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Cross-National Influences on Social Hostilities Involving Religion and Government Restrictions on Religion

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Since 2009, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life has published a series of quantitative reports seeking to measure the level of government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion around the globe.¹ These reports have focused on hostilities and restrictions within countries, scoring more than 190 countries on two indexes, a Social Hostilities Index and a Government Restrictions Index.

However, social hostilities involving religion can cross international borders, as the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States and their aftermath made clear. More recent examples include the violent street protests that broke out in several Muslim-majority countries in early 2006 after a Danish newspaper published a dozen cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, as well as rioting in northern India in 2009 after a group of Sikh radicals murdered a leader of a minority sect in a Sikh temple in Vienna, Austria.²

Government restrictions on religion also can have cross-national impacts or influences. In 2010, for instance, the governments of Singapore, Indonesia and several other countries limited some activities of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, reportedly in deference to China, which continues to ban the movement.³ And in 2012, a Saudi Arabian journalist who had been accused of blasphemy by Saudi authorities was extradited to Saudi Arabia by the Malaysian government.⁴

This supplemental analysis by the Pew Forum examines six broad ways in which events in one country often are reported to have contributed to social hostilities and government restrictions

1 These reports include "[Global Restrictions on Religion](#)" (December 2009), "[Rising Restrictions on Religion](#)" (August 2011) and "[Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion](#)" (September 2012).

2 For more information on the incident in Vienna, Austria, see page 8 of this analysis.

3 See the U.S. State Department's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Singapore, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148893.htm>; the Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal's 2010 report on Singapore, <http://www.mrt-rrt.gov.au/Country-Advice/Singapore/Singapore-Country-of-Origin-Information/default.aspx>; the U.S. State Department's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Indonesia, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148869.htm> and Reporters Without Borders, "Radio Era Baru Forcibly Closed By Police," Sept. 13, 2011, <http://en.rsf.org/indonesie-six-months-in-jail-for-radio-07-09-2011,40942.html>.

4 See BBC News, "Malaysia deports Saudi journalist Hamza Kashgari," Feb. 12, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17001900>, and Gulf News, "Mystery about controversial Saudi columnist's location deepens," Feb. 9, 2012, <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/mystery-about-controversial-saudi-columnist-s-location-deepens-1.978517>.

on religion in another country. These are: 1) tensions over the religion of immigrants and refugees; 2) religious extremism spreading from country to country; 3) attempts by governments to influence religious affairs in other countries; 4) religion-related terrorism by individuals or groups who come from abroad or are supported from abroad; 5) hostile reactions to religion-related events that have occurred in another country; and 6) religion-related wars or armed conflicts (including past conflicts, if the effects are ongoing).

As an extension of its continuing research on restrictions on religion around the world, the Pew Forum counted and categorized (“coded”) reports of these six kinds of external influences that occurred between July 1, 2009, and Dec. 31, 2011. The coding relied on widely cited, publicly available sources from groups such as the U.S. State Department, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group. (For a full list of sources, see pages 38-39 of [“Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion.”](#))

For an incident to be counted as having influenced a “cross-national religious hostility or restriction,” it had to have been reported as contributing – at least in part – to the religious hostilities or restrictions measured by the Pew Forum’s Social Hostilities Index and Government Restrictions Index. These are the same two indexes used in the previous studies:

- The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations and social groups. This includes mob or sectarian violence; religion-related terrorism or conflict; organized attempts to dominate public life with a particular perspective on religion; harassment over attire for religious reasons; and other religion-related intimidation or abuse. The SHI includes 13 measures of social hostilities.
- The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs or practices. The GRI is comprised of 20 measures of restrictions, including governmental bans of particular faiths (including those considered extremist); harassment or intimidation of religious groups; nonintervention in cases of discrimination or abuses against religious groups; limits on preaching; and preferential treatment of one or more religious groups.

This analysis has some important limitations. First, the coding does not distinguish between proximate causes and deeper, root causes of specific incidents. The Danish cartoons, for example, set off violent demonstrations by Muslims in numerous countries, but one could argue that the cartoons were merely a spark that ignited pre-existing tensions and

resentments. Either way, the publication of the cartoons would be counted in this analysis as an external influence on social hostilities involving religion.

