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Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend

Government harassment and use of force against religious groups surge as record number of refugees enter Europe

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Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend

Government harassment and use of force against religious groups surge as record number of refugees enter Europe

Government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion increased in 2015 for the first time in three years, according to Pew Research Center's latest annual study on global restrictions on religion.

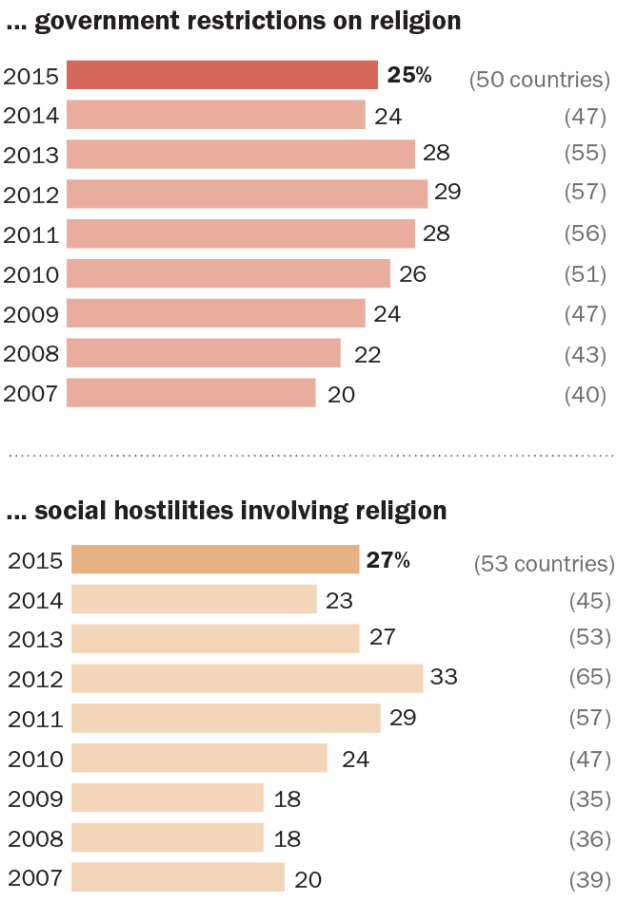
The share of countries with "high" or "very high" levels of government restrictions – i.e., laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices – ticked up from 24% in 2014 to 25% in 2015. Meanwhile, the percentage of countries with high or very high levels of social hostilities – i.e., acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society – increased in 2015, from 23% to 27%. Both of these increases follow two years of declines in the percentage of countries with high levels of restrictions on religion by these measures.

When looking at overall levels of restrictions in 2015 – whether resulting from government policies and actions or from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations or social groups – the new study finds that 40% of countries had high or very high levels of restrictions, up from 34% in 2014.

In addition to a rise in the percentage of countries with high or very high levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion, religious restrictions also rose

Number of countries with high or very high restrictions, hostilities rises in 2015

*% of **198 countries** with high or very high levels of ...*



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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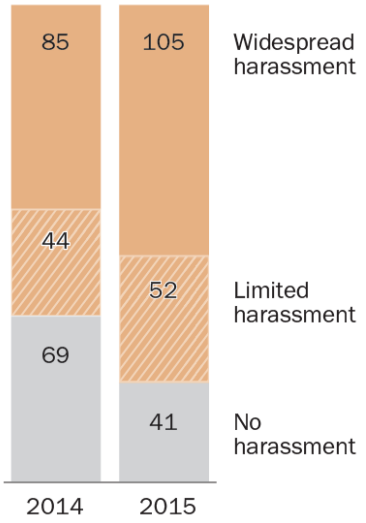
in 2015 by other measures. For example, more countries saw their scores on the Government Restrictions Index (based on 20 indicators of government restrictions on religion) increase rather than decrease (see Chapter 1). And the global median score on the Social Hostilities Index, based on 13 measures of social hostilities involving religion, ticked up in 2015 (see Chapter 3).

The global rise in social hostilities reflected a number of factors, including increases in mob violence related to religion, individuals being assaulted or displaced due to their faith, and incidents where violence was used to enforce religious norms. In Europe, for instance, there were 17 countries where incidents of religion-related mob violence were reported in 2015, up from nine the previous year. And sub-Saharan Africa saw a spread in violence used to enforce religious norms, such as the targeting of people with albinism for rituals by witch doctors. This type of hostility was reported in 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015, up from nine countries in 2014. (For more on rising religious restrictions in sub-Saharan Africa, see sidebar on page 30.)

The increase in government restrictions was linked to a surge in government harassment and use of force against religious groups, two of the specific indicators used to measure government restrictions on religion in the analysis.[1] Four of the five geographic regions analyzed in this report – the Middle East and North Africa, Asia and the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and

Government harassment of religious groups increases in 2015

Number of governments that engaged in _____ of religious groups in 2015



Note: "Limited" and "widespread" harassment refer to the scale and/or frequency of incidents. See Methodology for details.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data.
See Methodology for details.
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[1] For the purposes of this study, government harassment includes a government offense against a religious group or person due to their religious identity, including physical coercion or being singled out with the intent of making life or religious practice more difficult. Policies that specifically have an adverse effect on particular religious groups, or negative public comments or characterizations about religious groups by the government or government officials, also constitute harassment. Harassment is categorized as "limited" or "widespread" depending on the number of groups affected, the frequency of the harassment, the potential for the harassment to spread to multiple regions, or whether the harassment indicates a possible campaign against a certain religion or practice. For example, a country in which more than three religious groups were harassed, or where the harassment occurred in more than one region, would be classified as having widespread harassment of religious groups. A country in which one group was harassed, or where the harassment occurred in an isolated region, would be classified as having limited harassment of religious groups.
Government use of force against religious groups can include government actions or policies that result in damage to personal or religious property, arrest and detentions, displacement, assault, or death. Cases are aggregated into five categories, ranging from at least one but fewer than 10 cases to over 10,000 cases in a year. This measure does not include government use of force against those explicitly intending malicious harm.
For more details on how the analysis in this report is conducted, see Methodology.

Europe – saw increases in these two areas.

Of the 198 countries in the study, 105 (53%) experienced widespread government harassment of religious groups, up from 85 (43%) in 2014 and 96 (48%) in 2013. Limited harassment – cases that were isolated or affected a small number of groups – also rose, taking place in 52 countries (26%) in 2015 (up from 44, or 22% of countries, in 2014).

Government use of force against religious groups increased as well, with 23 countries (12%) experiencing more than 200 cases of government force in 2015, up from 21 (11%) in 2014. There was an even bigger increase in the number of countries with at least one, but no more than 200 incidents of government use of force against religious groups: 83 nations (42%) fell into this category in 2015, an increase from 60 countries (30%) in 2014.

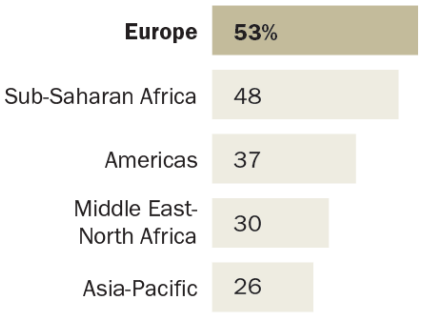
Government harassment and use of force rising in Europe, along with social hostilities against Muslims

While the Middle East-North Africa region continued to have the largest proportion of governments that engaged in harassment and use of force against religious groups (95%), Europe had the largest *increase* in these measures in 2015. More than half of the 45 countries in the region (53%) experienced an increase in government harassment or use of force from 2014 to 2015. Twenty-seven European countries (60%) saw widespread government harassment or intimidation of religious groups in 2015, up from 17 countries in 2014. And the governments of 24 countries in Europe (53%) used some type of force against religious groups, an increase from 15 (33%) in 2014.

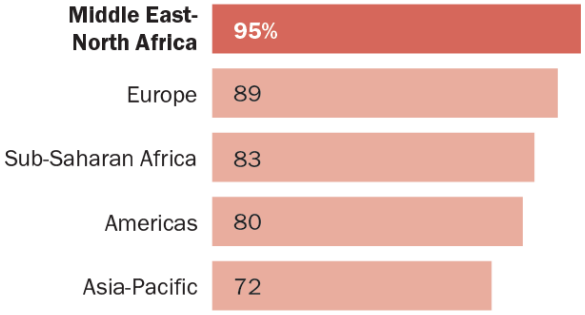
Two countries in Europe, France and Russia, each had more than 200 cases of government force against religious groups – mostly cases of individuals being punished for violating the ban on face coverings in public spaces and government buildings in France, and groups being prosecuted in Russia for publicly exercising their religion.[2] France and Russia also were the only two European countries with more than 200 cases of government force against religious groups in 2014, but there was a significant rise in 2015 in the number of countries in Europe where lower numbers of incidents – between one and nine – occurred (eight in 2014 vs. 17 in 2015).

Europe sees largest increase in government harassment and use of force against religious groups

*% of countries in each region with **increases** in government harassment or use of force against religious groups between 2014 and 2015*



% of countries in each region that experienced government harassment or use of force against religious groups in 2015



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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[2] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "France." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015. Also see the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance. June 30, 2016. "Annual Report on the State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the World."

Some incidents of government harassment measured by this study – which are not always physical, but may include derogatory statements by public officials or discrimination against certain religious groups – were related to Europe's incoming refugee population. In 2015, 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in Europe, nearly doubling the previous annual high of about 700,000 in 1992, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. More than half (54%) came from three Muslim-majority countries – Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

One such example involved Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, who complained about the religious makeup of refugees coming into the country. In September 2015, he wrote in a German newspaper, "Those arriving have been raised in another religion, and represent a radically different culture. Most of them are not Christians, but Muslims." He later told journalists, "I think we have a right to decide that we do not want a large number of Muslim people in our country," and in another interview said "the Islamic religion and culture do not blend with Christian religion and culture; it is a different way of life."[3]

Similarly, neighboring Slovakia rejected European Union mandatory refugee quotas, but said it would accept 200 Christian refugees from Syria. In August 2015, the Ministry of Interior explained the decision, saying Christian refugees would be better able to assimilate into Slovakian society than Muslim refugees given the lack of officially recognized mosques in the country. Earlier in the year, the leader of the Slovak National Party, Andrej Danko, had proposed a new law that would make it impossible to build Islamic religious buildings in the country.[4]

In addition to harassment by government officials, many European governments employed force against religious groups. For example, in February of 2015, German police raided the mosque of the Islamic Cultural Center in Bremen; the police said they suspected that the mosque supported Salafist groups and that a person associated with the mosque was distributing automatic weapons for a terror attack. Police broke down the front door of the mosque, handcuffed worshippers and forced some to lie on the floor for hours. No weapons were found in the mosque. In July, a Bremen regional court ruled that the search was unlawful.[5]

These incidents took place in a climate influenced by threats and attacks from religiously inspired terrorist groups. France experienced several religion-related terror attacks in 2015, including the Jan. 7 shooting at the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and the Nov. 13 attacks claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) at the Bataclan concert hall and various other

[3] Mackey, Robert. Sept. 3, 2015. "Hungarian Leader Rebuked for Saying Muslim Migrants Must Be Blocked 'to Keep Europe Christian.'" The New York Times. Also see U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Hungary." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[4] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Slovak Republic." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[5] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Germany." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

