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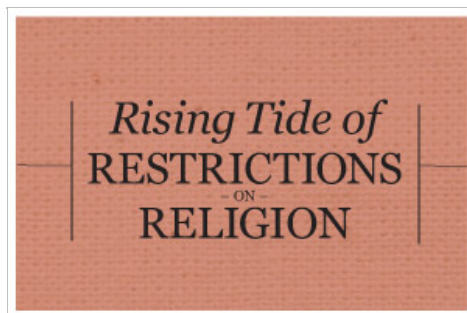
# Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion

ANALYSIS September 20, 2012

## Summary of Findings

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A rising tide of restrictions on religion spread across the world between mid-2009 and mid-2010, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. Restrictions on religion rose in each of the five major regions of the world – including in the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, the two regions where overall restrictions previously had been declining.

The share of countries with high or very high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices rose from 31% in the year ending in mid-2009 to 37% in the year ending in mid-2010. Because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, three-quarters of the world's approximately 7 billion people live in countries with high government restrictions on religion or high social hostilities involving religion, up from 70% a year earlier.

Restrictions on religion rose not only in countries that began the year with high or very high restrictions or hostilities, such as Indonesia and Nigeria, but also in many countries that began with low or moderate restrictions or hostilities, such as Switzerland and the United States. (See [sidebar on the U.S.](#))

The rising tide of restrictions in the latest year studied is attributable to a variety of factors, including increases in crimes, malicious acts and violence motivated by religious hatred or bias, as well as increased government interference with worship or other religious practices. For instance, a November 2009 constitutional referendum in Switzerland banned the construction of minarets on mosques in the country. In Indonesia, more than two dozen churches were forced to close due to pressure from Islamist extremists or, in some instances, local officials. And in Nigeria, violence between Christian and Muslim communities, including a series of deadly attacks, escalated throughout the period.

During the latest year covered in the study, there also was an increase in harassment or intimidation of particular religious groups. Indeed, five of the seven major religious groups monitored by the study – Jews, Christians, Buddhists, adherents of folk or traditional religions, and members of other world religions – experienced four-year highs in the number of countries in which they were harassed by national, provincial or local governments, or by individuals or groups in society (for details, see [Harassment of Specific Groups](#)).

This is the third time the Pew Forum has measured restrictions on religion around the globe. The new study scores 197 countries and territories on the same two indexes used in the previous studies: <sup>1</sup>

- The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs or practices. The GRI is comprised of 20 measures of restrictions, including efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversions, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups.
- The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations and social groups. This includes mob or sectarian violence, harassment over attire for religious reasons and other religion-related intimidation or abuse. The SHI includes 13 measures of social hostilities.

Over the four years studied, the number of countries with very high government restrictions on religion rose from 10 as of mid-2007 to 18 as of mid-2010, as a total of 10 countries (Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Indonesia, Maldives, Russia, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen) were added to the "very high" category, while just two (Brunei and Turkey) were removed (see table on page 10). Meanwhile, 94 countries (48%) had low levels of government restrictions as of mid-2010, down from 117 (59%) in the first year of the study. (For a complete list of all countries in each category, see the [Government Restrictions Index table PDF](#).)

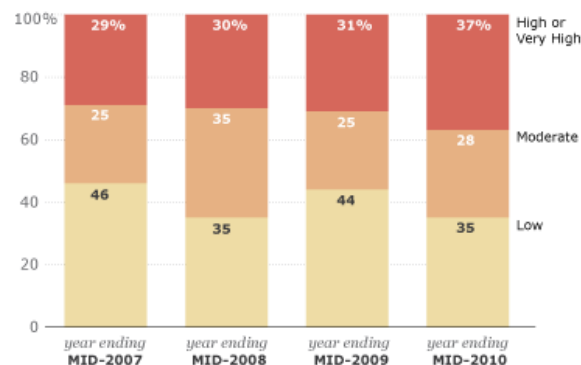
The number of countries with very high social hostilities also rose, from 10 as of mid-2007 to 15 as of mid-2010, as five countries (Egypt, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia and Yemen) were added to the "very high" category and none were removed (see table above). Meanwhile, half of the 197 countries in the study (98) had low levels of social hostilities in mid-2010, down from 114 in mid-2007. (For a complete list of all countries in each category, see the [Social Hostilities Index table PDF](#).)

