



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 10, 2011

Pew Research Report Shows Religious Discrimination on Rise Globally

Fox News [notes](#): "The report ... looked at statistics and government data spanning from 2006 to 2009, and use[d] such criteria as government crackdowns on religion and social hostility, including religious[ly]-motivated bias, beatings and murder, to determine which countries were the least tolerant to religion."

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The report found that "restrictions on religious beliefs and practices rose between mid-2006 and mid-2009 in 23 of the world's 198 countries (12%), decreased in 12 countries (6%) and remained essentially unchanged in 163 countries (82%)."



The results indicate that Christians in 66 percent of the world's countries (130) have experienced harassment by both their government and other members of the community. By a slightly smaller margin, Muslims face similar harassment in 117 countries. As noted by Fox News, "Many of those countries overlap with incidents against both religions, suggesting ongoing strife between the two religions."

Hindus and Buddhists face discrimination in significantly fewer countries (27 and 16 respectively), but this figure is lower because those religious groups tend to be concentrated by geography.

The report indicates that religious intolerance is highest in the Middle East and Europe. It notes that Muslims are the group most discriminated against in the Middle East, regardless of the fact that the Middle East is predominantly Muslim. However, the findings also show that Christians and Jews face strong persecution there as well.

According to the report, six of the 14 countries where government restrictions have increased were in the Middle East/North Africa region: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Zatar, Syria, and Yemen.

The greatest increase in government and social discrimination against people of faith was in Egypt, notes the report, though the researchers were careful to indicate that the increase in discrimination was not influenced by the revolution. The report asserts that there has been an ongoing battle between Muslims and Christians in that region for some time, with freedom of religion a key issue.

For example, the report references the long-standing ban on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, as well as the discrimination against Christians through public-sector hiring.

In Yemen, the government reportedly harasses Baha'is and Christian converts, and arrests those who promote Christianity and distribute Bibles.

The report claims that in Europe, France is the most discriminatory toward religious groups. It says that bias against Muslim groups has increased there, particularly because of the country's implementation of



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anti-burqa laws last year.

“In general, most of the countries that had substantial increases in government restrictions or social hostilities involving religion already had high or very high levels of restrictions or hostilities,” Pew noted.

The research determined that nine countries (10 if Tibet is not considered part of China) saw substantial increases in social hostilities, while five showed a decline:

The level of social hostilities involving religion rose substantially in five European nations: Bulgaria, Denmark, Russia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Much of the tension in Europe focused on the region’s rapidly growing Muslim population, but in some cases it also reflected rising anti-Semitism and antagonism toward Christian minorities, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Social hostilities also rose in several Asian countries, including China, Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam. In China, for example, an August 2008 terrorist attack attributed by Chinese authorities to a militant Muslim separatist group, known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, caused more than a dozen casualties in Xinjiang Province, and riots in Tibet in March 2008 pitted ethnic Tibetans (mainly Buddhists) against ethnic Han Chinese.

The report notes that a number of countries with already high levels of government restrictions on religion — such as China — showed no marked change.

Pew claims that there is a moderate level of social hostilities involving religion in the United States. The finding is based on FBI reports that indicate there have been at least 1,300 so-called hate crimes in the country motivated by religious bias. It also references the recent controversy surrounding the building of mosques and Islamic centers in New York City.

Perhaps most notably, the report shows that religion-related terrorist groups were active in 74 countries. In half of those countries, acts of violence were conducted in the name of religion, while the other half involved terrorist activities related to recruitment and fundraising.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the report names Japan and Brazil as the most religiously tolerant nations in the world, as they have fewer incidents of government crackdowns and social hostilities than any other country on the world.

Photo of Egyptian Copt holding a Coptic Christian cross: AP Images



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