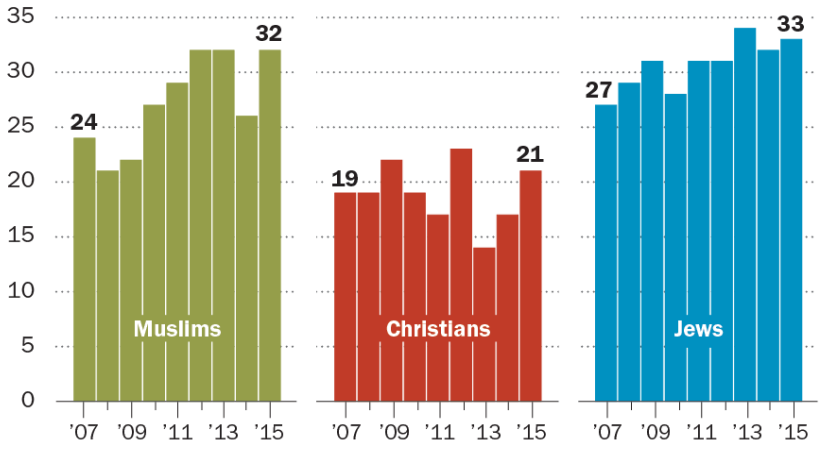
locations throughout Paris.[6] In the days following the Paris attacks, Germany cancelled an international soccer match because of security threats, and Belgian authorities arrested 16 people suspected of planning similar acts.[7]

Altogether, European law enforcement officials reported record numbers of terrorist attacks either carried out or prevented by authorities in 2015, although not all of these events were directly related to religion.[8]

Attacks that *were* influenced by religion, such as those in Paris, are counted in the study as social hostilities involving religion – i.e., hostile actions motivated by religion and carried out by individuals or social groups, separate from government actions. In Europe, hostilities toward Muslims in particular increased considerably. In 2015, 32 countries in Europe (71%) experienced social hostilities toward Muslims, up from 26 countries (58%) in 2014. By comparison, social hostilities toward Christians spread from 17 (38%) countries in 2014 to 21 (47%) in 2015. Hostilities against Jews in Europe remained common and increased slightly, from 32 (71%) countries in 2014 to 33 (73%) countries in 2015. Many of the incidents targeting these religious groups occurred in the form of mob violence.

Jews and Muslims remain victims of social hostilities in most European countries

Of the 45 countries in Europe, the number with social hostilities against _____ between 2007 and 2015



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[6] Bilefsky, Dan, and Maïa de la Baume. Jan. 7, 2015. "Terrorists Strike Charlie Hebdo Newspaper in Paris, Leaving 12 Dead." The New York Times. Also see Rubin, Alissa J. Nov. 12, 2016. "Paris: One Year On." The New York Times.
[7] Eddy, Melissa. Nov. 17, 2015. "Soccer Match in Germany Is Canceled Over Security Concerns." The New York Times. Also see Higgins, Andrew, and Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura. Nov. 22, 2015. "16 Arrests in Belgium Terrorism Raids." The New York Times.
[8] July 20, 2016. "Record number of EU terror attacks recorded in 2015." BBC News.

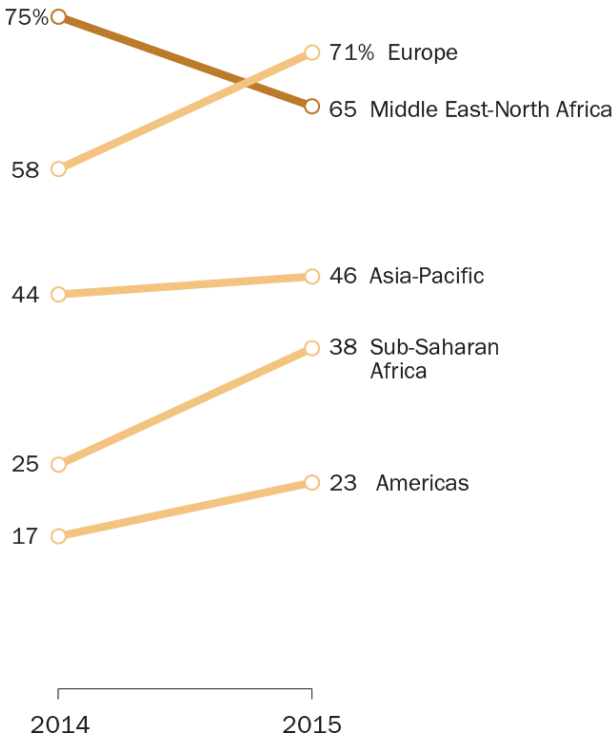
In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan concert hall shootings, some Muslims in France faced violent attacks by social groups or individuals. For example, two Muslim places of worship in the cities of Le Mans and Narbonne were attacked by grenades and gunshots the day after the Charlie Hebdo shooting. France's Interior Ministry reported that anti-Muslim incidents more than tripled in 2015, including cases of hate speech, vandalism and violence against individuals.[9]

Vandals in Spain also targeted mosques after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January of 2015.[10] Perpetrators drew swastikas and threats on Spanish mosques and Islamic centers on four separate occasions that month.

In Slovakia, far-right political groups organized protests against the "Islamization of Europe and Slovakia," drawing an estimated 3,000-5,000 people in Bratislava in June. The protest was called "STOP to the Islamization of Europe! Together against the Brussels dictate, for a Europe for Europeans." Groups held two more protests in September and October along a similar theme.[11]

Social hostilities toward Muslims increased most in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa

% of countries in each region with social harassment of Muslims



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[9] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "France." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[10] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Spain." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[11] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Slovak Republic." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

About this report

This is the eighth in a series of reports by Pew Research Center analyzing the extent to which governments and societies around the world impinge on religious beliefs and practices. The studies are part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project, which analyzes religious change and its impact on societies around the world. The project is jointly funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

To measure global restrictions on religion in 2015 – the most recent year for which data are available – the study ranks 198 countries and territories by their levels of government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. The new study is based on the same 10-point indexes used in the previous studies.

• The Government Restrictions Index measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. The GRI is comprised of 20 measures of restrictions, including efforts by government to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversion, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups.

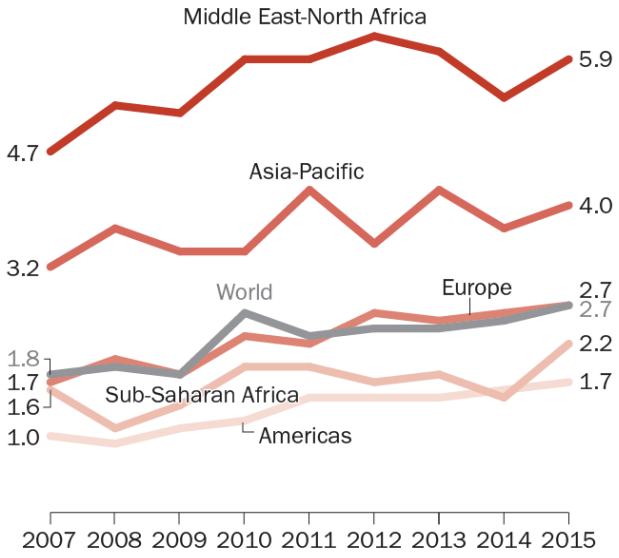
• The Social Hostilities Index measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society. This includes religion-related armed conflict or terrorism, mob or sectarian violence, harassment over attire for religious reasons or other religion-related intimidation or abuse. The SHI includes 13 measures of social hostilities.

To track these indicators of government restrictions and social hostilities, researchers combed through more than a dozen publicly available, widely cited sources of information, including the U.S. State Department's annual reports on international religious freedom and annual reports from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, as well as reports from a variety of European and U.N. bodies and several independent, nongovernmental organizations. (See Methodology for more details on sources used in the study.)

The new study also examines religious restrictions by region. The sharpest increase in median Government Restrictions Index score in 2015 occurred in sub-Saharan Africa, rising to 2.2 from 1.5 in 2014 (see sidebar on page 30 for more information on changes in sub-Saharan Africa).[12] But when looking at long-term trends, it is clear that a few other regions, including the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, have seen greater increases in median levels of government restrictions on religion since 2007. Indeed, the Middle East-North Africa region has seen the largest *increase* in government restrictions since 2007 and continued to have the highest *level* of these restrictions in 2015, with the region's median score increasing to 5.9 from 5.4 in 2014.

Middle East-North Africa continues to have highest government restrictions on religion

Median scores on the Government Restrictions Index, by region



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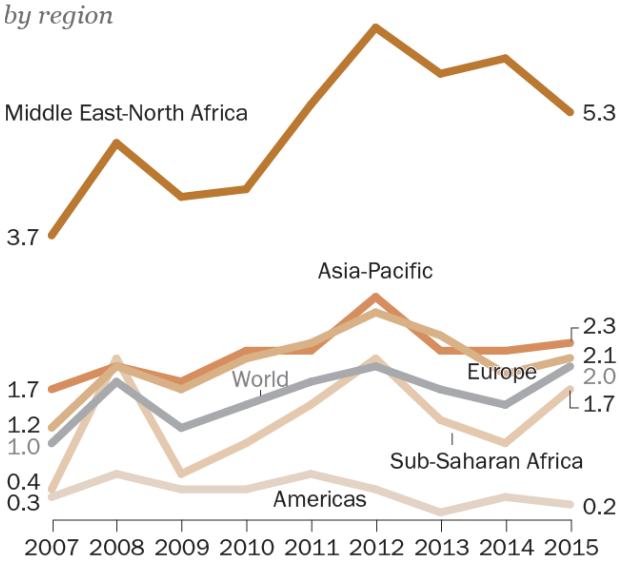
[12] As a result of an audit of country constitutions, sub-Saharan Africa's median score in 2014 was amended to 1.5. See Methodology for details.

Europe was one of the two regions where social hostilities toward religion rose in 2015, but sub-Saharan Africa experienced the largest increase in its median score during the year. The Middle East-North Africa region continued to have the highest levels of hostilities, despite a decline in 2015.

Sub-Saharan Africa sees biggest increase in social hostilities involving religion in 2015

Median scores on the Social Hostilities Index, by region



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Combining government restrictions and social hostilities, four-in-ten of the countries included in the study are in the most restrictive categories (high or very high). But some of these countries are among the world's most populous (such as Indonesia and Pakistan). As a result, 79% of the world's population lived in countries with high or very high levels of restrictions and/or hostilities in 2015 (up from 74% in 2014). It is important to note, however, that these restrictions and hostilities do not necessarily affect the religious groups and citizens of these countries equally, as certain groups or individuals may be targeted more frequently by these policies and actions than others.

Among the world's 25 most populous countries, Russia, Egypt, India, Pakistan and Nigeria had the highest overall levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion. Egypt had the highest levels of government restrictions in 2015, while Nigeria had the highest levels of social hostilities.

Muslims and Christians – who together make up more than half of the global population – continued to be harassed in the highest number of countries. The study also finds that the number of countries where Jews were harassed fell slightly in 2015, after years of steady increases.