**Changes in Government Restrictions**

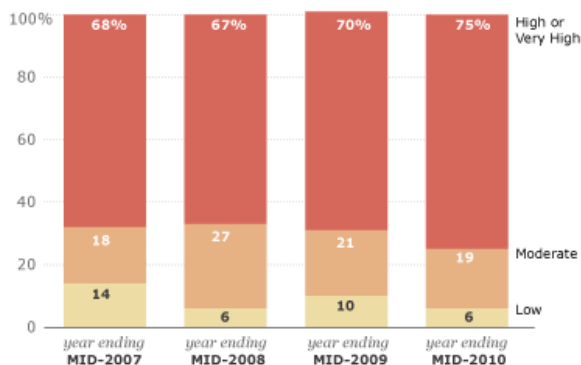
In addition to scoring countries on both indexes, the study looks at the extent and direction of change within each country from the year ending in mid-2009 to the year ending in mid-2010.

**Overall Restrictions on Religion**

Percentage of **countries** where levels of restrictions are ...



Percentage of **global population** living where levels of restrictions are ...



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

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**Countries with Very High Government Restrictions on Religion**

Scores of 6.6 or higher on the 10-point Government Restrictions Index

baseline year, ending MID-2007	latest year, ending MID-2010
Saudi Arabia	<b>Egypt</b>
Iran	<b>Indonesia</b>
Burma (Myanmar)	<b>Maldives</b>
China	Saudi Arabia
Uzbekistan	<b>Afghanistan</b>
Brunei	Iran
Egypt	Uzbekistan
Eritrea	<b>Tunisia</b>
Turkey	Eritrea
Vietnam	China
	<b>Syria</b>
	Burma (Myanmar)
	<b>Russia</b>
	Vietnam
	<b>Yemen</b>
	<b>Azerbaijan</b>
	<b>Algeria</b>
	<b>Belarus</b>

Gray text indicates a country that had very high government restrictions in the year ending in mid-2007 but not in the year ending in mid-2010. Bold indicates a country that had very high government restrictions in the year ending in mid-2010 but not in the year ending in mid-2007.

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## Countries with Very High Social Hostilities Involving Religion

Scores of 7.2 or higher on the 10-point Social Hostilities Index

baseline year, ending MID-2007	latest year, ending MID-2010
Iraq	Pakistan
Pakistan	India
India	Iraq
Afghanistan	Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Bangladesh
Indonesia	Somalia
Israel	Israel
Sri Lanka	<b>Nigeria</b>
Somalia	<b>Yemen</b>
Saudi Arabia	Afghanistan
	<b>Palestinian territories</b>
	<b>Egypt</b>
	<b>Russia</b>
	Saudi Arabia
	Indonesia

Bold indicates a country that had very high social hostilities in the year ending in mid-2010 but not in the year ending in mid-2007.

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## Changes in Government Restrictions

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) from the previous year (ending in mid-2009) to the latest year (ending in mid-2010)

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	PERCENTAGE OF COUNTRIES
2.0 or more increase	6	3%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	30	15%
0.1 to 0.9 increase	88	45%
No change	23	12%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	37	19%
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	13	7%
2.0 or more decrease	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>

Point changes are calculated by comparing GRI scores from year to year. Percentages may not add exactly due to rounding.

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Just six countries (3%) had large changes (2.0 points or more) in their scores on the 10-point Government Restrictions Index, and all six (Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Tunisia) were in the direction of higher restrictions. Among countries with modest changes (1.0 to 1.9 points), there were many more increases (30) than decreases (13). And the same was true among countries with small changes (less than 1.0 point): 88 had increases, while 37 had decreases.

Considering all changes, regardless of magnitude, 63% of countries had increases in government restrictions from mid-2009 to mid-2010, while 25% had decreases. The level of increase in government restrictions during the latest year studied exceeds the increase over the previous three years, when 56% of countries had increases and 31% had decreases.