In addition, there may be cases in which external influences are more psychological than physical, or more imagined than real – an erroneous story in the media, for example, or a speech by an official making an unsubstantiated claim about the activities of a foreign government. Whether grounded in reality or not, such events are counted as external influences if they are described by the sources used in this study as having had an international impact.

Finally, and most importantly, the Pew Forum’s coding is meant to be values-neutral. The statement that government restrictions or social hostilities involving religion in one country reportedly were influenced by events in another country is not intended to justify or fault any of the countries involved. The coding does not assign credit or blame.

Rather, the goals of this supplementary analysis are more modest. It seeks to obtain baseline measures of the frequency with which government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion are said to be influenced by events in other countries. It also attempts to categorize the external influences into six broad varieties – as outlined above – in order to see what kinds of cross-national effects are most common, regionally and worldwide. If repeated in future years, the coding may allow for more comparative analysis, enabling researchers to see whether external influences are increasing or decreasing over time and how their prevalence is changing, globally and regionally.

Key Findings

Initial analysis of data from two 12-month coding periods (July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010, and Jan. 1, 2011, to Dec. 31, 2011) finds that influences from abroad were reported to have contributed to religious hostilities and restrictions in 122 of 198 countries, or 62% of all the countries and territories studied.⁵ The most common kinds of influences, in descending order of prevalence, were: tensions over the movement of people (primarily migrants) across international borders; the alleged spread of religious extremism; efforts by governments to influence religious affairs in other countries; religion-related terrorism with cross-border

⁵ This analysis covers information for two 12-month periods: July 1, 2009, through June 30, 2010, and calendar year 2011. The periods are noncontiguous because the Pew Forum’s larger study on religious hostilities and restrictions is shifting to calendar year reporting beginning with 2011. The analysis covers a total of 198 countries, including South Sudan, which separated from Sudan in July 2011.

support or impacts; hostile reactions to events that happened or are alleged to have happened in other countries; and religion-related war or armed conflict.

Cross-National Influences on Restrictions, by Type of Restriction

Number and percentage of countries where social hostilities or government restrictions were reportedly influenced by ...

	TYPE OF RESTRICTION					
	Social Hostilities Involving Religion		Government Restrictions on Religion		Either Social Hostilities or Government Restrictions	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
	OF COUNTRIES		OF COUNTRIES		OF COUNTRIES	
International migrants	34	17%	52	26%	63	32%
Extremism	34	17	39	20	56	28
Foreign governments	22	11	46	23	55	28
Religion-related terrorism	43	22	25	13	51	26
Incidents in other countries	34	17	9	5	40	20
Religion-related armed conflict	14	7	9	5	16	8
Any of the above	95	48	95	48	122	62

Covers a total of 198 countries for the period between mid-2009 and mid-2010, and for calendar year 2011. Numbers add to more than totals, and percentages add to more than 100, because countries can have multiple types of outside influences.

Question wording:

1. Did events, groups or individuals from outside the country contribute to government restrictions on religion in the country? If yes, what were they? Check any that apply: problems involving international immigrants; extremist influences (alleged or real); influence of foreign governments; religion-related terrorism with cross-border ties or acts; hostile reactions to incidents that occurred in other countries; religion-related armed conflict that crosses a border.
2. Did events, groups or individuals from outside the country contribute to social hostilities involving religion in the country? If yes, what were they? Check any that apply: problems involving international immigrants; extremist influences (alleged or real); influence of foreign governments; religion-related terrorism with cross-border ties or acts; hostile reactions to incidents that occurred in other countries; religion-related armed conflict that crosses a border.

See methodology of September 2012 report, "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," for general information on how such questions are coded, <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Tide-of-Restrictions-on-Religion-methodology.aspx>.

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International Migrants

Among the six types of outside influences considered in this analysis, the movement of people across borders reportedly contributed to religious hostilities or restrictions in the largest number of countries. Between mid-2009 and 2011, international immigrants, migrant workers and refugees either played a role in social hostilities involving religion or were targeted by government restrictions on religion in a total of 63 countries (32%), according to the sources used in this study.