1. Rise in countries with 'very high' government restrictions on religion in 2015

Countries with the most extensive government restrictions on religion

Many countries have some form of government restriction on religion, whether it involves policies that favor some groups over others or outright bans on certain worship practices. But each year, a few countries stand out as having particularly extensive restrictions.

In 2015, 23 of the 198 countries in the study had "very high" levels of government restrictions, up from 16 countries in 2014.[13] Some countries – like China, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran – have had very high levels of restrictions every year since 2007, the first year for which data are available. Other countries may fluctuate into and out of this top category. Eight countries had very high levels of government restrictions in 2015 but not in 2014: Vietnam, Singapore, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Eritrea, Brunei and Mauritania. Laos was the only country to fall out of this category in 2015.

The number of countries with "high" levels of restrictions fell somewhat, from 31 countries in 2014 to 27 countries in 2015, although this was mainly due to some countries moving into the "very high" category. Meanwhile, the number of countries with "low" levels of restrictions decreased from 2014 to 2015 (from 92 to 87). For a complete list of all

Countries with very high government restrictions on religion

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

2014	2015
China	Egypt
Egypt	China
Uzbekistan	Iran
Turkey	Russia
Iran	Uzbekistan
Indonesia	Malaysia
Syria	Saudi Arabia
Saudi Arabia	Indonesia
Kazakhstan	Syria
Azerbaijan	**Morocco**
Turkmenistan	**Iraq**
Laos	**Algeria**
Malaysia	Tajikistan
Maldives	**Brunei**
Russia	Turkmenistan
Tajikistan	Azerbaijan
	Turkey
	Kazakhstan
	Eritrea
	Singapore
	Maldives
	Mauritania
	Vietnam

Note: Gray indicates a country that had very high government restrictions in 2014 but not in 2015. Bold indicates a country that had very high government restrictions in 2015 but not in 2014.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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[13] Countries with a "very high" level of government restrictions had the maximum score on at least 14 of the 20 questions that make up the Government Restrictions Index.

countries in each category, see the Government Restrictions Index table in Appendix A.[14]

Countries with the most extensive social hostilities involving religion

Similarly, most countries have some form of social hostilities involving religion, including social groups harassing members of a certain religion, or terrorist groups carrying out actions in the name of religion. Some countries, however, have particularly extensive social hostilities.

Eleven countries had "very high" levels of social hostilities involving religion in 2015, the same number as in 2014.[15] Despite the overall number of countries in this category remaining constant, there was some movement into and out of this category in 2015. Russia and Egypt had very high levels of social hostilities in 2015, but not in 2014; meanwhile, Lebanon and Sri Lanka fell out of the "very high" category in 2015.

The number of countries with "low" levels of social hostilities involving religion dropped from 98 in 2014 to 87 in 2015. For a complete list of all countries in each category, see the Social Hostilities Index table in Appendix B.[16]

Countries with very high social hostilities involving religion

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

2014	2015
Israel	Syria
Iraq	Nigeria
Syria	Iraq
Yemen	India
Pakistan	Israel
Sri Lanka	Yemen
India	**Russia**
Afghanistan	Afghanistan
Lebanon	Palestinian territories
Palestinian territories	Pakistan
Nigeria	**Egypt**

Note: Gray indicates a country that had very high social hostilities in 2014 but not in 2015. Bold indicates a country that had very high social hostilities in 2015 but not in 2014.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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[14] To see index-score thresholds for the very high, high, moderate and low categories, see Methodology.
[15] Countries with "very high" social hostilities had maximum scores on at least 10 of the 13 questions that make up the Social Hostilities Index.
[16] To see index-score thresholds for the very high, high, moderate and low categories, see Methodology.

Changes in government restrictions on religion

Each year, some countries experience significant changes in their scores on the Government Restrictions Index without necessarily rising into – or falling out of – the "very high" restrictions category. Looking only at countries with very high government restrictions would overlook these important dynamics. For this reason, Pew Research Center analyzes changes in government restrictions among all countries – not just those with a very high level of government restrictions – to provide greater insight into the nature of government restrictions on religion around the world.

More than half of countries experience increases in government restrictions on religion in 2015

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) from 2014 to 2015

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	4	2%	
1.0 to 1.9 increase	25	13	**54%**
0.1 to 0.9 increase	77	39	
No change	35	18	**18%**
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	53	27	
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	4	2	**29%**
2.0 or more decrease	0	0	
Total	**198**	**100**	

Note: Point changes are calculated by comparing GRI scores from year to year. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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Four countries – Cameroon, Comoros, Morocco and Niger – had a large change (2.0 points or more) on the Government Restrictions Index in 2015, all in the direction of higher restrictions. Some of this increase was due to policies that targeted certain religious practices. For example, in July of 2015, the governor of Cameroon's Far North Region banned the full-face veil after female suicide bombers wearing the religious garment killed at least 13 people in attacks.[17] Similar rules were enacted in Niger, where authorities banned full-face veils after an increase in militants using these types of coverings to hide explosive devices.[18]

Twenty-nine countries had modest changes of between 1.0 and 1.9 points in their GRI scores. Of these countries, four – Laos, Fiji, Turkey and Uganda – had decreases. Twenty-five had increases, with the United Arab Emirates and Somalia registering the largest increases (1.8 points and 1.6 points, respectively). Both of these countries increased restrictions on worship practices of certain faiths. In Somalia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs announced a ban on Christmas celebrations just before the holiday, and the United Arab Emirates continued to prohibit "black magic, sorcery,

[17] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Cameroon." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[18] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Niger." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

and incantations" while also strictly regulating the building of houses of worship for non-Muslim religious groups.[19]

Most countries had small changes in their GRI scores (less than 1 point). Seventy-seven countries (39%) had increases in their scores, while 53 (27%) had decreases.

Changes in social hostilities involving religion

Some countries had significant changes in their Social Hostilities Index scores, regardless of whether they fell in the "very high" category.

Sixteen countries had large changes (2.0 points or more) in their SHI score from 2014 to 2015. Of these, 12 had increases and four had decreases. Switzerland, Niger, the Philippines and Nepal had the largest increases in their scores: All four countries rose from moderate levels of social hostilities to high levels in 2015.

In Switzerland, there was a rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents in 2015. In July, for example, several people attacked an Orthodox Jew – one of the main perpetrators of the attack spat in the man's face and shouted "Heil Hitler!" Earlier in the year, in May, 13 Muslim gravesites were desecrated by vandals.[20]

And in Niger, the rising hostilities were due in part to violent protests against President Mahamadou Issoufou's comments in support of those killed in the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris. Issoufou said "We are all Charlie" at an event in Paris honoring the victims of the attack, sparking two days of violence in Niger during which 10 people were killed, 177 were injured and 69 churches and Christian-owned homes were destroyed.[21]

Large increases in social hostilities involving religion outnumber large decreases in 2015

Changes on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from 2014 to 2015

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	12	6%	
1.0 to 1.9 increase	28	14	39%
0.1 to 0.9 increase	38	19	
No change	42	21	21%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	55	28	
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	19	10	39%
2.0 or more decrease	4	2	
Total	**198**	**100**	

Note: Point changes are calculated by comparing SHI scores from year to year. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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[19] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Somalia." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015. Also see U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "United Arab Emirates." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[20] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Switzerland." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

The four countries with large decreases in their scores from 2014 to 2015 were Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Sweden and Sudan. In Azerbaijan, for instance, incidents of hostility from social groups toward religious groups, religion-related terrorism and violence resulting from the enforcement of religious norms all declined.

Among countries with modest changes (1.0 to 1.9 points) in their SHI scores, 28 had increases and 19 had decreases. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the increase in score was due in part to attacks throughout the year by the Islamic State militant group (also known as ISIS or ISIL). Local affiliates of the group claimed responsibility for five attacks in Saudi Arabia, including three suicide bombings at Shiite mosques and a shooting at a Shiite religious center.[22]

Ninety-three countries had only small changes from 2014 to 2015 (less than 1 point). Of these countries, 55 had decreases, while 38 had increases in their SHI scores.

[21] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Niger." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[22] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Saudi Arabia." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

Changes in overall restrictions on religion

In addition to analyzing government restrictions and social hostilities separately, Pew Research Center also considers these measures together. This provides a snapshot of the overall condition of religious restrictions in a country, both from governments and social groups.

More countries had overall increases in scores than decreases from 2014 to 2015. Among the 16 countries with large changes of 2.0 points or more, 12 countries had increases and four countries had decreases. Three times as many countries had modest increases (between 1.0 and 1.9 points) in their scores as experienced modest decreases (36 vs. 11).

Overall, restrictions increased in 116 countries (59%) and decreased in 66 countries (33%) while staying flat in the other 16.

Overall changes in global restrictions on religion

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) or Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from 2014 to 2015

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	12	6%	
1.0 to 1.9 increase	36	18	59%
0.1 to 0.9 increase	68	34	
No change	16	8	8%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	51	26	
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	11	6	33%
2.0 or more decrease	4	2	
Total	**198**	**100**	

Note: Categories of overall change in restrictions are calculated by comparing a country's unrounded scores on the GRI and SHI from year to year. When a country's scores on both indexes 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. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotal indicated due to rounding.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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2. Nearly all Muslims, Jews, Hindus live in countries where their group was harassed in 2015

In addition to looking at government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion separately, this analysis also combines the two broad types of religious restrictions when examining the harassment or intimidation of specific religious groups. Whether perpetrated by governments or social groups, specific religious groups were harassed in 169 countries in 2015, up from 160 in 2014.[23]

Harassment of members of specific religious groups takes many forms, including physical assaults, arrests and detentions, desecration of holy sites, and discrimination against religious groups in employment, education and housing. Harassment and intimidation also include things such as verbal assaults on members of one religious group by other groups or individuals.

Christians and Muslims were harassed in the most countries in 2015, continuing a trend from previous years. The number of countries where they were harassed grew significantly for both groups, from 108 to 128 for Christians and from 100 to 125 for Muslims.

Jews faced harassment in 74 countries in 2015, down from 81 countries in 2014. Still, Jews –

Christians, Muslims were harassed in rising number of countries in 2015

Number of countries where religious groups were harassed, by year

	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15
Christians	107	95	96	111	105	110	102	108	128
Muslims	96	91	82	90	101	109	99	100	125
Jews	51	53	63	68	69	71	77	81	74
Others*	33	34	39	52	42	39	38	43	50
Folk religions**	24	19	24	26	23	26	34	21	32
Hindus	21	18	11	16	12	16	9	14	18
Buddhists	10	11	7	15	9	13	12	10	7
Unaffiliated	— CODING WAS NOT DONE —					3	5	4	14
Any of above	**152**	**135**	**147**	**160**	**161**	**166**	**164**	**160**	**169**

* Includes Sikhs, members of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, members of newer faiths such as Baha'i and other religious groups.
** Includes, for example, followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.
Note: This measure looks at the number of countries in which groups were harassed, either by government or individuals/social groups. It does not assess the severity of the harassment. Numbers do not add to totals because multiple religious groups can be harassed in a country. The figure for other religious groups for the year ending in December 2012 and the any-of-the-above figure for the year ending in December 2011 have been updated to correct minor errors in previous reports.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data.
See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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[23] Due to a database error, last year's report on religious restrictions in 2014 said that harassment of specific religious groups occurred in 159 countries in that year. The figure has been corrected for this year's analysis.

who make up just 0.2% of the world's population – face harassment in a notably large number of countries.

