

## Government and Social Restrictions on Religion in Global Context

Good morning. I would like to begin by thanking Members of Parliament Mr. Konrad Szymanski and Mr. Mario Mauro for sponsoring this briefing and for the opportunity to summarize selected findings on restrictions on religion around the world from the ongoing [study](#) by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, a non partisan research group based in Washington, D.C., with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

### Global Context

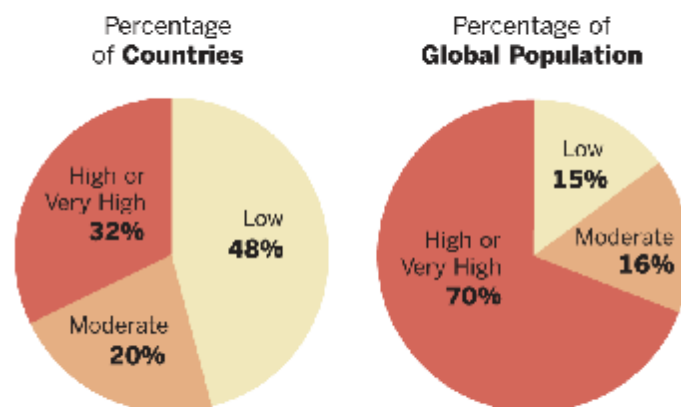
Overall, our study finds that more than 60 nations – nearly one-third of the countries in the world – have high or very high restrictions on religion. Some of these restrictions result from government actions, policies and laws. Others result from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups. Both kinds of restrictions are relatively low or moderate in about two-thirds of all countries. But because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, nearly 70 percent of the world's 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion.

Some restrictions result from government actions, policies and laws. Others result from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups. The highest overall levels of restrictions are found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices. But government policies and social hostilities do not always move in tandem. Vietnam and China, for instance, have high government restrictions on religion but are in the moderate or low range when it comes to social hostilities. Nigeria and Bangladesh follow the opposite pattern: high in social hostilities but moderate in terms of government actions.

Among the world's 50 most populous countries (plus all countries with very high restrictions) shown in the following chart, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India stand out as having the most restrictions when both measures are taken into account, while Japan, Brazil, Mozambique, Peru, South Africa and Taiwan have the least.<sup>1</sup>

### Global Restrictions on Religion

A minority of countries have high restrictions on religion, but these countries contain most of the world's population.

