2020	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Malatya	Marking houses	Found	Yes
308	2020	Hurmüz and Şimoni Diril	Chaldean	Şırnak	Kidnapping	Found	Ongoing trial
309	2020	Pir Sultan Abdal Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
310	2020	Gümelî Cemevi and Culture Association	Alevi	Zonguldak	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
311	2020	Ortaköy Cemetery	Christian	Ankara	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
312	2020	Latin Catholic Cemetery	Catholic	Trabzon	Physical attack	Not Found	No
313	2020	Armutlu Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Police attack	N/A	N/A
314	2020	Birlik Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
315	2020	Alevi Cemetery	Alevi	Aydın	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
316	2020	Hasan Beg Cemetery	Ezidi	Mardin	Physical attack	Not Found	No
317	2020	Sığacık Mosque	Sunni	Izmir	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
318	2020	Dzinunt Surp Asdvadzadzin Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Arson	Found	Unknown
319	2020	Gazi Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Police attack	N/A	N/A
320	2020	Bayraklı and Bornova Mosques	Sunni	Izmir	Other	Found	Unknown
321	2020	Surp Krikor Armenian Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	No
322	2020	Hrant Dink Foundation	Armenian	İstanbul	Threat	Found	Yes
323	2020	Zini Gediği Commemoration Site	Alevi	Erzincan	Physical attack	N/A	N/A
324	2020	Düzgün Baba Sacred Site	Alevi	Tunceli	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
325	2020	Antalya Bible Church	Protestant	Antalya	Threat	Found	No
326	2020	Agape Protestant Church	Protestant	Samsun	Threat	Found	Unknown

	Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown
327	2020	Alevi Houses	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Unknown	Unknown
328	2020	Sarılar Neighborhood	Protestant	Hatay	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
329	2020	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Izmir	Marking houses	Not Found	No
330	2021	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Yalova	Marking houses	Not Found	No
331	2021	Surp Garabet Church	Armenian	Istanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
332	2021	Süleyman Özmen	Ezidi	Mardin	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
333	2021	Akhisar Jewish Cemetery	Jewish	Manisa	Physical attack	Not Found	No
334	2021	Kasturya Synagogue	Jewish	İstanbul	Arson	Not Found	No
335	2021	The Great Mosque	Sunni	Bursa	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
336	2021	An Alevi House	Alevi	Elazığ	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
337	2021	Şalom Newspaper	Jewish	Istanbul	Cyber attack	Unknown	Unknown
338	2021	Marta Şimoni Church	Chaldean	Şırnak	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
339	2021	An Alevi Family	Alevi	Istanbul	Threat	Found	Unknown
340	2021	Kurtuluş Church	Protestant	Aydın	Threat	Found	No
341	2021	Özbey Family	Alevi	Izmir	Threat	Found	Unknown
342	2021	Hüseyin Karababa	Alevi	Ankara	Marking houses	Not Found	No
343	2021	Surp Takavor Armenian Church	Armenian	İstanbul	Humiliation	Found	Yes
344	2021	Sezer Öztürk	Alevi	İstanbul	Marking houses	Not Found	No
345	2021	Ağaçkesilen Sacred Site	Alevi	Tokat	Threat	N/A	N/A
346	2021	An Atheist Person	Atheist	Diyarbakır	Threat	Not Found	No
347	2021	Ali Baba Cemevi	Alevi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
348	2021	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Adana	Marking houses	Not Found	No
349	2021	Ceyhan Cemevi	Alevi	Adana	Physical attack	Not Found	No
350	2021	Surp Garabet Armenian Church	Armenian	Istanbul	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
351	2021	S.G.	Alevi	Hatay	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
352	2021	An Alevi Family	Alevi	Şanlıurfa	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
353	2021	An Atheist	Atheist	Batman	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
354	2021	S.A.	Alevi	Şanlıurfa	Hate inscription on the walls	Unknown	Unknown
355	2021	Anatolian Protestant Church	Protestant	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	No
356	2021	Protestant Community	Protestant	Artvin	Threat	Not Found	No
357	2022	Zöhre Ana Cemevi	Alevi	Ankara	Threat	Found	Yes
358	2022	Alevi Community	Alevi	Kocaeli	Hate Speech	Found	Yes
359	2022	St Mary Church	Chaldean	Mardin	Robbery	Unknown	Unknown
360	2022	Akşemsettin Mosque	Sunni	Düzce	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
361	2022	Şeyh Hüsamettin Mosque	Sunni	Istanbul	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
362	2022	A Syriac Family	Syriac Orthodox	Mardin	Physical attack	Found	No
363	2022	Panagia Evangelistria Church	Greek Orthodox	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	No
364	2022	Ökkeş Eruslu Mosque	Sunni	Gaziantep	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
365	2022	Hasköy Jewish Cemetery	Jewish	İstanbul	Physical Attack	Found	Ongoing trial
366	2022	Tibrevank Association	Armenian	İstanbul	Robbery	Unknown	Unknown
367	2022	Diyarbakır Church	Protestant	Diyarbakır	Threat	Not Found	No