### Changes in Social Hostilities

Increases in social hostilities involving religion also outnumbered decreases in each point range. Among the countries whose scores went up or down by 2.0 points or more on the 10-point Social Hostilities Index, four times as many had increases in hostilities (17) as had decreases (four).<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five countries had increases of between 1.0 and 1.9 points in their SHI scores, while just 15 had decreases in that range. And 55 countries had increases of less than 1.0 point, while 44 had decreases of that size.

## Changes in Social Hostilities

Changes on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from the previous year (ending in mid-2009) to the latest year (ending in mid-2010)

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	PERCENTAGE OF COUNTRIES
2.0 or more increase	17	9%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	25	13
0.1 to 0.9 increase	55	28
No change	37	19
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	44	22
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	15	8
2.0 or more decrease	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>

Point changes are calculated by comparing SHI scores from year to year. Percentages may not add exactly due to rounding.

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Considering changes of any magnitude, 49% of countries had increases in hostilities from mid-2009 to mid-2010, while 32% had decreases. During the three previous years, by contrast, 44% of countries had increases in hostilities and 39% had decreases.

### Changes in Overall Restrictions

Considering government restrictions and social hostilities together, increases outnumbered decreases in each point range from mid-2009 to mid-2010. Among countries whose scores went up or down by 2.0 points or more on *either of the indexes* after taking into account any offsetting change on the other index, six times as many countries had increases (18) as decreases (three).<sup>3</sup>

## Overall Changes in Global Restrictions on Religion

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) or Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from the previous year (ending in mid-2009) to the latest year (ending in mid-2010)

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	PERCENTAGE OF COUNTRIES
2.0 or more increase	18	9%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	37	19
0.1 to 0.9 increase	75	38
No change	12	6
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	35	18
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	17	9
2.0 or more decrease	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>

Categories of overall changes in restrictions are calculated by comparing a country's unrounded scores on the GRI and the SHI from year to year. When a country's scores on the GRI and the SHI changed in the same direction (both increased or both decreased), the greater amount of change determined the category. For instance, if the country's GRI score increased by 0.8 and its SHI score increased by 1.5, the country was put into the "1.0-1.9 increase" category. When a country's score increased on one index but decreased on the other, the difference between the amounts of change determined the grouping. For example, if the country's GRI score increased by 2.0 and its SHI score decreased by 1.5, the country went into the "0.1-0.9 increase" category. When a country's score on one index stayed the same, the amount of change on the other index was used to assign the category.

Percentages may not add exactly due to rounding.

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Overall, restrictions increased at least somewhat in 66% of countries and decreased in 28% between mid-2009 and mid-2010. As was the case when the two indexes were considered separately, this exceeds the increase during the preceding three years, when 56% of countries had increases and 39% had decreases.

### Sidebar: Situation in the United States

The United States was among the 16 countries whose scores on both the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index increased by one point or more in the year ending in mid-2010. This was the first time scores for the U.S. increased on both indexes during the four-year period covered in this study.

[Read More...](#)

### Patterns among Specific Types of Restrictions and Hostilities

As noted in previous Pew Forum studies on religious restrictions, higher scores on the Government Restrictions Index are associated with higher scores on the Social Hostilities Index and vice versa. This means that, in general, it is rare for countries that score high on one index to be low on the other.

The new study finds that some government restrictions have a stronger association with social hostilities than others. Government policies or actions that clearly favor one religion over others have the strongest association with social hostilities involving religion. The average level of social hostilities among the countries with very high levels of government favoritism (SHI = 4.8) is much higher than the average level of social hostilities among countries with low levels of government favoritism (1.3), as shown in the chart on page 20. Other government actions that are strongly associated with social hostilities involving religion are (in descending order): the use of force against religious groups; failing to intervene to stop religious discrimination; and limiting conversion from one religion to another.<sup>4</sup>

As the chart below shows, social hostilities involving religion were lowest among countries where governments do not harass or intimidate religious groups; national laws and policies protect religious freedom; governments do not interfere with religious worship or practices; and governments do not use force against religious groups.