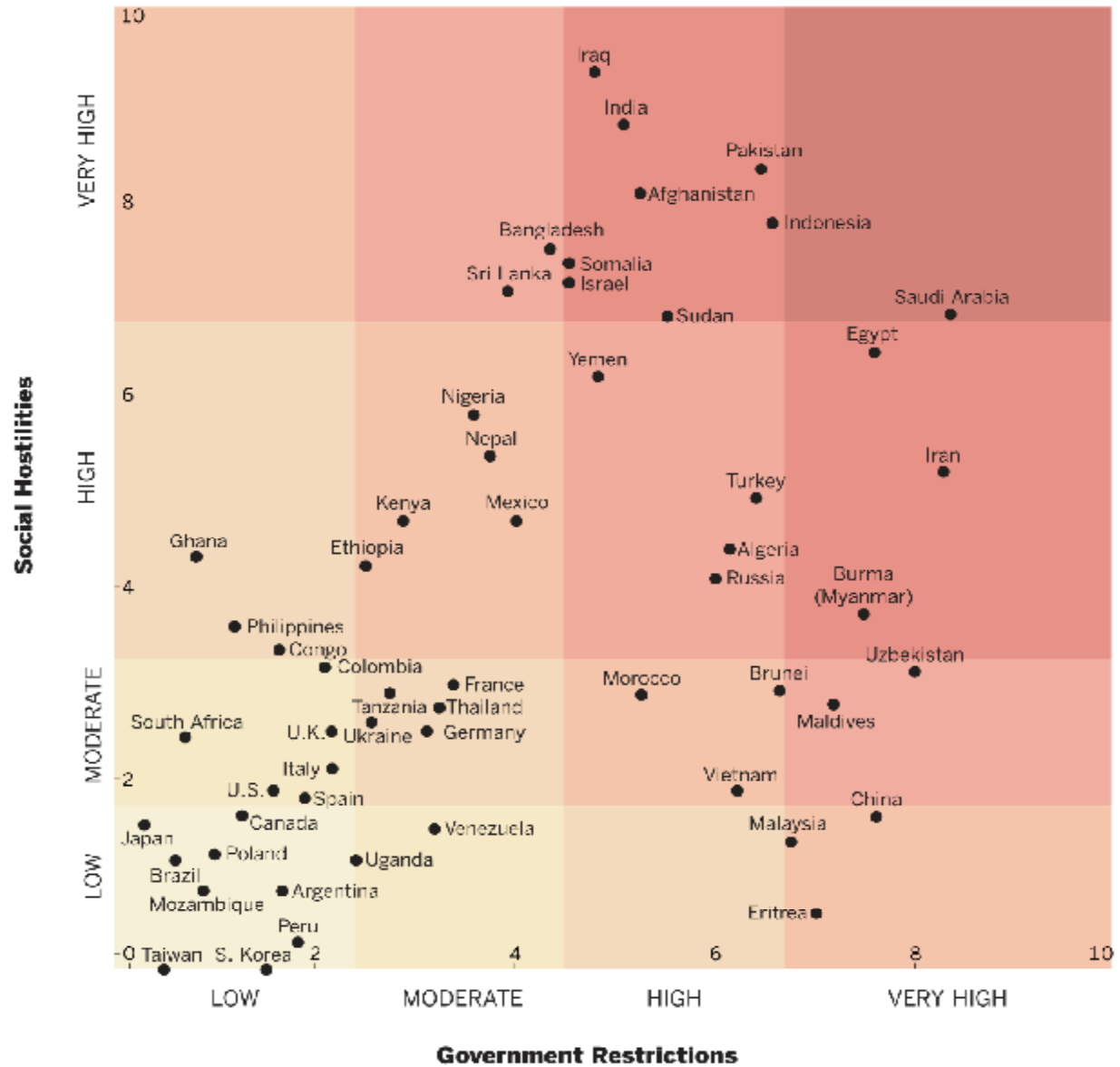


Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Global Restrictions on Religion, December 2009

## Religious Restrictions in the 50 Most Populous Countries

This chart shows how the world's 50 most populous countries and selected others score in terms of both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. Countries in the upper right have the most restrictions and hostilities. Countries in the lower left have the least.



Note: The Pew Forum categorized the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion by percentiles. Countries with scores in the top 5% on each index 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."

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These overall findings are based on a series of more than 30 measures phrased as questions, such as, "Does any level of government interfere with worship or other religious practices?" And, on the social side, "Is there mob violence related to religion?" We answered the questions for each country

by combing through annual editions of 16 widely cited and publicly available reports on international religious freedom by the U.S. State Department, the United Nations Special Rapporteur, the Council of the European Union, the U.K. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and numerous other reports by other organizations, including the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch.

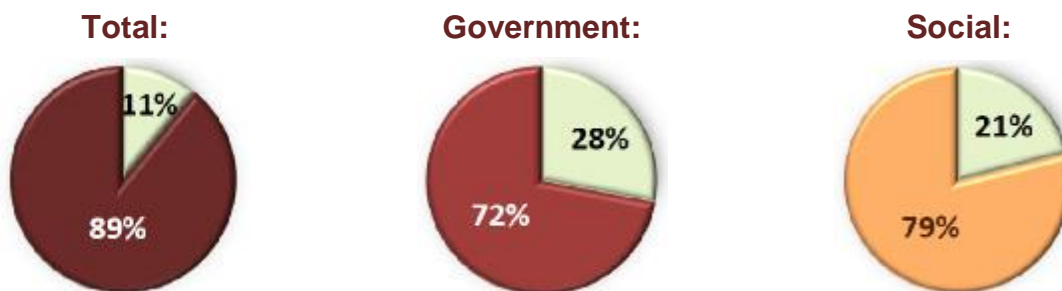
Although high restrictions are found in a minority of countries, the extent of restrictions is broad. Every country studied has some restrictions on religion, and there may be strong public support in particular countries for laws aimed, for example, at curbing “cult” activity (as in France), preserving an established church (as in the United Kingdom) or keeping tax-exempt religious organizations from endorsing candidates for elected office (as in the United States).

