

Reference Document

"The Spanish Court Ruling That Changes What You Can Say About Jehovah's Witnesses"

Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

How to Use This Document

Each entry below identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video.

Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced from court rulings, legislation, official Watchtower publications (including internal manuals like *Shepherd the Flock of God*), peer-reviewed research, or other government/regulatory records. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — Sourced from established advocacy or legal resource sites, academic researchers, or reputable investigative journalism (AFP, EFE, Reuters, regional papers of record). Secondary sources support claims and are most defensible when paired with a primary or another independent secondary.

SECTION 1: The April 16 Ruling and Its Historic Framing

Claim: The ruling was issued by the civil division of the Madrid Provincial Court (Audiencia Provincial Civil de Madrid), Section 29, and was notified on April 16, 2026.

- Source: EFE wire, carried by multiple Spanish outlets including *Menorca.info*, *Infobae*, *Última Hora*, *Público*
- URL: <https://www.menorca.info/actualidad/nacional/2026/04/21/2613767/confirman-llamar-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova-delito.html>
- Verification: PRIMARY — EFE is Spain's national wire service; language referring to Section 29 appears verbatim across four major outlets carrying the EFE text.
- Note: A single outlet, *The Objective*, reports Section 21. Multi-source wire coverage weighs decisively toward Section 29.

Claim: The ruling holds that calling Jehovah's Witnesses a "destructive sect," calling oneself a "victim" of them, and forming an association to say so publicly are all protected by freedom of expression.

- Source: *eldiario.es*, Marcos Pinheiro (April 21, 2026)
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/justicia-avala-llame-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova_1_13158958.html
- Verification: PRIMARY — direct quotation from the appellate judgment as reported by the original Spanish outlet that broke the story.
- Key quote from the ruling: "*Considerar que pertenecer a los Testigos de Jehová causa daños a la salud, pone en riesgo la vida de personas o genera víctimas*" is protected speech "*a pesar de ser todo lo dicho molesto o hiriente.*"

Claim: The wires — EFE in Spain, AFP internationally — moved the story on April 21, 2026.

- Source: Publication dates of *eldiario.es* (Marcos Pinheiro), AFP wire pickups in *El Nacional*, *Diario Libre*, *Listín Diario*
- URL: <https://www.elnacional.com/2026/04/justicia-espanola-avala-el-derecho-a-calificar-a-los-testigos-de-jehova-de-secta-destructiva/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — publication timestamps visible on source pages.

Claim: Per AEVTJ's attorney Carlos Bardavío, speaking to AFP, this is the first time a court anywhere in the world has ruled that a formally registered religion can be described as a "destructive sect" without

that constituting defamation.

- Source: AFP wire interview with Carlos Bardavío, carried by *El Nacional* and others
- URL: <https://www.elnacional.com/2026/04/justicia-espanola-avala-el-derecho-a-calificar-a-los-testigos-de-jehova-de-secta-destructiva/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — attributed quote from the case attorney via international wire.
- Key quote: "*Es la primera vez que en un país se dice que se puede calificar de secta destructiva a una religión, aunque esté debidamente inscrita como religión.*"

Claim: Watchtower has announced it will appeal to Spain's Supreme Court.

- Source: *eldiario.es*, April 21, 2026
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/justicia-avala-llame-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova_1_13158958.html
- Verification: SECONDARY — reported by the primary Spanish outlet covering the ruling.

SECTION 2: The Official Story and the Four Lawsuits

Claim: Jehovah's Witnesses have been officially registered in Spain since 1970 and were granted "well-known roots" (notorio arraigo) status in 2006.

- Source: *The Objective*, April 21, 2026; general Spanish legal reporting
- URL: <https://theobjective.com/espana/tribunales/2026-04-21/audiencia-testigos-jehova-secta/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — established by Spanish government registration records; widely reported as background context.

Claim: There are approximately 120,000 Jehovah's Witness members in Spain, with nearly 800 Kingdom Halls across the country.

- Source: *Telecinco* citing *El Mundo*; JW Spain's own published statistics
- URL: https://www.telecinco.es/noticias/sociedad/20231214/testigos-jehova-secta-exfieles-victimas-justicia-espana_18_011219277.html
- Verification: SECONDARY — figure appears consistently across Spanish coverage; originates with Watchtower's own country statistics.

Claim: AEVTJ (Spanish Association of Victims of Jehovah's Witnesses) was founded by ex-members in 2019 and formally registered with Spain's Ministry of the Interior on February 12, 2020.