Hindus were harassed in 18 countries in 2015, up from 14 in 2014. In contrast, the number of countries where Buddhists were harassed fell from 10 in 2014 to seven in 2015.

Religiously unaffiliated people – including atheists, agnostics and those who do not identify with any religion – were harassed in 14 countries in 2015, up from four the previous year. In Saudi Arabia, for example, atheists were targeted by government authorities and courts. At least two individuals accused of atheism were sentenced to death in 2015: one man in February for renouncing Islam and desecrating a Quran, and Ashraf Fayadh, a Palestinian poet, in November for apostasy.[24]

Government versus social harassment of groups

Members of some religious groups face harassment from governments more often than social groups, or vice versa. Jews continue to be harassed by individuals and social groups in many more countries than by governments, although the number of countries where individuals or social groups harassed Jews decreased (from 80 in 2014 to 67 in 2015) while the number of countries where governments harassed Jews increased (from 31 to 43). Jews in Europe, for instance, continued to have issues with property restitution. In Moldova, a government agency attempted to take control of the ruins of a synagogue and yeshiva that had been purchased by the Jewish community in 2010. The government's claim on the property was rejected by a district court at the end of the year.[25] And, in Poland, there remained a number of unresolved property restitution cases involving buildings on land that previously contained Jewish cemeteries destroyed in the World War II era.[26]

Those belonging to world religions other than the groups analyzed in the report – including Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Scientologists, Baha'i and Rastafarians – were harassed by governments in 44 countries in 2015. For example, Egypt continued to ban Baha'i institutions and practices, refusing to recognize the faith.[27] And in Panama, Rastafarians were required to remove their head coverings when applying for identification or passports.[28] By comparison, social groups were found to have harassed members of this "other religions" category in far fewer countries (18).

[24] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Saudi Arabia." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[25] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Moldova." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[26] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Poland." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[27] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Egypt." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[28] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Panama." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

There was a large increase in the number of countries where governments harassed Muslims in 2015, from 80 in 2014 to 106 in 2015. The governments of 32 countries in Europe harassed Muslims in 2015 – up from 27 in 2014. Christians also were harassed by governments in more countries, up from 79 to 97. They were targeted by the highest number of governments in the Asia-Pacific region, where 33 countries harassed Christians in 2015.

Number of countries where religious groups were harassed, by type of harassment

	Government harassment in the year ...									*Social harassment in the year ...*								
	'07	**'08**	**'09**	**'10**	**'11**	**'12**	**'13**	**'14**	**'15**	**'07**	**'08**	**'09**	**'10**	**'11**	**'12**	**'13**	**'14**	**'15**
Christians	79	80	71	95	78	81	85	79	97	74	72	70	77	81	83	71	85	94
Muslims	77	74	58	74	78	83	73	80	106	64	53	58	64	82	88	84	81	94
Jews	11	16	14	21	28	28	39	31	43	46	48	60	64	63	66	72	80	67
Others*	25	28	29	40	39	34	33	39	44	15	13	19	28	18	20	17	17	18
Folk religions**	13	10	9	10	5	11	12	13	16	16	13	19	20	21	18	26	12	23
Hindus	12	11	9	13	9	13	8	9	14	12	9	8	10	6	9	4	7	11
Buddhists	7	7	6	11	5	9	7	8	5	4	4	4	7	5	7	7	3	3
Unaffiliated	CODING WAS NOT DONE					2	1	1	9	CODING WAS NOT DONE					2	4	3	6
Any of above	**118**	**112**	**103**	**124**	**129**	**131**	**133**	**129**	**157**	**127**	**110**	**124**	**135**	**150**	**147**	**145**	**139**	**146**

*Includes Sikhs, members of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, members of newer faiths such as Baha'i and other religious groups.
**Includes, for example, followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.
Note: This measure does not assess the severity of the harassment. Numbers do not add to totals because multiple religious groups can be harassed in a country.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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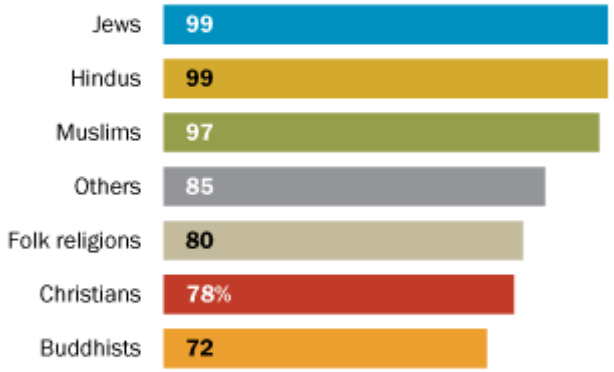
How size and location of religious groups affects data on harassment

The size and distribution of religious groups provides important context when analyzing the number of countries where they are harassed. Some groups simply have sizable populations in more countries than others, resulting in the potential for harassment in more places. On the other hand, some groups are heavily concentrated in just a few countries, which can lower the *number* of countries where they are harassed but potentially increase the *share* of that group's adherents who live in places where harassment occurs.

Jews, Hindus, Muslims most likely to live in countries where their groups experience harassment

% of each religious group's population living in countries where harassment of their group occurred in 2015



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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For example, Hindus were harassed in just 18 countries, fewer than some other groups. But the vast majority of the world's Hindus (95%) live in India, where harassment of Hindus by both government and social groups was reported in 2015. Members of the lowest Hindu castes, also known as Dalits, often faced obstacles to basic government institutions and services such as education and health care. The United Nations also reported systematic abuse of Dalits by individuals, and many of the perpetrators of these crimes were not prosecuted by the government.[29] Coupled with harassment of Hindus in several other countries with considerable Hindu populations, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, this meant that 1 billion Hindus, or 99% of the world's Hindus, lived in countries where Hindus were harassed in 2015.

Christians and Muslims are the largest religious groups in the world – and some of the most geographically dispersed. This helps account for why members of these groups are harassed in such a large number of countries. But Christians are even more widely dispersed than Muslims, which means that harassment of Muslims in certain countries impacts a comparatively larger share of the global Muslim population. As a result, even though Muslims and Christians were harassed in a comparable number of countries (125 and 128, respectively), a larger percentage of

[29] U.S. Department of State. April 13, 2016. "India." 2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

Muslims than Christians (97% vs. 78%) live in countries where members of their religion were harassed by governments or social groups in 2015.

The widespread harassment of Jews is notable because about eight-in-ten of the world's Jews live in just two countries – the United States and Israel – but Jews continue to be harassed in a relatively large number of nations (74 in 2015). Not only do nearly all of the world's Jews live in countries where harassment of Jews took place in 2015 (99%), but Jews were harassed in many countries around the world where there is just a small Jewish presence.

This is not to suggest that all members of these religious populations were harassed because they lived in countries where incidents may have occurred. Indeed, there are often important regional differences in harassment, especially in large countries such as India, and most people living in these countries probably did not experience harassment directly. But this analysis does demonstrate how geographic distribution – or lack thereof – may intensify the impact of harassment for certain groups.

3. Government restrictions rise in nearly all regions in 2015

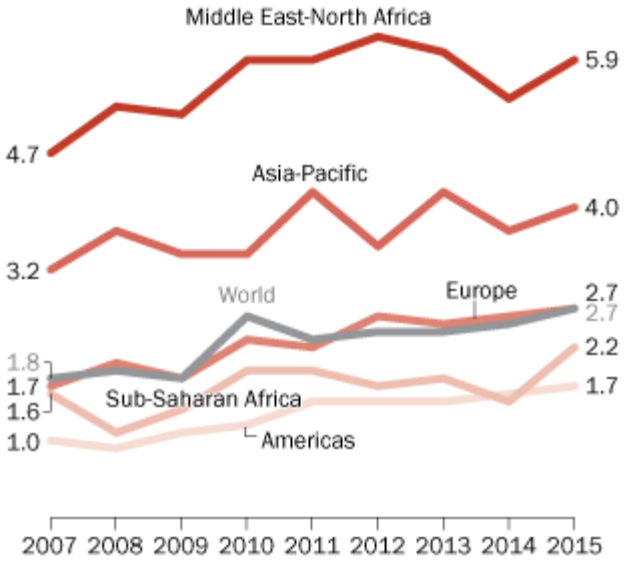
Government restrictions by region

The median level of government restrictions on religion increased in four of the five regions analyzed in this report (Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe) from 2014 to 2015 and remained roughly the same in one region (the Americas). The largest increase occurred in sub-Saharan Africa.

Continuing the trend from previous years, the Middle East-North Africa region had the highest median level of government restrictions in 2015. The median score for the 20 countries in the region increased to 5.9 in 2015, up from 5.4 the previous year, and was more than double the global median (2.7). These countries exhibited many of the same government restrictions as previous years, but experienced increases in some measures. For example, the number of governments that harassed religious groups rose from 14 to 17 countries, and the number that displayed hostility involving physical violence toward minority or nonapproved religious groups increased from eight to 11.

Government restrictions on religion, by region

Median scores on the Government Restrictions Index



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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In the Asia-Pacific region, the median score on the Government Restrictions Index increased from 3.7 in 2014 to 4.0 in 2015, following a decrease during the previous year. Half (25) of the region's 50 countries had increases in government restrictions in 2015. In Nepal, for instance, a government-funded organization prevented the burial of Christians in a cemetery behind a Hindu temple, despite allowing the burial of other non-Hindu indigenous faiths.[30]

Europe's median score increased slightly from 2.6 to 2.7, with an increase in government restrictions in 31 of 45 countries. Among the main reasons behind the increase were upticks in

[30] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Nepal." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

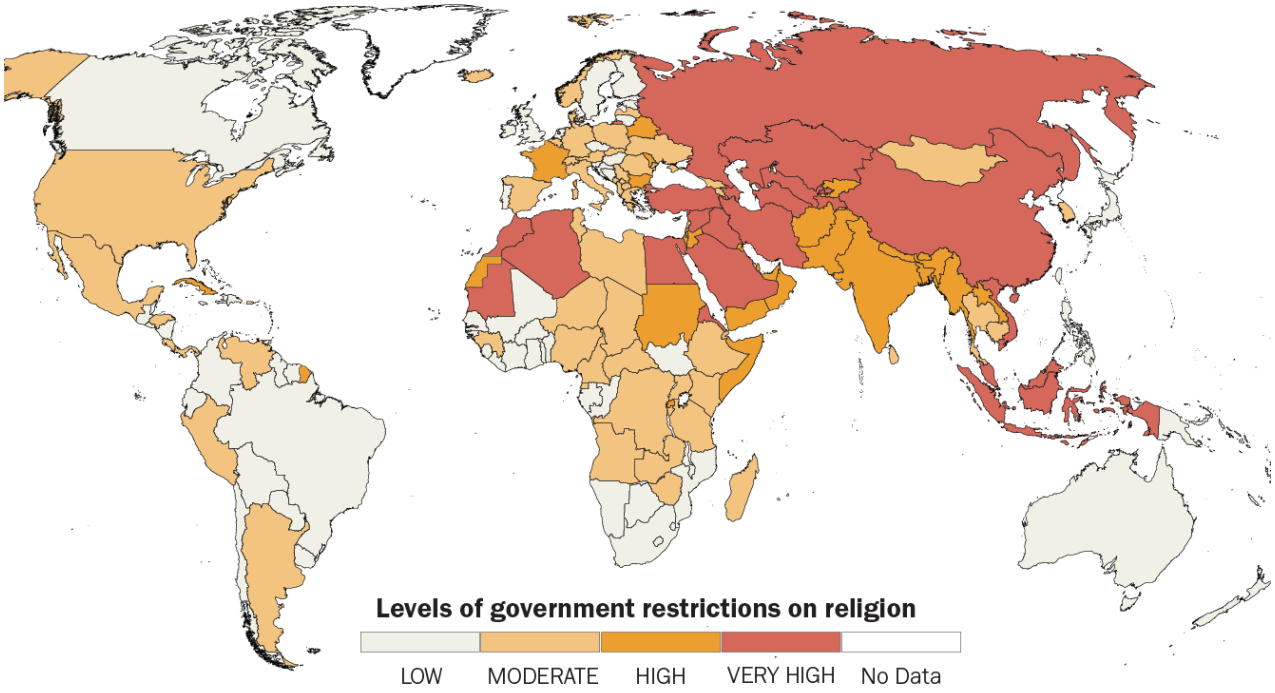
government harassment and intimidation of religious groups and the use of government force against religious groups (see the Overview of this report for more details).