Likewise, certain types of social hostilities involving religion are more likely to be associated with higher government restrictions on religion. Sectarian or communal violence between religious groups has the strongest association with government restrictions on religion. The average level of government restrictions among the countries with sectarian violence (GRI = 5.0) is much higher than among countries without such violence (2.4), as shown in the chart on page 21. Other social hostilities that are strongly associated with government restrictions are (in descending order): hostilities over conversion from one religion to another; violence or the threat of violence to enforce religious norms; religion-related terrorist violence; and groups coercively dominating public life with their perspective on religion.<sup>5</sup>

As shown in the chart below, government restrictions are, on average, lowest in countries where there are no violent acts resulting from tensions between religious groups; there are no crimes or malicious acts motivated by religious hatred; there are no groups dominating public life with their perspective on religion; and there are no incidents of violence stemming from hostility over conversions.

### Harassment of Specific Groups

The Government Restrictions Index and Social Hostilities Index each include a question about the harassment of specific religious groups (GRI Q.11 and SHI Q.1a). Harassment and intimidation by governments or social groups take many forms, including physical assaults, arrests and detentions, the desecration of holy sites and discrimination against religious groups in employment, education and housing. Harassment and intimidation also include such things as verbal assaults on members of one religious group by other groups or individuals.

The number of countries where harassment or intimidation of specific religious groups took place rose from 147 as of mid-2009 to 160 as of mid-2010. Moreover, five of the seven major religious groups included in this study – Christians, Jews, Buddhists, adherents of folk or traditional religions, and members of other world religions – experienced four-year highs with respect to the number of countries in which they were harassed by some level of government or by individuals or groups in society.

In the year ending in mid-2010, government or social harassment of Christians was reported in 111 countries; the previous high was 107 countries in the first year of the study. Government or social harassment of Jews was reported in 68 countries in the year ending in mid-2010, a figure that had been steadily rising across all four years of the study. Incidents of harassment involving members of other world religions – including Sikhs, ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, and newer faiths such as Baha'is and Rastafarians – occurred in 52 countries in the year ending in mid-2010, up from 39 countries the previous year. Members of groups that practice folk or traditional religions (including African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions) faced harassment in 26 countries, compared with 24 in the previous year. Buddhists were harassed in 15 countries in the latest year studied; although this is far fewer than most other major religious groups, it represents a four-year high for this group. In the latest year of the study, Muslims were harassed in 90 countries and Hindus faced harassment in 16 countries – also more countries than in the previous year, though not four-year highs.

Overall, across the four years of this study, religious groups were harassed in a total of 184 countries at

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one time or another. 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.<sup>6</sup> Jews, who comprise less than 1% of the world's population, experienced harassment in a total of 85 countries, while members of other world faiths were harassed in a total of 72 countries.

restrict3-11

Some religious groups were more likely to be harassed by governments, while others were more likely to be harassed by individuals or groups in society. Christians, for example, were harassed by government officials or organizations in 95

countries in the year ending in mid-2010 and by social groups or individuals in 77 countries. Muslims also were more likely to be harassed by governments (74 countries) than by social groups or individuals (64 countries). Jews, by contrast, experienced social harassment in many more countries (64) than they faced government harassment (21).

### Regions and Countries

Government restrictions on religion and/or social hostilities involving religion increased in each of the five major regions of the world between mid-2009 and mid-2010. In three regions – Europe, the Middle East-North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa – the median level of restrictions and hostilities both increased. In the Americas, the median level of government restrictions increased, while in the Asia-Pacific region, the median level of social hostilities increased.

Looking at the extent and direction of change on the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index together, increases of one point or more outnumbered decreases of that magnitude in all five regions, as shown in the chart on page 25. Sub-Saharan Africa had the largest share of countries with increases of one point or more (36%). Europe and the Americas had the lowest proportion of countries where overall restrictions increased by one point or more (22% and 23%, respectively).