- Source: AEVTJ official site; AvoidJW case dossier
- URL: <https://victimasdetestigosdejehova.org/>
- URL: <https://avoidjw.org/court/aevtj-factual-background/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — confirmed via the association's own published statutes and government registration records.

Claim: Watchtower's Spanish branch, legally registered as "Testigos Cristianos de Jehová," has its Bethel headquarters in Torrejón de Ardoz, Madrid.

- Source: *eldiario.es*; multiple Spanish legal filings
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/justicia-avala-llame-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova_1_13158958.html
- Verification: PRIMARY — cited location in Spanish court records.

Claim: Watchtower, joined by six individual Jehovah's Witnesses, filed four separate lawsuits connected to AEVTJ's existence and activities over a four-year span.

- Source: AvoidJW case dossier; *Bitter Winter* coverage; *eldiario.es*
- URL: <https://avoidjw.org/court/aevtj-factual-background/>
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/testigos-de-jehova-en-espana-una-victoria-y-una-derrota-en-apelacion/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — documented across both pro- and anti-AEVTJ reporting, cross-confirming the four-lawsuit structure.

SECTION 3: Lawsuit 1 — The Core Case Against AEVTJ

Claim: The core lawsuit demanded AEVTJ be dissolved, the word "victims" stripped from its name, website, and social media, all its online content taken down, €25,000 in damages, and that AEVTJ pay court costs.

- Source: *eldiario.es*; AvoidJW case dossier
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/justicia-avala-llame-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova_1_13158958.html
- Verification: PRIMARY — these specific demands are listed in the court filings and recited in the judgment.

Claim: The case was heard in the Court of First Instance Number 6, Torrejón de Ardoz, presided by Judge Raquel Chacón Campollo.

- Source: Consejo General del Poder Judicial (CGPJ) official press release, December 14, 2023
- URL: <https://www.poderjudicial.es/cgpi/es/Poder-Judicial/Noticias-Judiciales/Un-juzgado-de-Torrejon-de-Ardoz-de-sestima-la-demanda-de-la-organizacion-religiosa-Testigos-de-Jehova-por-vulneracion-del-derecho-al-honor>
- Verification: PRIMARY — official Spanish judicial authority publication.

Claim: The trial involved nine oral sessions, around 70 ex-members submitting written testimonies, approximately 8 testifying in person, and roughly a dozen Witnesses appearing for the plaintiffs.

- Source: AFP wire (8 ex-members in court); Carlos Bardavío interview with Beroean Pickets (70 written testimonies submitted within 20 days)
- URL: <https://www.elnacional.com/2026/04/justicia-espanola-avala-el-derecho-a-calificar-a-los-testigos-de-jehova-de-secta-destructiva/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — combined figure reconciles the AFP wire count (oral testimony) with Bardavío's earlier statement (total written testimony submissions).

Claim: In December 2023, Judge Chacón issued an approximately 70-page ruling dismissing Watchtower's lawsuit in its entirety and ordering the plaintiffs to pay court costs.

- Source: CGPJ official press release; *eldiario.es*
- URL: <https://www.poderjudicial.es/cgpi/es/Poder-Judicial/Noticias-Judiciales/Un-juzgado-de-Torrejon-de-Ardoz-de-sestima-la-demanda-de-la-organizacion-religiosa-Testigos-de-Jehova-por-vulneracion-del-derecho-al-honor>
- Verification: PRIMARY — CGPJ is Spain's highest judicial governance body.
- Key quote from the CGPJ release: *"El juzgado de Primera Instancia nº 6 de Torrejón de Ardoz ha desestimado en su integridad la demanda que la organización religiosa Testigos de Jehová presentó contra la Asociación Española de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová (AEVTJ)..."*

Claim: The Chacón ruling described Jehovah's Witnesses' internal teachings as producing "an environment of insistent supervision" (un ambiente de supervisión insistente) over the faithful, specifically citing insistence on knowing details of personal relationships, distrust of testimonies, and the obligation to consult elders first under a strict hierarchical system.

- Source: *The Objective*, April 21, 2026, summarizing the Chacón ruling as affirmed on appeal
- URL: <https://theobjective.com/espana/tribunales/2026-04-21/audiencia-testigos-jehova-secta/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — direct quotations from the judgment language.

Claim: On April 16, 2026, the Madrid Provincial Court (civil division) rejected Watchtower's appeal in its entirety, affirming the lower ruling and the dismissal of all damages and dissolution demands.

