

Pew Forum Report Analyzes Religious Restrictions Around the World Three-Year Study Finds 70% of Global Population Lives with High Restrictions and One-Third Experiences an Increase

Approximately 70% of the world's population lives in countries with high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities — including, in some cases, people who are secular or non-religious. Additionally, more than 2.2 billion people, nearly a third (32%) of the world's total population, live in countries where either government restrictions on religion or social hostilities involving religion rose substantially between mid-2006 and mid-2009, according to a 2011 study on global restrictions on religion by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. Only about 1% of the world's population lives in countries where government restrictions or social hostilities declined.

These are among the key findings of *Rising Restrictions on Religion*, the Pew Forum's second report on global restrictions on religion. The study is part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, an effort funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation to analyze religious change and its impact on societies around the world.

Other major findings include:

- The extent of violence and abuse related to religion, one of the harshest measures of restrictions on religion, increased in more places than it decreased. The number of countries in which governments used at least some measure of force against religious groups or individuals rose from 91 (46%) in the period ending in mid-2008 to 101 (51%) in the period ending in mid-2009. This violence was wide-ranging, including individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, detained or displaced from their homes, as well as damage to or destruction of personal or religious properties.
- In nearly three-quarters of all countries, private citizens or groups committed crimes, malicious acts or violence motivated by religious hatred or bias. Such acts occurred in 142 countries (72%) in the period ending in mid-2009, about the same as in the previous reporting period (141 countries or 71%). The number of countries that experienced mob violence related to religion rose from 38 (19%) as of mid-2008 to 52 (26%) as of mid-2009.
- Religion-related terrorist groups were active in 74 countries around the world in the period ending in mid-2009, a slight increase from the period ending in mid-2008. The groups carried out acts of violence in half of the 74 countries. This includes people who were killed, wounded, displaced from their homes, kidnapped or had their property destroyed in religion-related terrorist attacks.
- Adherents of the world's two largest religious groups, Christians and Muslims, who together comprise more than half of the global population, were harassed in the largest number of countries. Over the three-year period studied, incidents of either government or social harassment were reported against Christians in 130 countries (66%) and against Muslims in 117 countries (59%). Buddhists and Hindus, who together account for roughly one-fifth of the world's population and who are more

geographically concentrated than Christians or Muslims, faced harassment in fewer places; harassment was reported against Buddhists in 16 countries (8%) and against Hindus in 27 countries (14%).

- In proportion to their numbers, some smaller religious groups faced especially widespread harassment. Although Jews comprise less than 1% of the world's population, government or social harassment of Jews was reported in 75 countries (38%). Incidents of harassment involving members of other world religions – including Sikhs, followers of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, newer faith groups such as Baha'is and Rastafarians, and localized groups that practice tribal or folk religions – were reported in 84 countries (42%).
- Restrictions on religion are particularly common in the 59 countries that prohibit blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion. While such laws are sometimes promoted as a way to protect religion, in practice they often serve to punish religious minorities whose beliefs are deemed unorthodox or heretical.
- There appears to be at least some relationship between constitutional protections for religious freedom and overall changes in government restrictions on religion. Among the countries with the least robust constitutional protections for religious freedom, government restrictions increased in 11 and decreased in only two. In contrast, among the countries whose constitutions provide for religious freedom without substantial contradictions, government restrictions increased in three countries and decreased in six.

This study scores 198 countries and territories — more than 99.5% of the world's population — on a total of 33 measures phrased as questions about government restrictions (government laws, policies and actions) and social hostilities (acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations and social groups). The study uses 18 widely cited, publicly available sources of information, including reports by the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Human Rights Watch.

The full report – including a summary of results, index scores by region, results by country, the methodology and an interactive graphic showing the levels of restrictions in the world's 25 most populous countries – is available on the Pew Forum's website at <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Restrictions-on-Religion.aspx>.

For more information on the study or to request an interview with the report's primary researcher, please contact:

Mary Schultz, Communications Manager, +1-202-419-4556 (mschultz@pewforum.org)

Liga Plaveniece, Communications Associate, +1-202-419-4586 (lplaveniece@pewforum.org)

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life
1615 L Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036-5610
U.S.A.

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