Evidence Bite: Freedom of Religion and Freedom from Religion in the Context of Contemporary Anti-Gender Politics

This article by CCINDLE partner Elżbieta Korolczuk outlines how debates about religious freedom are used within anti-gender politics, and why balancing freedom of religion with freedom from religion is crucial for gender equality and democracy. Across Europe and beyond, anti-gender actors regularly invoke 'freedom of religion' to justify their opposition to women's rights and LGBTQ+ equality. The article examines these arguments in the Polish context and argues that interpretations of religious freedom are used selectively and politically, and often at the expense of gender equality and minority rights. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

The **key observations** of the article include that:

1. Religious freedom is used selectively in anti-gender politics

The article shows that appeals to religious freedom are often unevenly applied. Governments and political actors defend religious freedom in principle but in practice apply it selectively. They might exclude Muslim communities or minority groups, for example, while invoking religious freedom to justify restricting women's and LGBTQ+ rights. In this way, religious freedom is instrumentalised to serve political debates rather than consistently upheld.

2. Religion plays a central role in opposition to gender equality

In contexts such as Poland, where a conservative Catholic Church wields substantial influence, religious institutions are key actors in anti-gender politics. Their activities may include opposing reproductive rights and abortion, resisting LGBTQ+ inclusion, and shaping public discourses and policy debates through their moral authority. The article thus argues that religion is not just a background factor but an active force shaping anti-gender mobilisation and policy outcomes.

3. 'Freedom from religion' is overlooked but essential

The author highlights a critical tension, that while freedom of religion is widely recognised, freedom from religion (i.e. the right not to be governed by religious norms) is often neglected. Without a clear separation between religion and the state, religious norms can limit the rights and autonomy of women and minorities and reinforce social inequalities.

The **key takeaway messages** of the article include that:

- **Rights should be balanced, not hierarchised:** Religious freedom should not override gender equality or minority rights, democratic systems need to protect both.
- **Secularism is important for inclusion:** A clear separation between religion and the state helps ensure that no single belief system limits others' rights.

Evidence Bite: Freedom of Religion and Freedom from Religion in the Context of Contemporary Anti-Gender Politics

- **Anti-gender politics uses religion strategically:** Appeals to religion are often political tools rather than sincere expressions of belief, and should be analysed as such.

The article shows that debates about religion are not neutral, but deeply political. When religious freedom is prioritised without safeguards, it can be used to restrict rights and exclude social groups, and reinforce an array of inequalities beyond gender. Balancing freedom of religion with freedom from religion is therefore vital for democratic inclusion, gender equality, and the rights of diverse communities. You can read the article in full here.

For more information on the CCINDLE project, as well as publications, evidence bites, podcasts, videos and more, please visit our website: https://ccindle.org

Email: ccindle.info@ru.nl

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union under grant No 101061256. UK consortium partners are funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant numbers 10051932 and 10048433]. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency or UKRI. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.
This evidence bite used ChatGPT 5.4 to generate an initial summary of the featured article.