- Source: *eldiario.es*; EFE wire (carried by *Menorca.info*, *Público*); AFP wire
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/justicia-avala-llame-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova_1_13158958.html
- URL: <https://www.publico.es/politica/tribunales/audiencia-madrid-confirma-llamar-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova-delito.html>
- Verification: PRIMARY — reported across all major Spanish outlets citing the judgment directly.

SECTION 4: Lawsuits 2, 3, and 4 — El Mundo, Carmona, Flórez

Claim: Lawsuit 2 was filed against the newspaper El Mundo. The Court of First Instance Number 1 in Torrejón de Ardoz ruled for Watchtower on October 2, 2023, ordering El Mundo to publish a rectification text.

- Source: Averum Abogados (Watchtower's legal counsel) summary of Sentencia nº 287/2023
- URL: <https://www.averum.es/el-mundo-condenado-a-rectificar-hechos-inexactos-sobre-creencias-y-practicas-de-los-testigos-de-jehova/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — detailed account of the ruling from Watchtower's own counsel, containing direct quotations from the judgment.
- Note: The ruling was grounded on the narrow issue that specific factual claims in the article could not be backed by El Mundo's own reporting — not the broader question of whether JW's can be called a "sect."

Claim: Lawsuit 3 was filed against Enrique Carmona, AEVTJ's secretary, for a video in which he described JW's as a "dangerous cult." Carmona was convicted at the trial level. Different sections of Madrid's Provincial Court have since reached contradictory results on similar free-speech questions in related cases.

- Source: *Bitter Winter*, April 2025 coverage of the appellate results
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/testigos-de-jehova-en-espana-una-victoria-y-una-derrota-en-apelacion/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — *Bitter Winter* has pro-JW editorial leanings but remains the most detailed English-language source tracking the full set of appellate outcomes in these cases.

Claim: Lawsuit 4, filed against former AEVTJ president Israel Flórez, is still pending. Flórez's trial is scheduled for May 12, 2026, in Torrejón de Ardoz.

- Source: EFE wire carried by *Menorca.info*; *Público*
- URL: <https://www.publico.es/politica/tribunales/audiencia-madrid-confirma-llamar-secta-destructiva-testigos-jehova-delito.html>
- Verification: PRIMARY — court scheduling is a matter of official Spanish judicial record.

Claim: Israel Flórez's 25-year-old son Eric died by suicide in December 2023, hours before a Madrid press conference, and Flórez stated in a public Facebook message afterward that his son's belonging to "that destructive sect" had "surely had a lot to do with it."

- Source: *ACI Prensa*; AvoidJW (with permission from Flórez)
- URL: <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/102391/exmiembros-testigos-de-jehova-han-destrozado-la-vida-de-miles-de-personas>
- Verification: SECONDARY — documented in multiple contemporaneous reports, including on-the-record statements from Flórez himself.

SECTION 5: The Counter-Argument and Its Weaknesses

Claim: *Bitter Winter*, a publication affiliated with CESNUR and edited by Italian sociologist Massimo Introvigne, has consistently framed AEVTJ as an anti-cult front group and has argued that Judge Chacón's methodology was biased and the Spanish word "secta" is neutral.

- Source: *Bitter Winter* masthead and editorial archive
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/>
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/testigos-de-jehova-en-espana-una-victoria-y-una-derrota-en-apelacion/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — *Bitter Winter*'s editorial positions are documented in its own published articles.

Claim: An earlier appellate section of Madrid's Provincial Court — specifically the Eleventh Section — reportedly relied on an AI-generated definition to resolve the question of what the word "secta" means in Spanish.

- Source: *Bitter Winter* coverage of the Carmona appellate reversal
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/testigos-de-jehova-en-espana-una-victoria-y-una-derrota-en-apelacion/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — reported by *Bitter Winter*; characterization repeated in Spanish legal commentary.

Claim: The April 2026 appellate court directly addressed the apologetic framing that AEVTJ members are merely disgruntled ex-members spreading rumors.

- Source: *Canarias7*, quoting the judgment directly
- URL: <https://www.canarias7.es/sociedad/victimas-testigos-jehova-podran-seguir-denunciando-secta-20260421113256-ntrc.html>
- Verification: PRIMARY — direct quotation from the appellate judgment.
- Key quote: *"Todas las personas que forman parte de la Asociación han sido testigos de Jehová, por lo que aseguran que su propia experiencia es la prueba de las declaraciones de hecho que realizan, y no se trata de meros rumores o sospechas."*

Claim: The Madrid court based its decision on Watchtower's own internal confidential documents as well as on the testimonies of eight former members.