Sub-Saharan Africa's median increase from 1.5 in 2014 to 2.2 in 2015 was caused in part by increases in government harassment of religious groups or individuals and government hostility toward minority or nonapproved religious groups. For more details on the increase in government restrictions in this region, see sidebar on page 30.

In the Americas, the median score for government restrictions remained roughly the same from 2014 (1.6) to 2015 (1.7).[31] As in previous years, the Americas' median score remained significantly lower than the global median (2.7).

Government restrictions on religion around the world

Level of government restrictions on religion in each country as of December 2015



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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[31] Before rounding, the increase in the Americas' median GRI score was 0.07. Scores are considered stable in this analysis if they change by less than 0.1.

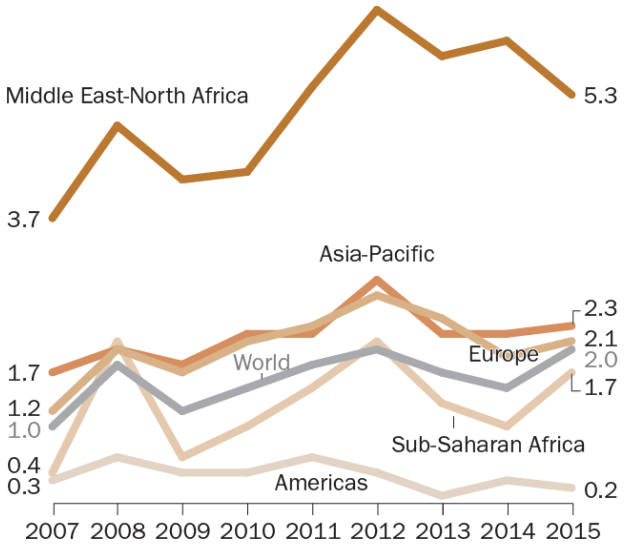
Social hostilities by region

The median level of social hostilities involving religion decreased from 2014 to 2015 in the Middle East-North Africa region, increased in two regions (sub-Saharan Africa and Europe), and remained relatively unchanged in the Americas and Asia-Pacific regions. The global median score increased from 1.5 to 2.0.

Despite decreasing from 6.0 in 2014 to 5.3 in 2015, the median level of social hostilities in the Middle East-North Africa region continued to be the highest of any region and remained well above the global median. Across the region's 20 countries, six had increases in social hostilities while 13 had decreases (and one country, Oman, had no change in its Social Hostility Index score from 2014 to 2015). A decline in social hostilities in Israel reflected in part the ceasing of the religion-related armed conflict between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip that dominated the summer of 2014.[32]

Social hostilities involving religion, by region

Median scores on the Social Hostilities Index



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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By contrast, social hostilities involving religion *increased* in sub-Saharan Africa, rising from a median score of 1.0 in 2014 to 1.7 in 2015. Some of this was due to a rise in the use of violence or the threat of violence to enforce religious norms, which increased in 16 of the region's 48 countries. For more details on the increase in social hostilities in this region, see sidebar on page 30.

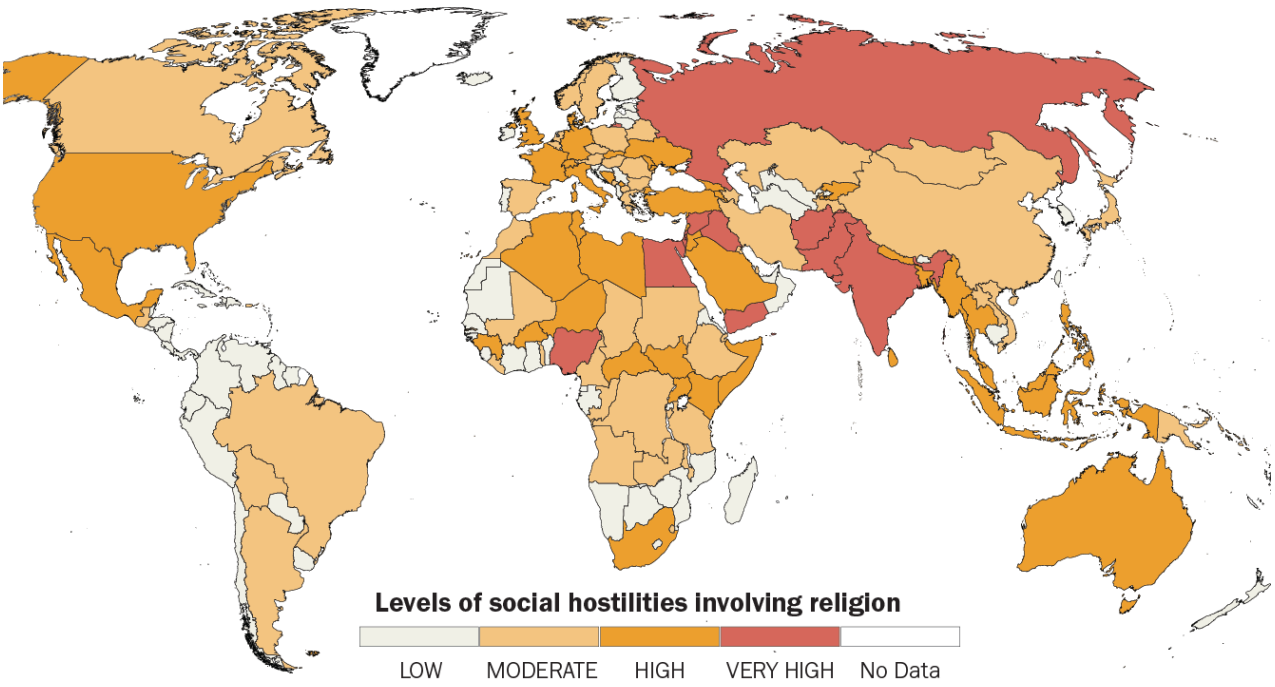
Europe also experienced an increase in its median score, from 1.9 to 2.1 in 2015. Some of this was due to a rise in mob violence related to religion, with 17 countries experiencing this (up from nine the previous year). Similarly, individuals in Europe were assaulted or displaced from their homes in retaliation for religious activities considered offensive or threatening to the majority faith (including preaching and other forms of religious expression) in 28 countries in 2015 – a

[32] Rudoren, Jodi. Aug. 26, 2014. "Cease-Fire Extended, but Not on Hamas's Terms." The New York Times. Religion-related armed conflicts are coded as social hostilities regardless of government involvement. See Methodology for details.

significant increase from nine countries in 2014. In Austria, for instance, a man wearing a Star of David necklace was assaulted at a shopping mall, where his attackers shouted anti-Semitic slurs before beating him.[33] And in Ireland, a Saudi woman who was riding a bus was punched by a man who said he hated Islam.[34]

Social hostilities involving religion around the world

Level of social hostilities involving religion in each country as of December 2015



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
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[33] Dec. 31, 2015. "Global Anti-Semitism: Selected Incidents Around the World in 2015." Anti-Defamation League.
[34] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Ireland." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

Sidebar: Rising restrictions and hostilities in sub-Saharan Africa

The Nigeria-based extremist group Boko Haram, following its 2014 abduction of hundreds of schoolgirls in northeastern Nigeria, crossed international borders for numerous attacks in 2015.[35] In February 2015, for example, Boko Haram attacked Fotokol in Cameroon and Bosso and Diffa in Niger – all along the Nigerian border – killing at least 71 people.[36] And in the summer of 2015, Boko Haram fighters targeted villages and cities in Niger and Chad, killing at least 38 people in Niger and 49 people in two separate attacks in Chad.[37] In one of the Chad attacks, a suicide bomber wore a burqa as a disguise.[38]

Not only did these incidents contribute to an increase in the median level of social hostilities involving religion in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015, but also government policies and actions in response to the Boko Haram threat caused a rise in the median level of government restrictions. Compared with other regions, sub-Saharan Africa experienced the largest increases in both government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion in 2015.

Several governments indicated that Boko Haram's attacks during the year led them to impose restrictions on religion, including bans on varied forms of Islamic veils for women and harassment of Muslim women wearing veils. For example, a gendarme officer in Cameroon reportedly tried to forcibly remove a Muslim woman's headscarf at a highway roadblock in the region of Bamenda, while a Catholic nun with a head covering was allowed to pass through unchallenged.[39]

In addition to bans on Islamic veils in Cameroon and Niger (noted in the Overview of this report), Chad and the Republic of Congo enacted similar restrictions in response to terror attacks. In Chad, the government cited the risk of concealing explosives under a burqa; 62 Chadian women were arrested for wearing burqas in 2015.[40] And the Republic of Congo banned the full-face Islamic veil in public places as a reaction to security concerns, despite a lack of extremist violence in the country.[41]

There also were incidents of harassment elsewhere. For instance, Muslim students in Ghana reported that officials ordered girls to remove their hijabs before taking the West African Senior School Certificate Examination.[42]

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[35] Oct. 17, 2016. "Nigeria Chibok abductions: What we know about the missing girls." BBC News.
[36] Feb. 6, 2015. "Boko Haram attacks border towns in Niger." Al Jazeera. Also see Feb. 4, 2015. "Boko Haram 'kill 70' in Cameroon border town of Fotokol." BBC News.
[37] June 18, 2015. "Boko Haram crisis: Attack in Niger kills dozens." BBC News. Also see Nako, Madjiasra, and Emma Farge. "Chad arrests five and bans burqa after suicide bombings." Reuters.
[38] Nako, Madjiasra, and Moumine Ngarmbassa. July 11, 2015. "Suicide bomber in burqa kills 15 people in Chad capital." Reuters.
[39] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Cameroon." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[40] Nako, Madjiasra, and Moumine Ngarmbassa. July 11, 2015. "Suicide bomber in burqa kills 15 people in Chad capital." Reuters. Also see Feb. 11, 2016. "Banning the burqa." The Economist.
[41] Buchanan, Rose Troup. May 2, 2015. "Republic of Congo bans full-face veils in attempt to prevent religious extremist attacks." The Independent.
[42] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Ghana." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

Government restrictions on religion in the region were not limited to regulating religious dress. In Cameroon, 84 children remained in custody without charges for most of 2015, following raids the previous year on Quranic schools suspected of recruiting children for Boko Haram.[43] And some restrictions were unrelated to the Boko Haram threat entirely: In Rwanda, several Jehovah's Witnesses were dismissed from government jobs for refusing to touch the national flag while taking the public servants' oath.[44] (Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to avoid saluting national flags.)

