

Religious Restrictions On Rise in 23 Nations

A new study suggests that government-controlled religion restrictions or social hostilities involving religion are getting worse in nearly one third of the world.

Of the world's total population of 6.9 billion, more than 2.2 billion people—32 percent—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 new study on global restrictions on religion released Tuesday by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. Government restrictions or social hostilities declined in only about 1 percent of the world's population.

In general, most of the countries that experienced substantial increases in government restrictions or social hostilities involving religion already had high or very high levels of restrictions or hostilities. By contrast, nearly half of the countries that had substantial decreases in restrictions or hostilities already scored low. This suggests that there may be a gradual polarization taking place in which countries that are relatively high in religious restrictions are becoming more restrictive, while those that are relatively low are becoming less restrictive.

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.

Like the baseline report, the new 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 and social hostilities. The study uses 18 widely cited, publicly available information sources, 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.