- Source: AFP wire reporting carried by *El Nacional*
- URL: <https://www.elnacional.com/2026/04/justicia-espanola-avala-el-derecho-a-calificar-a-los-testigos-de-jehova-de-secta-destructiva/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — AFP is directly summarizing the basis of the judgment.
- Key quote: *"El tribunal madrileño basó su decisión en textos internos de la organización, en principio confidenciales y reservados, así como en los testimonios de ocho antiguos adeptos."*

SECTION 6: The Elder Committee Room Testimony

Claim: The appellate ruling includes on-the-record testimony from a lifelong Jehovah's Witness woman who, at age 18, reported to a three-elder committee that she believed she had been raped eight to ten years earlier. The elders questioned her in explicit sexual detail. One elder left the room in shame; the other two continued the questioning. In the days after, she experienced anorexia and struck herself against a wall. The elders eventually told her she was innocent but forbade her from going to civil courts and told her to leave it in Jehovah's hands. The attacker was ultimately treated internally as responsible for adultery, not rape.

- Source: *Canarias7*, reporting Doménico Chiappe, quoting directly from the appellate judgment
- URL: <https://www.canarias7.es/sociedad/victimas-testigos-jehova-podran-seguir-denunciando-secta-20260421113256-ntrc.html>
- Verification: PRIMARY — the passage appears as a direct excerpt from the court ruling. It is narrative testimony captured in the judgment itself.
- Key quote from the ruling: *"Uno de ellos abandonó la sala avergonzado, porque le parecía aquel interrogatorio obsceno y desagradable; los otros dos, en cambio, le dijeron que tenían que conocer todo para determinar si había sido víctima o no."*

SECTION 7: The Silencing Playbook Across Europe

Claim: In Germany, Watchtower brought a defamation action against the European anti-cult umbrella organization FECRIS at the District Court of Hamburg. In a 2020 ruling, the court found 18 of FECRIS's statements defamatory or untrue.

- Source: Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)
- URL: <https://hrwf.eu/germany-fecris-sentenced-for-slanderous-statements-about-jehovahs-witnesses/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — official court ruling documented in HRWF's legal tracking archive.

Claim: In Belgium, the Ghent criminal court convicted Watchtower in 2021 for inciting hatred through its shunning practice. The Court of Appeal overturned the conviction, and Belgium's Court of Cassation confirmed the acquittal at the end of 2023.

- Source: Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)
- URL: <https://hrwf.eu/belgium-the-court-of-cassation-upholds-the-right-of-jehovahs-witnesses-to-exclude-members/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — reported appellate and cassation outcomes in HRWF's case archive.

Claim: In Norway, where the government deregistered the Witnesses over their shunning policy, the Court of Appeal unanimously ruled in Watchtower's favor, with the case now pending at Norway's Supreme Court.

- Source: JW.org official news release
- URL: <https://www.jw.org/en/news/region/norway/Court-of-Appeal-Unanimously-Overturns-Unconstitutional-Ruling-in-Norway/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — the release comes from Watchtower itself and confirms the appellate outcome in their favor.

Claim: In Spain, a Torrejón de Ardoz court ordered the newspaper El Mundo to publish a rectification text in October 2023. Enrique Carmona was personally convicted at the trial level for a video he made.

- Source: Averum Abogados; *Bitter Winter*
- URL: <https://www.averum.es/el-mundo-condenado-a-rectificar-hechos-inexactos-sobre-creencias-y-practicas-de-los-testigos-de-jehova/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — detailed legal summaries from both sides of the case.

SECTION 8: The International Ripple — Mexico, Argentina, and Beyond

Claim: AEVTJ's current president, Samuel Ferrando, is a former Jehovah's Witness from Catalonia who led the association's Catalan delegation before taking over nationally.

- Source: *Público* interview (October 2024)
- URL: <https://www.publico.es/sociedad/samuel-ferrando-testigos-jehova-practicas-propias-grupos-sectarios.html>
- Verification: SECONDARY — long-form interview with Ferrando documenting his background.

Claim: Ferrando told AFP that, in the time since the December 2023 Chacón ruling, sister victim associations have been formed in Mexico and Argentina, modeled on AEVTJ.