In 34 of the 63 countries (or 17% of all the countries studied), incidents involving immigrants contributed to social hostilities related to religion. In most cases, immigrants were targets of societal harassment or abuse; in Greece, for example, vigilantes reportedly attacked illegal immigrants from Muslim countries on several occasions in 2011, and unidentified arsonists burned makeshift mosques in downtown Athens, according to a U.S. State Department report.⁶

In some cases, however, actions by immigrants contributed to religion-related hostilities. For example, in May 2010, Faisal Shahzad, a naturalized U.S. citizen, attempted to set off a bomb in New York's Times Square; he reportedly had embraced a radical form of Islam and trained at a terrorist camp in the Waziristan region of his native Pakistan.⁷

In 52 of the 63 countries (26% of all the countries studied), governments imposed religion-related restrictions aimed specifically at international migrants. In the United Arab Emirates, for instance, immigration authorities allegedly discriminated against religious minorities, such as Shia Muslims and Jews, in granting and extending residency permits; in response, some foreign-born residents falsely declared themselves members of other faiths, according to the U.S. State Department's 2011 International Religious Freedom report.⁸ In another case, tens of thousands of Hindus displaced from Buddhist-majority Bhutan in the late 1980s and early 1990s remained in Nepalese refugee camps because the Bhutanese government refused to allow them to return.⁹

⁶ See the U.S. Department of State's 2011 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Greece, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=186357>.

⁷ For more information see The New York Times, "Times Topics: Faisal Shahzad," http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/s/faisal_shahzad/index.html.

⁸ See the U.S. Department of State's 2011 International Religious Freedom Report on the United Arab Emirates, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/nea/192911.htm>.

⁹ See the U.S. Department of State's 2011 International Religious Freedom Report on Bhutan, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168244.htm, and the U.S. Department of State's 2011 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Bhutan, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=186357>.

Extremist Influences

The spread of religious extremism from abroad was cited by various sources as a factor in religious hostilities or restrictions in a total of 56 countries (28%) between mid-2009 and the end of 2011.¹⁰

Religious extremism reportedly contributed to social hostilities in 34 of the 56 countries (17% of all the countries studied). For instance, religious tensions increased in Kenya in 2011 because of efforts by the militant al-Shabaab movement from Somalia to radicalize Kenyan youth, according to the International Crisis Group.¹¹

In addition, in 39 of the 56 countries (20% of all the countries studied), governments tightened restrictions on religion at least partly in reaction to alleged extremist influences from abroad. The United Kingdom, for instance, prevented a preacher based in India from entering the country in 2010 based on immigration rules allowing officials to bar entry to foreign preachers who espouse hatred.¹²

Foreign Governments

According to the sources coded for this analysis, between mid-2009 and 2011, foreign governments allegedly contributed to religious hostilities or restrictions in a total of 55 countries (28%).

In 22 of the 55 countries (11% of all countries studied), actions by foreign governments reportedly exacerbated social hostilities involving religion. For example, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that Libya, Saudi Arabia and Sudan had provided financial support to religious schools that promote an extremist interpretation of Islam in Nigeria. The USCIRF also cited “reports that an increasing number of Nigerian Islamic scholars and clerics are being trained in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, and return with a

10 For the purposes of this analysis, the term “religious extremism” is defined as advocating violence or hatred based on religious ideology. Under this definition, religious groups may hold very strict or conservative beliefs about faith and religious practices without being extremist. If the sources used in this study describe an incident that occurred during the coding period as religious extremism, and if the way the sources use the term appears to be in line with this definition, then it is coded as a reported case of religious extremism.

11 See International Crisis Group, “Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation,” Jan. 25, 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/kenya/b085-kenyan-somali-islamist-radicalisation.aspx>.

12 See the U.S. Department of State’s 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on the United Kingdom, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148995.htm>.

politico-religious ideology that explicitly promotes hatred of, and violence against, non-Muslims.”¹³

In 46 of the 55 countries (23% of all countries studied), the actions of foreign governments reportedly influenced government restrictions on religion. In 2009, for instance, the Kuwaiti government denied entry to an Egyptian professor from a Dutch university because an Egyptian court had declared him an apostate for writings that allegedly treated the Quran as a literary work rather than as the word of God.¹⁴ And in 2010, authorities in places as disparate as Hong Kong and Moldova took action against adherents of Falun Gong, allegedly under pressure from the Chinese government. According to the U.S. State Department, these steps included restricting gatherings by Falun Gong supporters and canceling performances by a Falun Gong-related musical and dance troupe.¹⁵ Additionally, governments sometimes adopt restrictions established in other countries. For instance, Monaco denies registration to religious groups identified as being involved in “dangerous” sectarian activity by France’s Inter-Ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat Against Sectarian Aberrations.¹⁶