Year	Attacked Site / Person	Religion / Sect	Province	Attack Type	Assailants	Penalty Yes/ No/Unknown	
368	2022	Şah-ı Mardan Culture Houses Construction and Survival Association Ana Fatma Cemevi Gökçebel Village Association Turkmen Alevi Bektashi Foundation Headquarters	Alevi	Ankara	Physical attack	Found	Ongoing trial
369	2022	Selami Sarıtaş	Alevi	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Yes
370	2022	Narlı Cemevi Administrators	Alevi	Kahramanmaraş	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
371	2022	Gaziantep Synagogue	Jewish	Gaziantep	Robbery	Found	Yes
372	2022	Eyüp Sultan Tomb	Sunni	İstanbul	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
373	2022	Ümit Kuşbakan	Alevi	Izmir	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
374	2022	Kurtuluş Churches Association	Protestant	Malatya	Threat	Found	Unknown
375	2022	Hüseyin Gazi Lodge	Alevi	Ankara	Arson	Found	Yes
376	2022	Yeniköy Cemetery	Christian and Muslim	Diyarbakır	Physical attack	Unknown	Unknown
377	2022	Several Mosques	Sunni	Çankırı	Physical attack	Found	Unknown
378	2022	Hacıbektâş Veli Cemevi	Alevi	Kayseri	Threat	Found	Unknown
379	2022	Pir Sultan Abdal Cemevi	Alevi	Istanbul	Threat	Unknown	Unknown
380	2022	Hacı Bektâş Veli Anatolian Culture Foundation - Ceyhan Cemevi	Alevi	Adana	Physical Attack	Unknown	Unknown
381	2022	Alevi Houses	Alevi	Mersin	Marking houses	Found	Unknown

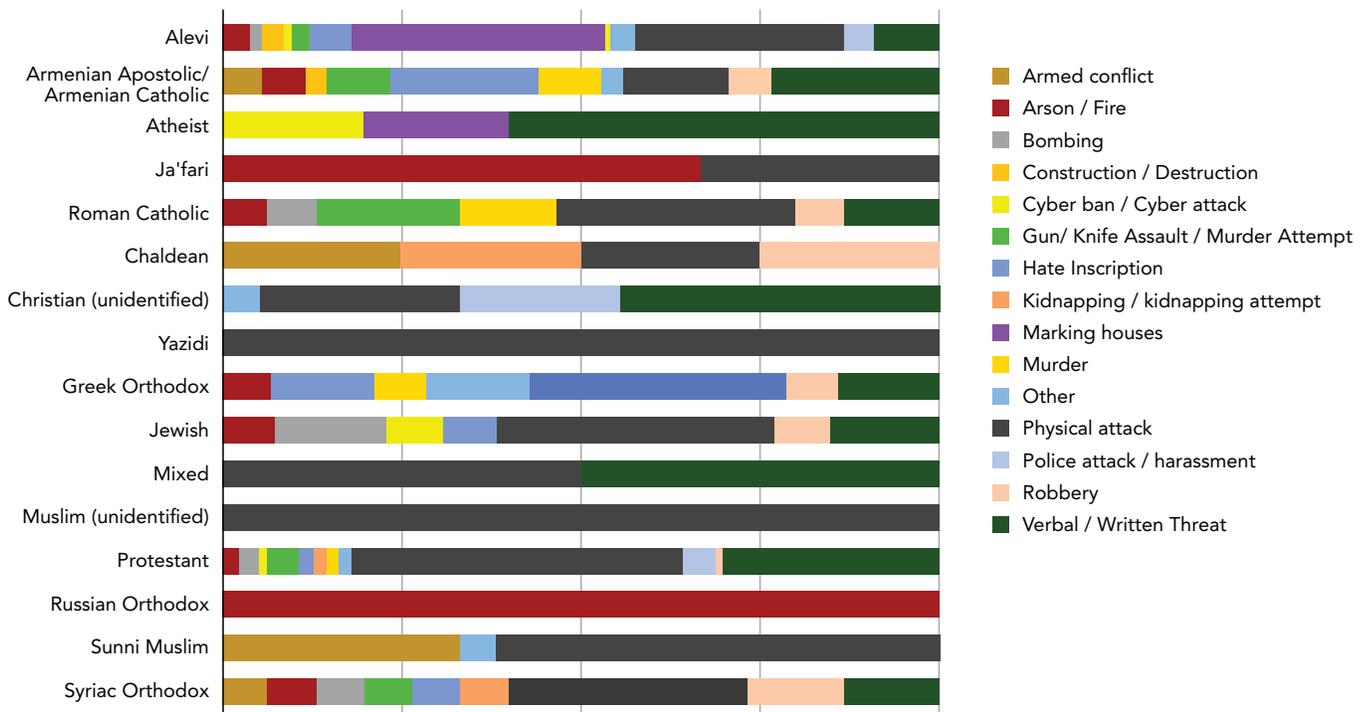
## 4.2. DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACKS FROM THE MEDIA SURVEY, 2002-2022