These types of incidents contributed to sub-Saharan Africa's median Government Restrictions Index (GRI) score rising from 1.5 in 2014 to 2.2 in 2015 – the largest increase of any region. Cameroon, Comoros and Niger experienced especially large increases (2.0 points or more) in their GRI scores.

Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the largest increase in the median level of social hostilities involving religion in 2015. Six of the 48 countries in the region saw surges of at least 2.0 points in their level of social hostilities: Niger had the largest increase, followed by Chad, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Most notably, the use of violence or the threat of violence to enforce religious norms rose in 16 countries. This type of hostility involves forcing others to submit to a particular religious point of view.

People accused of practicing witchcraft were targeted in a number of cases. In the Republic of Congo, two elderly men were killed after being accused of witchcraft.[45] And in Burkina Faso, elderly women were often accused of witchcraft and barred from their villages. A Roman Catholic Church-operated organization in the capital, Ouagadougou, supported 260 women accused of witchcraft in 2015, and another government center sheltered 84 women.[46] During the year, people accused of witchcraft also were targeted in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia.

Use of violence to enforce religious norms surges in 2015

Number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa where violence was used to enforce religious norms

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data.
See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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[43] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Cameroon." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[44] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Rwanda." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[45] Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides. May 6, 2015. "République du Congo: Violences contre des personnes accusées de sorcellerie et les pratiques de désenvoutement des Eglises chrétiennes." Division de l'information, de la documentation et des recherches.
[46] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Burkina Faso." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.

Meanwhile, people practicing witchcraft rituals targeted individuals with albinism. In Malawi, there was an increase in the demand for body parts of people with albinism; the Association of People Living with Albinism in Malawi reported 19 cases of abuse, including eight deaths, in 2015.[47] In Tanzania, one child with albinism was killed, and three other cases were reported involving "abduction, mutilation and dismemberment of bodies."[48]

[47] U.S. Department of State. Aug. 10, 2016. "Malawi." International Religious Freedom Report for 2015.
[48] Amnesty International. Feb. 23, 2016. "Amnesty International Report 2015/16." The State of the World's Human Rights.

4. Among the most populous countries, Russia, Egypt, India, Pakistan and Nigeria had highest overall restrictions on religion in 2015

Examining the world's 25 most populous countries is a way to see the restrictions on religion that have the potential to impact the highest number of people. More than 5 billion people – about 75% of humanity – live in these 25 countries, although the populations within these nations likely do not necessarily experience government restrictions or social hostilities equally.

Among this group of populous countries, Russia, Egypt, India, Pakistan and Nigeria had the highest combined levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion in 2015, while Brazil, Japan, South Africa, Ethiopia and the Philippines had the fewest restrictions and hostilities.

Looking at just government restrictions, Egypt, China, Iran, Russia and Indonesia had the highest levels in 2015, with each country falling into the "very high" restrictions category. In contrast, Brazil, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa and the United Kingdom all fell into the "low" category in 2015.

Nigeria, India, Russia, Pakistan and Egypt had the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion among the 25 most populous countries in 2015. All fell into the "very high" hostilities category. Ethiopia, Vietnam, Brazil, Japan and China, meanwhile, had the lowest levels of social hostilities, and all fell into the "moderate" category. The fact that none of the 25 most populous countries fell into the "low" social hostilities category may indicate that large populations carry an inherently greater risk of incidents of social hostilities, simply because there are more people.

Among the most populous countries, Egypt and Russia were the only ones to be among the highest five in both government restrictions and social hostilities, while Japan and Brazil were the only countries to be in the lowest five in both of these measures. Indeed, government restrictions and social hostilities are not necessarily correlated: In some places (such as Russia and Egypt) there are high restrictions and hostilities, but in others, such as China, some of the highest levels of government restrictions in 2015 were accompanied by some of the lowest levels of social hostilities.

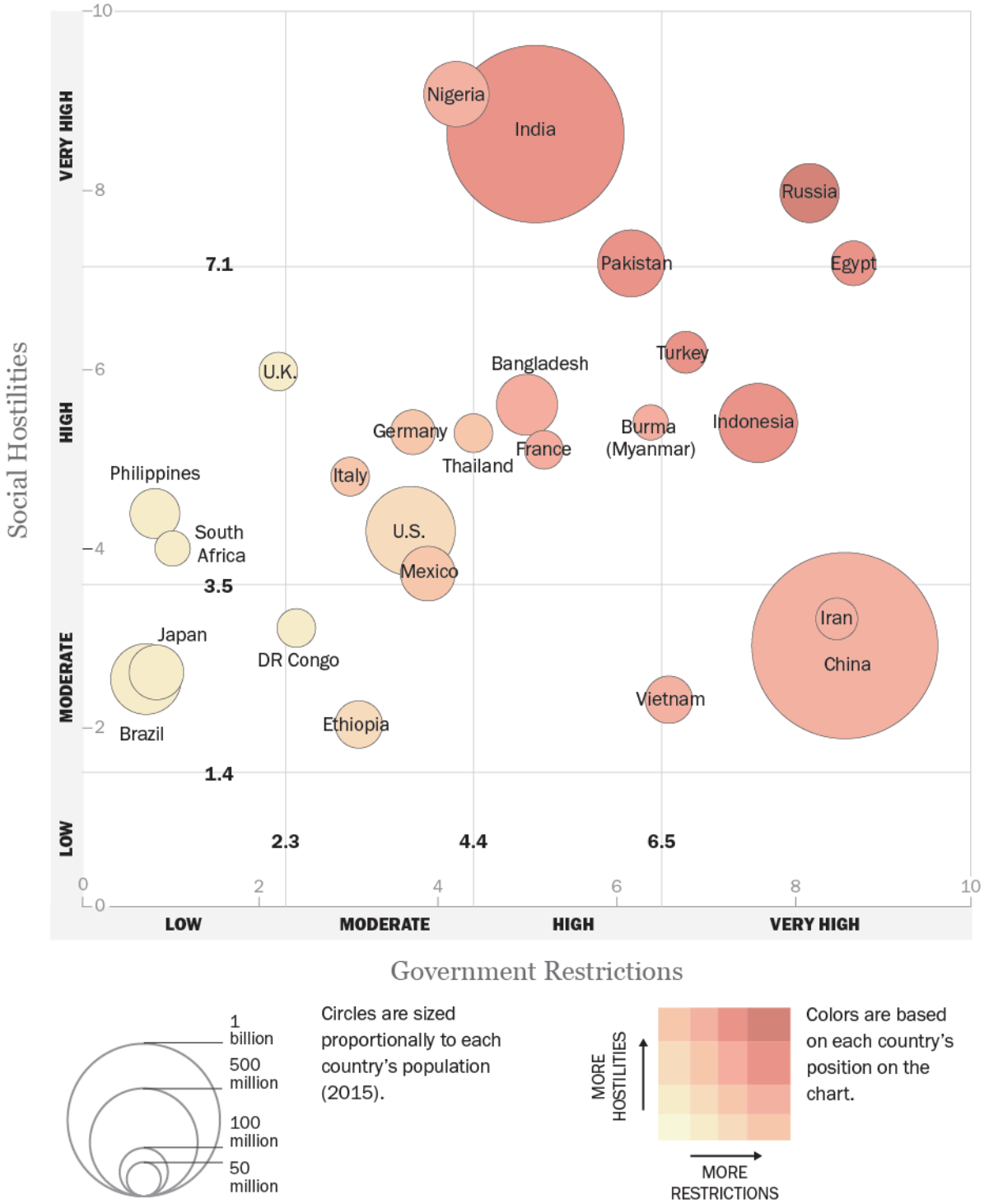
In 2015, none of the 25 most populous countries experienced large changes in their Government Restrictions Index score. Russia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United States,

experienced modest increases of between 1.0 and 1.9 points in their scores, while Turkey experienced a modest decrease.

Three countries – the Philippines, Germany and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – had large increases (2.0 points or more) in their Social Hostilities Index score in 2015, although none moved into the "very high" category.

Restrictions on religion among the world's 25 most populous countries

Among the world's 25 most populous countries, Russia, Egypt, India, Pakistan and Nigeria stand out as having the most restrictions on religion (as of the end of 2015) when both government restrictions and religious hostilities are taken into account. (Countries in the upper right of the chart have the most restrictions and hostilities.) Brazil, Japan, South Africa, Ethiopia and the Philippines have the least restrictions and hostilities. (Countries in the lower left have the least restrictions and hostilities.) Scores are for calendar year 2015.



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

Methodology

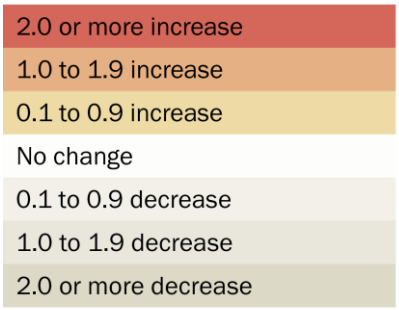
This is the eighth time Pew Research Center has measured restrictions on religion around the globe.[49] This report, which includes data for the year ending Dec. 31, 2015, generally follows the same methodology as previous reports.

Pew Research Center uses two 10-point indexes – the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) – to rate 198 countries and self-governing territories on their levels of restrictions.[50] This report analyzes changes in restrictions on an annual basis, focusing on the period from 2014 to 2015.

The study categorizes the direction and degree of change in each country's scores in two ways, numerically and by percentile. First, countries are grouped into categories depending on the size of the numeric change in their scores from year to year on the two indexes: changes of 2 points or more in either direction, changes of at least 1 point but less than 2 points, changes of less than 1 point, or no change at all. (See chart at right.)

Index point change

Categories for assessing index score changes between years



"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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Changes in overall levels of restrictions are calculated for each country by comparing its scores on both indexes (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 determines 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 overall "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 determines 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 overall "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.

[49] See Methodology of Pew Research Center's 2009 report "Global Restrictions on Religion" for a discussion of the conceptual basis for measuring restrictions on religion.
[50] Some earlier reports provided scores for 197 countries and territories. This report includes South Sudan (which separated from Sudan in July 2011), bringing the total to 198 countries and territories.

Second, this report categorizes the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities in each country by percentiles. As the benchmark, it uses the results from the baseline year of the study (the year ending in mid-2007). Scores in the top 5% on each index in mid-2007 were categorized as "very high." The next highest 15% of scores were categorized as "high," and the following 20% were categorized as "moderate." The bottom 60% of scores were categorized as "low." See the table to the right for the index score thresholds as determined from the mid-2007 data. These thresholds are applied to all subsequent years of data.