Terrorism

Between 2009 and 2011, religion-related terrorist groups reportedly engaged in cross-border attacks or drew on international connections for support in a total of 51 countries (26%).¹⁷

According to the sources coded for this analysis, religion-related terrorism contributed to social hostilities involving religion in 43 of the 51 countries (22% of all the countries studied). For instance, the Lord’s Resistance Army, a militant group that originated in Uganda in the

13 See U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Annual Report 2012,” page 113, [http://www.uscirf.gov/images/Annual%20Report%20of%20USCIRF%202012\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/Annual%20Report%20of%20USCIRF%202012(2).pdf).

14 See the U.S. Department of State’s 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Kuwait, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148828.htm>.

15 See the Hong Kong section of the U.S. Department of State’s 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on China, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148863.htm#hong_kong, and the U.S. Department of State’s 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Moldova, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148963.htm>.

16 This government organization is sometimes known by the acronym MIVILUDES. For more information, see the U.S. Department of State’s 2011 International Religious Freedom Report on Monaco, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2011/eur/192841.htm>.

17 For the purposes of this analysis, the term “religion-related terrorism” is defined as premeditated, politically motivated violence against noncombatant targets by sub-national 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 target religious personnel, such as clergy. Readers should note that the political character and motivation of the groups, not solely the type of violence, is at issue here. For instance, a bombing would not be classified as religion-related terrorism if it was not directed at religious personnel and there was no discernible religious ideology or bias behind it.

late 1980s, reportedly committed cross-border attacks and abductions in various African countries, including South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.¹⁸

In addition, religion-related terrorism reportedly influenced government restrictions on religion in 25 of the 51 countries (13% of all the countries studied). In Russia, for instance, the government has banned 18 Muslim groups for alleged ties to terrorism, according to a 2010 U.S. State Department report.¹⁹

External Events

Reactions to incidents that occurred in other countries are reported to have contributed to religious hostilities or restrictions in a total of 40 countries (20%) between mid-2009 and 2011.

Events abroad were associated with social hostilities involving religion in 34 of the 40 countries (17% of all the countries studied). For instance, riots took place across the Punjab region of northern India in 2009 in response to an attack in Vienna, Austria, on visiting leaders of the Dera Sach Khand, a religious group that has a strong base of support among Indians from the lower castes of the former caste system. The attack, by Sikh radicals, killed one visiting guru and injured another.²⁰ Also in 2009, anti-Semitic violence and vandalism spiked in a number of European countries, including Belgium, and some members of the Belgian Jewish community attributed the timing to Israel's incursion into Gaza.²¹

In addition, reactions to incidents abroad allegedly contributed to government restrictions on religion in nine of the 40 countries (5% of all countries studied). For instance, as a reaction to the Arab Spring uprisings that began in early 2011, the government of Equatorial Guinea

18 See the U.S. State Department's 2011 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in South Sudan, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=187675>; the U.S. State Department's 2011 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?dliid=186183>; and The Christian Science Monitor, "What is the Lord's Resistance Army?" Nov. 8, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/Africa-Monitor/2011/1108/What-is-the-Lord-s-Resistance-Army>.

19 See the U.S. Department of State's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Russia, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148977.htm>.

20 See the U.S. Department of State's 2009 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in India, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136087.htm>; Reuters, "Curfew imposed in Punjab after riots," May 26, 2009, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2009/05/26/idINIndia-39883620090526>; and Reuters, "Is caste behind the killing in Vienna and riots in Punjab?" May 26, 2009, <http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2009/05/26/is-caste-behind-the-killing-in-vienna-and-riots-in-punjab/>.