#### *Government Restrictions by Region*

The median level of government restrictions on religion increased in four of the five regions demarcated in this study (the Middle East and North Africa, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas); it stayed roughly the same in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the latest year studied, government restrictions were highest in the Middle East and North Africa. The median score on the Government Restrictions Index for the 20 countries in the region (5.8 as of mid-2010) was up from the previous year (5.2).

As of mid-2010, government restrictions on religion were high or very high in most of the countries that experienced the political uprisings known as the Arab Spring in late 2010 and early 2011. In Tunisia – where the uprisings began – government restrictions increased from the high category as of mid-2009 to the very high category as of mid-2010 (an increase of more than two points). In Egypt – where the violence spread shortly after – government restrictions already were in the very high category; still, the country's score on the Government Restrictions Index edged slightly higher, from 8.6 in mid-2009 to 8.7 in mid-2010. And in Yemen – where violence erupted almost simultaneously with the uprising in Egypt – government restrictions on religion rose from the high category (6.4) as of mid-2009 to the very high category (7.0) as of mid-2010.

The 50 countries in the Asia-Pacific region had a median GRI score in the middle range (3.4) as of mid-2010, the same as the previous year. However, half of the 18 countries worldwide with very high government restrictions on religion are located in the region: Indonesia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, China, Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam and Azerbaijan.

Median scores on the Government Restrictions Index for countries in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas rose slightly from mid-2009 to mid-2010. Although the median level of government restrictions in the Americas was relatively low (1.2 as of mid-2010), one country, Cuba, had high restrictions. Eight other countries in the region, including the United States, were in the moderate category. (See sidebar on the [Situation in the United States.](#))

#### *Social Hostilities by Region*

The median level of social hostilities involving religion also increased in four of the five regions (the Middle

East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa); it stayed roughly the same in the Americas.

As with government restrictions, social hostilities involving religion were highest in the Middle East and North Africa. However, the region's median score on the Social Hostilities Index rose only slightly, from 4.2 as of mid-2009 to 4.3 as of mid-2010.

The median level of social hostilities in the Americas remained low, unchanged from mid-2009 to mid-2010. Only one of the 35 countries in the region – Mexico – had high social hostilities, and 29 (83%) had low hostilities. Five countries in the region (United States, Brazil, Colombia, Haiti and Chile) were in the moderate category; however, all but one of these countries, Colombia, had increases of one point or more on the Social Hostilities Index. Columbia's score decreased by 0.2. (See [sidebar on the Situation in the United States.](#))

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#### *Restrictions and Hostilities in the Most Populous Countries*

Among the world's 25 most populous countries, Egypt, Indonesia, Russia, Burma (Myanmar), Iran, Vietnam, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nigeria stand out as having the most restrictions on religion as of mid-2010 when government restrictions and social hostilities both are taken into account. Brazil, Japan, Italy, the United States and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have the least restrictions and hostilities.

None of the 25 most populous countries had low social hostilities involving religion as of mid-2010, while four had low government restrictions on religion: South Africa, Brazil, Philippines and Japan. As discussed in the sidebar on page 15, the United States moved from the low category of government restrictions in mid-2009 to the moderate category in 2010, based on the information in the sources consulted for this study.

Government restrictions and/or social hostilities increased by one point or more in several European countries from mid-2009 to mid-2010, including Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany and France. (See [Government Restrictions Index table PDF](#) on and [Social Hostilities Index table PDF](#).) Russia moved from the high category of social hostilities in mid-2009 to the very high category in mid-2010, primarily because of increasing tensions in heavily Muslim areas. Russia already had very high government restrictions. Indeed, Russia was the only European country with very high scores on both the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index in the latest year studied. (To compare scores for each of the 25 most populous countries in all four years covered in this study, see the interactive feature below.)

Embed Code:

### About the Study

These are among the key findings of the Pew Forum's new report on global restrictions on religion. The 197 countries and self-administering territories covered by the study contain more than 99.5% of the world's population. They include 191 of the 192 member states of the United Nations as of mid-2010 plus six self-administering territories — Kosovo, Hong Kong, Macau, the Palestinian territories, Taiwan and Western Sahara.<sup>7</sup> Each country or territory was scored on a total of 33 measures phrased as questions about government restrictions or social hostilities involving religion. (For the full question wording, see the [Summary of Results](#).) The Government Restrictions Index is comprised of 20 questions; there are 13 questions on the Social Hostilities Index.