Levels of restrictions on religion

	GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS INDEX	SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INDEX
Very high	6.6 to 10.0	7.2 to 10.0
High	4.5 to 6.5	3.6 to 7.1
Moderate	2.4 to 4.4	1.5 to 3.5
Low	0.0 to 2.3	0.0 to 1.4

Note: Based on distribution of index scores in the baseline year, ending mid-2007.
"Global Restrictions on Religion Rise Modestly in 2015, Reversing Downward Trend"

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Overview of procedures

The methodology used by Pew Research Center to assess and compare restrictions on religion was developed by former Pew Research Center senior researcher and director of cross-national data Brian J. Grim in consultation with other Pew Research Center staff members, building on a methodology that Grim and Professor Roger Finke developed while at Penn State University's Association of Religion Data Archives.[51] The goal was to devise quantifiable, objective and transparent measures of the extent to which governments and societal groups impinge on the practice of religion. The findings were used to rate countries and self-governing territories on two indexes that are reproducible and can be periodically updated.

This research goes beyond previous efforts to assess restrictions on religion in several ways. First, Pew Research Center coded (categorized and counted) data from more than a dozen published cross-national sources, providing a high degree of confidence in the findings. Pew Research Center coders looked to the sources for only specific, well-documented facts, not opinions or commentary.

Second, Pew Research Center staff used extensive data-verification checks that reflect generally accepted best practices for such studies, such as double-blind coding (coders do not see each other's ratings), inter-rater reliability assessments (checking for consistency among coders) and carefully monitored protocols to reconcile discrepancies among coders.

[51] See Grim, Brian J., and Roger Finke. 2006. "International Religion Indexes: Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion." Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion.

Third, the coding took into account whether the perpetrators of religion-related violence were government or private actors. The coding also identified how widespread and intensive the restrictions were in each country.

Fourth, one of the most valuable contributions of the indexes and the questions used to construct them (see the section on the coding instrument on page 41) is their ability to chart change over time.

Countries and territories

The 198 countries and self-administering territories covered by the study contain more than 99.5% of the world's population. They include 192 of the 193 member states of the United Nations as of 2015 plus six self-administering territories – Kosovo, Hong Kong, Macau, the Palestinian territories, Taiwan and Western Sahara.[52] Reporting on these territories does not imply any position on what their international political status should be, only recognition that the de facto situations in these territories require separate analysis.

Although the 198 countries and territories vary widely in size, population, wealth, ethnic diversity, religious makeup and form of government, the study does not attempt to adjust for such differences. Poor countries are not scored differently on the indexes than wealthy ones. Countries with diverse ethnic and religious populations are not "expected" to have more social hostilities than countries with more homogeneous populations. And democracies are not assessed more leniently or harshly than authoritarian regimes.

Information sources

In the latest year of the study, Pew Research Center identified 18 widely available, frequently cited sources of information on government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion around the world. This study includes four sources that were not used in the baseline report on religious restrictions. (See page 40 for more details on the new information sources.)

The primary sources, which are listed below, include reports from U.S. government agencies, several independent, nongovernmental organizations and a variety of European and United

[52] The one member state of the United Nations not included in the study 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 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom, for example, says that "Religious freedom does not exist in North Korea despite the constitutional guarantee for the freedom of religion.") 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 Pew Research Center categorized and counted ("coded," in social science parlance) for this quantitative study. Therefore, the report does not include scores for North Korea.

Nations bodies. Although most of these organizations are based in Western countries, many of them depend on local staff to collect information across the globe. As previously noted, Pew Research Center did not use the commentaries, opinions or normative judgments of the sources; the sources were combed only for factual information on specific policies and actions.

Primary sources for 2015

1. Country constitutions

2. U.S. State Department annual reports on International Religious Freedom

3. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom annual reports

4. U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief reports

5. Human Rights First reports in first and second years of coding; Freedom House reports in subsequent years of coding

6. Human Rights Watch topical reports

7. International Crisis Group country reports

8. United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office annual report on human rights

9. Council of the European Union annual report on human rights

10. Global Terrorism Database

11. European Network Against Racism Shadow Reports

12. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports

13. U.S. State Department annual Country Reports on Terrorism

14. Anti-Defamation League reports

15. U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

16. Uppsala University's Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Armed Conflict Database

17. Human Rights Without Frontiers "Freedom of Religion or Belief" newsletters

18. Amnesty International Country Profiles

U.S. government reports with information on the situation in the United States

- U.S. Department of Justice "Religious Freedom in Focus" newsletters and reports
- FBI Hate Crime Reports

As noted, this study includes four sources that were not included in Pew Research Center's first report on global restrictions on religion: Freedom House reports; Uppsala University's Armed Conflict Database; the "Freedom of Religion or Belief" newsletters of Human Rights Without Frontiers; and the Global Terrorism Database.

The Freedom House reports have replaced Human Rights First reports, which have not been updated since mid-2008. The Uppsala Armed Conflict Database provides information on the number of people affected by religion-related armed conflicts, supplementing other sources. The Human Rights Without Frontiers "Freedom of Religion or Belief" newsletters have replaced the Hudson Institute publication "Religious Freedom in the World" (by Paul Marshall), which has not been updated since its release in 2008. Human Rights Without Frontiers is a nongovernmental organization based in Brussels that has affiliated offices throughout the world.

Since 2013, Pew Research Center has used data from the Global Terrorism Database, maintained by the University of Maryland's National Consortium for Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), along with the International Crisis Group's country reports, Uppsala University's Armed Conflict Database and the State Department's annual Country Reports on Terrorism, for information on religion-related terrorism. (One source used in earlier reports, the U.S. government's Worldwide Incident Tracking System, or WITS, is no longer available online.) Prior to 2013, the report relied only on the International Crisis Group reports, the Uppsala database and the State Department reports for information on religion-related terrorism. The Global Terrorism Database is one of the most comprehensive sources on terrorism around the world and is the source for the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism. The addition of this source thus provides greater context and information on terrorism without biasing the reporting through the addition of information that was not previously available.

While some of the increases in religious restrictions noted in this study could reflect the use of more up-to-date and/or better information sources, Pew Research Center staff monitor the impact of source information variability each year and have found no evidence of overall informational bias. (For additional discussion, see the "Potential Biases" section in 2014's report, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High.")

The coding instrument

As explained in more detail below, Pew Research Center staff developed a battery of questions similar to a survey questionnaire. Coders consulted the primary sources in order to answer the questions separately for each country. While the State Department's annual reports on International Religious Freedom generally contained the most comprehensive information, the other sources provided additional factual detail that was used to settle ambiguities, resolve contradictions and help in the proper scoring of each question.

The questionnaire, or coding instrument, generated a set of numerical measures on restrictions in each country. It also made it possible to see how government restrictions intersect with broader social tensions and incidents of violence or intimidation by private actors. The coding instrument with the list of questions used for this report is shown in the summary of results on page 58.

The coding process required the coders to check all the sources for each country. Coders determined whether each source provided information critical to assigning a score; had supporting information but did not result in new facts; or had no available information on that particular country. Multiple sources of information were available for all countries and self-administering territories with populations greater than 1 million. Most of the countries and territories analyzed by Pew Research Center were multi-sourced; only small (predominantly island) countries had a single source, namely the State Department reports.

Coding the United States presented a special problem since it is not included in the State Department's annual reports on International Religious Freedom. Accordingly, Pew Research Center coders also looked at reports from the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI on violations of religious freedom in the United States, in addition to consulting all the primary sources, including reports by the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, the International Crisis Group and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, many of which contain data on the United States.

The coding process

Pew Research Center employed strict training and rigorous coding protocols to make its coding as objective and reproducible as possible. Coders worked directly under an experienced researcher's supervision, with additional direction and support provided by other Pew Research Center researchers. The coders underwent an intensive training period that included a thorough overview of the research objectives, information sources and methodology.

Countries were double-blind coded by two coders (coders did not see each other's ratings), and the initial ratings were entered into an electronic document (coding instrument) including details on each incident. The coders began by filling out the coding instrument for each country using the information source that had the most comprehensive information. The protocol for each coder was to answer every question on which information was available in the initial source. Once a coder had completed that process, he or she then turned to the other sources. As new information was found, this was also coded and the source duly noted. Whenever ambiguities or contradictions arose, the source providing the most detailed, clearly documented evidence was used.

After two coders had separately completed the coding instrument for a particular country, their scores were compared by a research associate. Areas of discrepancy were discussed at length with the coders and were reconciled in order to arrive at a single score on each question for each country. The data for each country were then combined into a master file, and the answers and substantiating evidence were entered into a database.

After data collection for all countries was completed, Pew Research Center coders and researchers compared the scores from calendar year 2015 with those from the previous year, ending Dec. 31, 2014. They identified scores that had changed and analyzed the substantiating evidence for each year to make sure the change was substantive and not the result of coder error. Throughout this process, the coding instrument itself was continually monitored for possible defects. The questions were designed to be precise, comprehensive and objective so that, based on the same data and definitions, the coding could be reliably reproduced by others with the same results. At the same time, Pew Research Center has attempted to minimize changes to the coding instrument as much as is possible to ensure all changes between years are the result of actual changes in restrictions and hostilities, not changes in methodology.

Pew Research Center staff generally found few cases in which one source contradicted another. When contradictions did arise – such as when sources provided differing estimates of the number of people displaced due to religion-related violence – the source that cited the most specific documentation was used. The coders were instructed to disregard broad, unsubstantiated

generalizations regarding abuses and to focus on reports that contained clear, precise documentation and factual details, such as names, dates and places where incidents occurred.

Pew Research Center staff compared coders' scores for all questions for each of the 198 countries and territories included in the study, computing the degree to which the scores matched. The inter-rater reliability score across all variables was 0.74. Scores above 0.7 are generally considered good.

The data-verification procedures went beyond the inter-rater reliability statistics. They also involved comparing the answers on the main measures for each country with other closely related questions in the data set. This provided a practical way to test the internal reliability of the data.

In previous years, Pew Research Center staff also checked the reliability of the coded data by comparing them with similar, though more limited, religious restrictions data sets. In particular, published government and social regulation of religion index scores are available from the Association of Religion Data Archives (for three years of data) and the Hudson Institute (for one year of data), which makes them ideal measures for cross-validation. The review process found very few significant discrepancies in the coded data; changes were made only if warranted by a further review of the primary sources.

Restriction of religion indexes

The Government Restrictions Index is based on 20 indicators of ways that national and local governments restrict religion, including through coercion and force. The Social Hostilities Index is based on 13 indicators of ways in which private individuals and social groups infringe on religious beliefs and practices, including religiously biased crimes, mob violence and efforts to stop particular religious groups from growing or operating. The study also counted the number and types of documented incidents of religion-related violence, including terrorism and armed conflict.

Government Restrictions Index

Coding multiple indicators makes it possible to construct a Government Restrictions Index of sufficient gradation to allow for meaningful cross-national comparisons. An additional advantage of using multiple indicators is that it helps mitigate the effects of measurement error in any one variable, providing greater confidence in the overall measure.

Pew Research Center coded 20 indicators of government restrictions on religion (see the summary of results on page 58). These 20 items were added together to create the GRI. In two cases, these items represent an aggregation of several closely related questions: Measures of five types of

physical abuses are combined into a single variable (GRI Q.19), and seven questions measuring aspects of government favoritism are combined into an overall favoritism scale (GRI Q.20 is a summary variable showing whether a country received the maximum score on one or more of the seven questions).