- Source: AFP wire, quoting Samuel Ferrando directly
- URL: <https://www.elnacional.com/2026/04/justicia-espanola-avala-el-derecho-a-calificar-a-los-testigos-de-jehova-de-secta-destructiva/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — on-the-record quote from the AEVTJ president in a major international wire service interview.

Claim: Ferrando has publicly said that one in ten of the people who have joined AEVTJ express suicidal ideation at some point during their time inside the organization or after leaving it.

- Source: Samuel Ferrando's public statements, including in the *Público* interview
- URL: <https://www.publico.es/sociedad/samuel-ferrando-testigos-jehova-practicas-propias-grupos-sectarios.html>
- Verification: SECONDARY — this is Ferrando's claim about the association's own membership, not an external clinical statistic.

SECTION 9: The Confidential Manual in Other Jurisdictions

Claim: The Shepherd the Flock of God manual is a confidential internal document written by Watchtower's Governing Body specifically for elders, explicitly marked confidential, and elders are instructed to keep it from being seen by non-elders.

- Source: AvoidJW documentation of Watchtower elder policies
- URL: <https://avoidjw.org/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — the document itself is confidential; its existence, authorship, and restricted-distribution status are documented across multiple independent sources including leaked copies and court exhibits.

Claim: In Mexico, a serving elder recently used Mexico's federal data protection law, together with Watchtower's own internal manual, to block a judicial committee proceeding — citing the manual's own procedures to argue the process being used against him violated those procedures.

- Source: Creator's direct investigative research for a separate deep-dive video on this case
- Verification: SECONDARY — based on primary-source correspondence and documents reviewed by the creator, with details held back for the dedicated follow-up video.

Claim: In Brazil, the civil court of Pratápolis, Minas Gerais, presided by Judge Ângelo de Almeida, ordered Watchtower and individual elders to make a formal new congregational announcement acknowledging that a disfellowshipping announcement had been carried out in violation of the Constitution — a functional retraction — with a R\$500 daily fine for noncompliance.

- Source: Dr. Juliano de Henrique Mello, the attorney who argued the case, writing on his professional legal site
- URL: <https://julianohmello.com.br/2025/03/03/2017/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — published by the case attorney, documenting the ruling he obtained.

SECTION 10: Additional Supporting Sources

Consejo General del Poder Judicial (CGPJ) — Spain's jurisprudence search portal

- Source: Poder Judicial de España
- URL: <https://www.poderjudicial.es/search/indexAN.jsp>
- Verification: PRIMARY — official Spanish judicial system database used to search published rulings.
- Contains: Full-text search of Spanish appellate rulings, including the ECLI-numbered judgments cited throughout this video.

AEVTJ official site

- Source: Asociación Española de Víctimas de los Testigos de Jehová
- URL: <https://victimasdetestigosdejehova.org/>
- Verification: PRIMARY — the association's own published materials, statutes, and ex-member resources.
- Contains: AEVTJ's mission, membership information, published testimonies, and the sister associations network.

AEVTJ official X (Twitter) account

- Source: AEVTJ
- URL: <https://x.com/aevtj>
- Verification: PRIMARY — the association's verified public communications channel.
- Contains: AEVTJ statements in response to the ruling and to Watchtower's announced appeal.

Bardavío Abogados — AEVTJ's legal representation

- Source: Bardavío Abogados law firm, Spain
- URL: <https://bardavioabogados.com/es/noticias>
- Verification: PRIMARY — the law firm that successfully argued the case; publishes press communications and rulings.
- Contains: Professional commentary on the case, including prior appellate wins and the firm's framing of this week's ruling as a legal standard of special significance.

eldiario.es — earlier coverage of the December 2023 Chacón ruling

- Source: *eldiario.es*
- URL: https://www.eldiario.es/politica/victimas-testigos-jehova-ganan-juzgados-derecho-denunciar-control-total-fiel-es_1_10762395.html
- Verification: SECONDARY — investigative reporting by the outlet that broke the April 2026 story.
- Contains: In-depth coverage of the original Chacón ruling and the factual background behind the affirmed decision.

***Bitter Winter* — pro-Watchtower counter-narrative coverage**

- Source: CESNUR / *Bitter Winter*, edited by Massimo Introvigne
- URL: <https://bitterwinter.org/testigos-de-jehova-en-espana-una-victoria-y-una-derrota-en-apelacion/>
- Verification: SECONDARY — cited here for balance, not as a factual source for claims about AEVTJ or the ruling itself.
- Contains: The most detailed English-language tracking of all four Spanish lawsuits and their appellate outcomes, read against a pro-Watchtower editorial position.