Attack Distribution by Religion



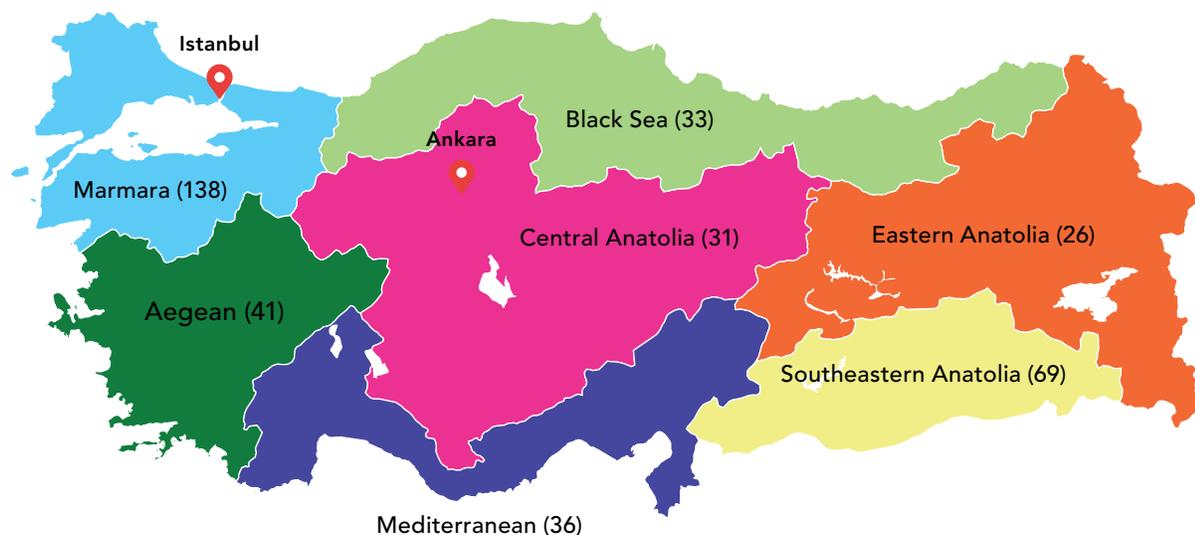
### 4.2.1. Distribution of Incidents by Religion

The graphic below demonstrates the types of attack faced by each religious community. For instance, Alevi communities mostly suffer from the marking of houses, where an attacker generally places a red cross on the outer walls. The marking of Alevi homes has been a common practice over the decades and across Turkey.



## 4.2.2. Regional Distribution of Incidents

## Regional Distribution of Attacks



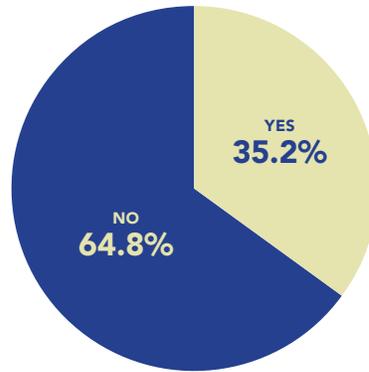
The area where the most attacks took place is the Marmara region with 138 cases, which constitutes almost 30% of the total number of attacks. The Marmara region is followed by the Southeastern Anatolia region with 69 cases. Since the Marmara region has highest population in Turkey according to 2021 data, this situation seems natural. However, considering that the Southeast Anatolia region has approximately one third of the population of the Marmara region, it can be argued that the intensity of the attacks is denser in Southeast Anatolia.