The GRI is a fine-grained measure created by adding the 20 items on a 0-to-10 metric, with zero indicating very low levels of government restrictions on religion and 10 indicating very high levels of restrictions. The 20 questions that form the GRI are coded in a standard scale from zero to 1 point, while gradations among the answers allowed for partial points to be given for lesser degrees of the particular government restriction being measured. The overall value of the index was calculated and proportionally adjusted – so that it had a maximum value of 10 and a possible range of zero to 10 – by dividing the sum of the variables by two.

A test of whether the 20 items were statistically reliable as a single index produced a scale reliability coefficient of 0.91 for calendar year 2015. Since coefficients of 0.7 or higher are generally considered acceptable, it was statistically appropriate to combine these 20 items into a single index.

Social Hostilities Index

In addition to government restrictions, violence and intimidation in societies also can limit religious beliefs and practices. Accordingly, Pew Research Center staff tracked more than a dozen indicators of social impediments on religion. Once again, coding multiple indicators made it possible to construct an index that shows gradations of severity or intensity and allows for comparisons among countries. The summary of results contains the 13 items used by Pew Research Center staff to create the Social Hostilities Index.

The SHI was constructed by adding together the 13 indicators based on a 0-to-10 metric, with zero indicating very low impediments to religious beliefs and practices and 10 indicating very high impediments. The various questions that form the index are coded in a standard scale from zero to 1 point, while gradations among the answers allow for partial points to be given for lesser degrees of the particular hostilities being measured. The indicators were added together and set to have a possible range of zero to 10 by dividing the sum of the variables by 1.3.

As with the Government Restrictions Index, various types of violence and intimidation were combined. A test of whether these 13 items were statistically reliable as a single index produced a scale reliability coefficient of 0.89. Since coefficients of 0.7 or higher are generally considered acceptable, it was statistically appropriate to combine these items into a single index.

How examples are coded

Examples of each type of government restriction or social hostility are generally counted in a single measure on the GRI or SHI. For instance, a restriction on proselytizing (sharing one's faith with the intent of persuading another to join the faith) is not also counted as a restriction on conversion (an individual changing their religion). In some situations, however, an individual restriction or hostility may be part of a broader set of restrictions or hostilities. For instance, a mob attack by members of one religious group on an individual of another religion may be an isolated event and counted just under question SHI Q.2: Was there mob violence related to religion? However, if such an attack triggers repeated attacks between religious groups, it also might be an indication of sectarian or communal violence, which by definition involves two or more religious groups facing off in repeated clashes. In such a case, the mob attack also would be counted under question SHI Q.3: Were there acts of sectarian or communal violence between religious groups? (See the summary of results.)

Effects of consolidating to a new database

For the first few years of this study, information on the number, types and locations of incidents of government force and social violence toward religious groups as well as deference to religious authorities in matters of law were coded at the province level. (See example of data coding on pages 45-48 of the December 2009 baseline report.) Each year, the province numbers were summed and put into separate country-level files. Following the publication of the August 2011 report, Pew Research Center staff created a database that integrated all province- and country-level data on religious restrictions. During this process, Pew Research Center staff reviewed any discrepancies between province files and the sums that had been transferred to the country files and made appropriate corrections. The adjustments made were relatively minor and had small effects on index scores for countries, on average less than 0.005 points on the 10-point indexes. Consolidating the data into a database also entailed a review of the data on harassment of religious groups. In particular, instances of harassment from the year ending in mid-2007 were stored as open-ended questions, and in a few cases they were recoded to match the categories used in subsequent years.

Beginning with data covering 2012, Pew Research Center stopped collecting data at the province level; all data are coded at the country level.

Changing time period of analysis

This is the fifth time Pew Research Center has analyzed restrictions on religion in a calendar year. Previous reports analyzed 12-month periods from July 1-June 30 (e.g., July 1, 2009-June 30,

2010). The shift to calendar years was made, in part, because most of the primary sources used in this study are based on calendar years.

Because of the shift in time frame, previous studies did not report directly on incidents that occurred during the period from July 1-Dec. 31, 2010. While this misses some incidents that occurred during the second half of 2010, events that had an ongoing impact – such as a change to a country's constitution or the outbreak of a religion-related war – were captured by the coding. Researchers for the study carefully reviewed the situation in each country and territory during this six-month period and made sure that restrictions with an ongoing impact were not overlooked.

Religion-related terrorism and armed conflict

Terrorism and war can have huge direct and indirect effects on religious groups, including destroying religious sites, displacing whole communities and inflaming sectarian passions. Accordingly, Pew Research Center tallied the number, location and consequences of religion-related terrorism and armed conflict around the world, as reported in the same primary sources used to document other forms of intimidation and violence. However, war and terrorism are sufficiently complex that it is not always possible to determine the degree to which they are religiously motivated or state sponsored. Out of an abundance of caution, this study does not include them in the Government Restrictions Index. They are factored instead into the index of social hostilities involving religion, which includes one question specifically about religion-related terrorism and one question specifically about religion-related war or armed conflict. In addition, other measures in both indexes are likely to pick up spillover effects of war and terrorism on the level of religious tensions in society. For example, hate crimes, mob violence and sectarian fighting that occur in the aftermath of a terrorist attack or in the context of a religion-related war would be counted in the Social Hostilities Index, and laws or policies that clearly discriminate against a particular religious group would be registered on the Government Restrictions Index.

For the purposes of this study, the term "religion-related terrorism" is defined as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatants by subnational groups or clandestine agents that have some identifiable religious ideology or religious motivation. It also includes acts carried out by groups that have a nonreligious identity but affect religious personnel, such as clergy. Readers should note that it is the political character and motivation of the groups, not the type of violence, that is at issue here. For instance, a bombing would not be classified as religion-related terrorism if there was no clearly discernible religious ideology or bias behind it unless it was directed at religious personnel. Religion-related war or armed conflict is defined as armed conflict (a conflict that involves sustained casualties over time or more than 1,000 battle

deaths) in which religious rhetoric is commonly used to justify the use of force, or in which one or more of the combatants primarily identifies itself or the opposing side by religion.

Changes to Somalia's coding

Starting with data covering 2013, researchers changed the way they coded government restrictions in Somalia. In previous years of the study, researchers had coded actions by the al-Shabaab rebel group as government restrictions, largely because the group effectively controlled large swathes of Somali territory. The extent of al-Shabaab control over Somali territory decreased in calendar year 2013, so researchers did not code their actions as government restrictions but rather as social hostilities. Researchers continued to follow this policy when coding data for 2015.

Crimea coding

Starting with data covering 2015, researchers coded incidents occurring in Crimea as part of Russia's GRI and SHI score. This is to reflect Russia's de facto control over Crimea, and is not intended as a Pew Research Center position on the de jure status of the territory, which the United Nations recognizes as part of Ukraine.[53]

Country constitution audit

Researchers conducted an audit of country constitutions for all previous years of coding (2007-2014). While the vast majority of country constitutions were correctly coded as to whether they included religious freedom provisions, there were a few countries where the coding was amended. These included Mexico, Costa Rica, Fiji, Iran, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Cameroon, Kenya and Mozambique. These amendments resulted in minimal changes in these countries' overall GRI scores and did not alter overall trends represented in previous reports. Two countries – Mexico and Costa Rica – had score changes that pushed them from one category to another in 2014. Mexico's 2014 GRI score decreased from "high" to "moderate", while Costa Rica's 2014 GRI score increased from "low" to "moderate."

Potential biases

As noted earlier, the primary sources indicate that the North Korean government is among the most repressive in the world, including toward religion. But because independent observers lack regular access to North Korea, the sources are unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that forms the basis of this report. Therefore, North Korea is not included on either index.

[53] United Nations. March 27, 2014. "Territorial integrity of Ukraine." Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 March 2014.

This raises two important issues concerning potential information bias in the sources. The first is whether other countries that limit outsiders' access and that may seek to obscure or distort their record on religious restrictions were adequately covered by the sources. Countries with relatively limited access have multiple primary sources of information that Pew Research Center used for its coding. Each is also covered by other secondary quantitative data sets on religious restrictions that have used a similar coding scheme, including earlier years of coded State Department report data produced by Grim at Penn State's Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) project (four data sets); independent coding by experts at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Liberty using indexes also available from ARDA (one data set); and content analysis of country constitutions conducted by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty (one data set). Pew Research Center staff used these for cross-validation. Thus, contrary to what one might expect, even most countries that limit access to information tend to receive fairly extensive coverage by groups that monitor religious restrictions.

The second key question – the flipside of the first – is whether countries that provide freer access to information receive worse scores simply because more information is available on them. As described more fully in the methodology in the baseline report, Pew Research Center staff compared the length of State Department reports on freer-access countries with those of less-free-access countries. The comparison found that the median number of words was approximately three times as large for the limited-access countries as for the open-access countries. This suggests that problems in freer-access countries are generally not overreported in the State Department reports.

Only when it comes to religion-related violence and intimidation in society do the sources report more problems in the freer-access countries than in the limited-access ones. However, the Social Hostilities Index includes several measures – such as SHI Q.8 ("Did religious groups themselves attempt to prevent other religious groups from being able to operate?") and SHI Q.11 ("Were women harassed for violating religious dress codes?") – that are less susceptible to such reporting bias because they capture general social trends or attitudes as well as specific incidents. With these limitations in mind, it appears that the coded information on social hostilities is a fair gauge of the situation in the vast majority of countries and a valuable complement to the information on government restrictions.

Data on social impediments to religious practice can more confidently be used to make comparisons among countries with sufficient openness, which includes more than nine-in-ten countries covered in the coding. An analysis by Grim and Richard Wike, Pew Research Center's director of global attitudes research, tested the reliability of the State Department reports on social impediments to religious practice by comparing public opinion data with data coded from the

reports in previous years by Grim and experts at Penn State. They concluded that "the understanding of social religious intolerance embodied in the State Department reports is comparable with the results of population surveys and individual expert opinion."[54]

Coding harassment of specific religious groups

As in previous reports, this study provides a summary of the number of countries where specific religious groups faced government or social harassment. This is essentially a cross-tabulation of GRI.Q.11 ("Was there harassment or intimidation of religious groups by any level of government?") and the first type of religious hatred or bias measured in SHI.Q.1.a. ("Did individuals face harassment or intimidation motivated by religious hatred or bias?"). For the purposes of this study, the definition of harassment includes any mention in the primary sources of an offense against an individual or group based on religious identity. Such offenses may range from physical attacks and direct coercion to more subtle forms of discrimination. But prejudicial opinions or attitudes, in and of themselves, do not constitute harassment unless they are acted upon in a palpable way.

As noted above, this study provides data on the number of countries in which different religious groups are harassed or intimidated. But the study does not assess either the severity or the frequency of the harassment in each country. Therefore, the results should not be interpreted as gauging which religious group faces the most harassment or persecution around the world.

[54] See Grim, Brian J., and Richard Wike. 2010. "Cross-Validating Measures of Global Religious Intolerance: Comparing Coded State Department Reports with Survey Data and Expert Opinion." Politics and Religion.