To answer the questions that make up the indexes, Pew Forum researchers combed through 19 widely cited, publicly available sources of information, including reports by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or



Belief, the Council of the European Union, the United Kingdom's Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, Freedom House and Amnesty International. (For the complete list of sources, see the [Methodology](#).)

The researchers involved in this process recorded only concrete reports about specific government laws, policies and actions, as well as specific incidents of religious violence or intolerance by social groups; they did not rely on the commentaries or opinions of the sources. (For a more detailed explanation of the coding and data verification procedures, see the [Methodology](#).) The goal was to devise a battery of quantifiable, objective measures that could be analyzed individually as well as combined into two comprehensive indexes, the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index.

Some of the increases in religious restrictions noted in this study could reflect the use of more up-to-date or better information sources, but there is no evidence of a general informational bias in the direction of higher restrictions. For instance, the social hostilities sections of the U.S. State Department's annual reports on International Religious Freedom (one of the 19 primary sources used in this study) in general have gotten shorter in more recent years. Pew Forum staff carefully monitor the impact of source information variability each year. (See the [Methodology](#) for more details.)

Readers should note that the categories of very high, high, moderate and low restrictions or hostilities are relative – not absolute – rankings based on the overall distribution of index scores in the initial year of this study. As such, they provide a guide for comparing country scores and evaluating their direction of change over time. They also reflect the number and severity of different restrictions or hostilities that occurred in a given year in any part of the country. Accordingly, more populous countries may have a higher likelihood of scoring higher than less populous countries, though in practice, some countries with very high levels of restrictions or hostilities have relatively small populations, such as the Maldives and the Palestinian territories.

Finally, although it is very likely that more restrictions exist than are reported by the 19 primary sources, taken together the sources are sufficiently comprehensive to provide a good estimate of the levels of restrictions in almost all countries. The one major exception is North Korea. The sources clearly indicate that North Korea's government is among the most repressive in the world with respect to religion as well as other civil and political liberties. (The U.S. State Department's 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom, for example, says that "Genuine freedom of religion does not exist" in North Korea.) But because North Korean society is effectively closed to outsiders and independent observers lack regular access to the country, the sources were unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that the Pew Forum categorized and counted ("coded," in social science parlance) for this quantitative study. Therefore, the report does not include scores for North Korea.

#### Footnotes:

1 Previous reports provided a score for the territory of Northern Cyprus and therefore included 198 countries and territories. According to the U.S. State Department, only one country – Turkey – recognizes the separate status of Northern Cyprus. Thus, future reports will score Northern Cyprus as part of the Republic of Cyprus. The exclusion of Northern Cyprus in this report has a negligible effect on the global and regional findings. In addition, a single index score was recorded for all of Sudan for this report because South Sudan remained a part of Sudan until July 2011, which is after the period studied in this report. ([Return to text](#))

2 The 17 countries that had increases of 2.0 points or more were: Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Cyprus, France, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The four countries that had decreases of 2.0 points or more were Comoros, Denmark, Slovakia and Western Sahara. ([Return to text](#))

3 The 18 countries that had an increase of 2.0 points or more were: Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cyprus, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, New Zealand, Nicaragua, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The three countries that had decreases of 2.0 points or more were Comoros, Denmark and Slovakia. ([Return to text](#))

4 Ordering is based on second decimal places when scores are tied. ([Return to text](#))

5 Ordering is based on second decimal places when scores are tied. ([Return to text](#))

6 For estimates of the size of the global Christian population, see the Pew Forum's 2011 report, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population." For estimates of the size of the global Muslim population, see the Pew Forum's 2011 report, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population." ([Return to text](#))

7 As previously noted, this report does not include scores for the territory of Northern Cyprus or North Korea. ([Return to text](#))

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