	Istanbul	Türkiye
Alevi	35	120
Armenian Apostolic / Armenian Catholic	29	34
Atheist	3	5
Ja'fari	3	3
Roman Catholic	2	15
Chaldean	0	4
Christian (unidentified)	1	18
Yazidi	0	5
Greek Orthodox	9	14
Jewish	9	13
Mixed	0	2
Muslim (unidentified)	0	2
Protestant	16	109
Russian Orthodox	0	1
Sunni Muslim	3	21
Syriac Orthodox	0	15

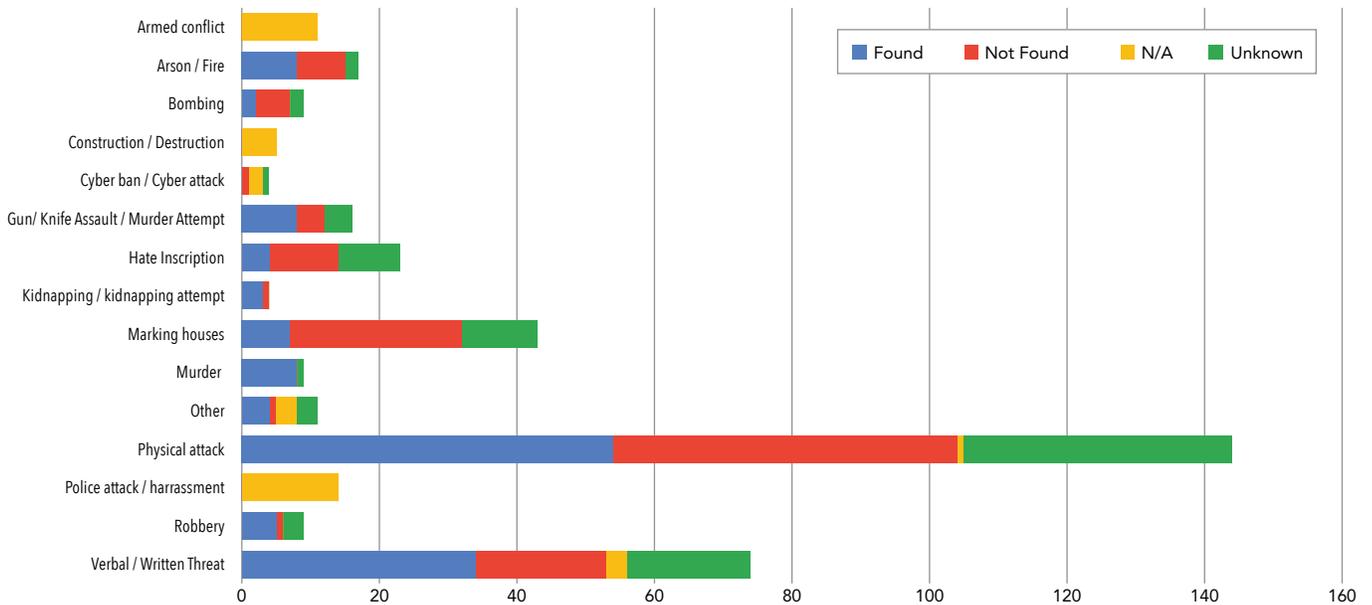
110 incidents out of 138 attacks in the Marmara region occurred in Istanbul. In other words, almost 29% of all identified attacks took place in Istanbul. This data appears to track the diversity of religious groups and the number of religious sites in Istanbul. For example, it is estimated that 30% of the Alevi population in Turkey lives in Istanbul, and 29% of detected attacks on the Alevi community took place in Istanbul. Similarly, most attacks against the Armenian, Jewish and Greek communities, the vast majority of whom live in Istanbul, took place in this city. The Protestant community is significant for its widespread presence throughout Turkey. Unlike the Armenian, Jewish, and Greek communities, the Protestant population resides throughout Turkey and the attacks against them are represented in many regions of Turkey.