21 See the U.S. Department of State's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Belgium, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148917.htm>.

banned all demonstrations, including religious processions, and increased security personnel in the streets to enforce the ban, according to Amnesty International.²²

Armed Conflict

Religion-related wars and armed conflicts reportedly exacerbated religious hostilities and government restrictions in a total of 16 countries (8%) between mid-2009 and 2011.²³

In 14 of the 16 countries (7% of all countries studied), religion-related wars and armed conflicts were said to have contributed to social hostilities. For instance, in Azerbaijan, an unresolved conflict over the predominantly Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh has continued for more than a decade, with ongoing displacement of people and occasional violence. While the dispute has primarily political, ethnic and historical roots, religion is also cited as a factor in tensions between Azerbaijan, which has a Muslim majority, and Armenia, which is majority Christian.²⁴ In Afghanistan, the U.S. and its allies continue to wage war against al-Qaeda, the group that organized the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks against the United States.

In addition, religion-related armed conflicts reportedly influenced government restrictions on religion in nine of the 16 countries (5% of all countries studied). For instance, conflict between the Republic of Cyprus and the breakaway northern region supported by Turkey effectively has created a de facto religious division, with Muslims concentrated in the north and Christians in the rest of the country. This creates difficulties for Christians and Muslims who want to visit certain religious sites that are separated by the border.²⁵

Regions

The influence of cross-national events was felt in every region of the world between July 1, 2009, and Dec. 31, 2011. According to the sources coded for this analysis, these influences were most prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa, where all 20 countries of the region were

22 See Amnesty International, "Equatorial Guinea, Annual Report 2012: The state of the world's human rights," <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/equatorial-guinea/report-2012>.

23 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. This measure also includes UN-designated refugees who remain displaced from previous religion-related wars, such as the Bosnian conflict and Arab-Israeli wars.

24 See BBC News, "Regions and territories: Nagorno-Karabakh," Jan. 10, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/3658938.stm.

25 See the U.S. Department of State's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Cyprus, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148926.htm>.

affected. Outside influences also contributed to religious hostilities or restrictions in approximately three-quarters of the countries in both the Asia-Pacific region (38 of 50 countries) and Europe (33 of 45 countries). By contrast, such influences reportedly affected about half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (23 of 48) and about a quarter of countries in the Americas (eight of 35).

In the Middle East and North Africa, no single type of outside influence stood out. However, certain types of outside influences predominated in each of the other four regions. Actions of foreign governments reportedly were the most common outside influence in the Asia-Pacific region, affecting 23 of the region's 50 countries (46%). In sub-Saharan Africa, the two most common outside influences were reported to be religious extremism and religion-related terrorism, with each affecting nearly a third of the countries in the region (29%). And incidents involving international immigrants are reported to have accounted for the largest share of incidents in Europe (36%) and the Americas (11%).

This analysis was written by Brian J. Grim, Senior Researcher and Director of Cross-National Data, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Research assistance was provided by Angelina Theodorou, Research Assistant, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Cross-National Influences on Restrictions, by Region

Number and percentage of countries where social hostilities or government restrictions were reportedly influenced by ...

	Americas (35 countries)		Asia-Pacific (50 countries)		Europe (45 countries)		Middle East- North Africa (20 countries)		Sub-Saharan Africa (48 countries)		Global (198 countries)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
International migrants	4	11%	21	42%	16	36%	13	65%	9	19%	63	32%
Extremism	2	6	15	30	12	27	13	65	14	29	56	28
Foreign governments	2	6	23	46	14	31	12	60	4	8	55	28
Religion-related terrorism	3	9	15	30	6	13	13	65	14	29	51	26
Incidents in other countries	3	9	8	16	14	31	13	65	2	4	40	20
Religion-related armed conflict	1	3	5	10	0	0	7	35	3	6	16	8
Any of the above	8	23	38	76	33	73	20	100	23	48	122	62

Covers a total of 198 countries for the period between mid-2009 and mid-2010, and for calendar year 2011. Numbers can add to more than totals, and percentages add to more than 100, because countries can have multiple types of outside influences.

Question wording:

1. Did events, groups or individuals from outside the country contribute to government restrictions on religion in the country? If yes, what were they? Check any that apply: problems involving international immigrants; extremist influences (alleged or real); influence of foreign governments; religion-related terrorism with cross-border ties or acts; hostile reactions to incidents that occurred in other countries; religion-related armed conflict that crosses a border.
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See methodology of September 2012 report, "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," for general information on how such questions are coded, <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Tide-of-Restrictions-on-Religion-methodology.aspx>.

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