### 4.3. IDENTIFICATION OF ASSAILANTS AND PROSECUTION

Assailants Identified

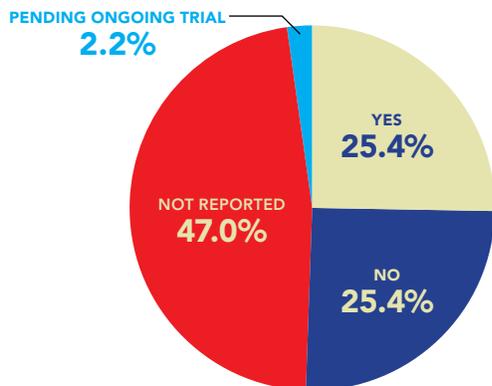


Assailants Identification – Attack Type



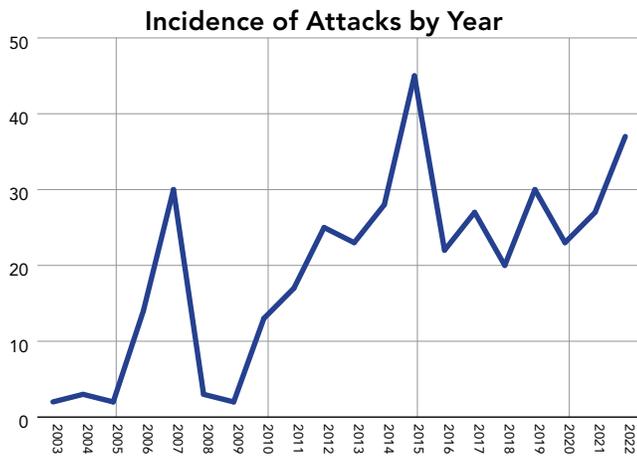
The most common type of attack is a physical attack with 138 cases. However, only 38 percent of the perpetrators of physical attacks could be identified. When looking at other types of attacks, perpetrators are most often identified in murder cases with 88 percent. On the other hand, the attacks in which the attacker is identified the least are the marking of houses with 16 percent.

Assailants Penalized

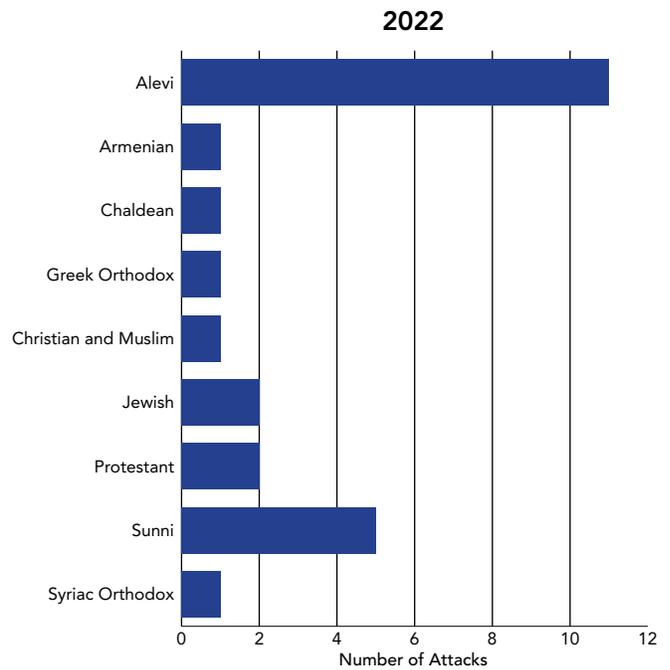


According to media outlets, only 25% of detained attackers receive sentences. Further, 25% of the assailants caught were not sentenced. As can be seen in the graph, the situation of most of the detainees is unknown.

#### 4.4. INCIDENTS ACCORDING TO YEARS



Looking at the distribution of attacks over the years, it is possible to say that there is a general upward trend. The highest number of attacks seems to have occurred in 2015 with 45 cases. That year coincided with general elections held in June during which the AKP could not attain the number of votes to form a government on its own. The crisis of not being able to form a government lasted for months and came to an end with the AKP retaining power in November elections. During this period, the number of bomb attacks throughout the country increased. The increase in attacks on religious sites could be tied to the general political atmosphere.



In 2022, there were a total of 25 attacks against nine different religious communities. Eleven of these attacks, nearly half of them, were against the Alevi community. Meanwhile, the simultaneous attacks against four different *cemevis* in Ankara in July 2022 were counted as a single attack as they were committed by the same perpetrator.

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