But many of the restrictions measured throughout the world involved some degree of force or coercion. For instance, from mid-2006 to mid-2009 (the overall time period considered hereinafter), government and/or social harassment or intimidation of religious groups was reported in nearly nine-in-ten countries (89%). National or local government actors harassed or intimidated religious groups in 143 countries (72%), while private actors, including individuals and social groups, harassed or intimidated religious groups in an even greater number of countries – 157 (79%). The brunt of these restrictions is often felt most directly by religious minorities or minority traditions of the majority faith.<sup>ii</sup>

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### Harassment of Religious Groups in Countries of the World

In what **percent of countries** was there harassment or intimidation of religious groups by any level of **government** or by individuals or groups in **society**?



Source: Pew Forum’s forthcoming updated report on Global Restrictions on Religion

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### General Patterns in the Harassment of Religious Groups

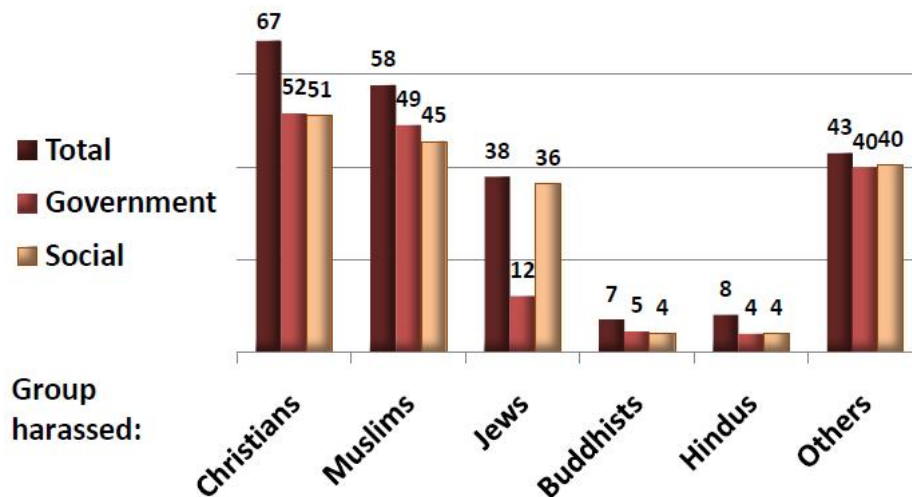
Harassment of religious groups occurs in a wide variety of contexts, but tends to occur in a greater share of countries where, for instance, constitutions provide limited or contradictory protections for religious freedom. Also, as will be further explored in subsequent Pew Forum reports, harassment of religious groups occurs to a greater extent in countries where governments penalize the defamation of religion, including penalizing such things as blasphemy, apostasy, and criticisms or critiques of a religion or religions.<sup>iii</sup>

In preparation for today’s hearing on the topic of persecution of Christians, I have conducted a further analysis of the Pew Forum’s data and compiled the number of countries in which Christians as well as other religious groups faced governmental or social harassment during the time period studied. While this analysis gives some sense of the global nature of the harassment and persecution of religious groups, it is important to note that these data do not measure the severity of the harassment or persecution. And, since this analysis looks at only aggregate groups for a finite period of time, it is not possible to say whether one religious group is harassed or persecuted to a greater or lesser extent than other religious or ethnic minorities, or whether incidents of persecution are rising or falling around the globe. Also, since other members of this panel will be providing specific examples of the persecution of Christians, I will confine my remarks to the global data on harassment of religious groups.

Nevertheless, the data are revealing. Christians, the world’s largest religious group,<sup>iv</sup> were harassed by government actors in 102 countries (52%) and social actors in 101 countries (51%). Since both sources of harassment do not always occur in the same country, all together Christians faced some form of harassment in two-thirds of all countries (133 countries, or 67%).

**Percentage of Countries where Different Religious Groups were Harassed**

In what **percent of countries** were the following religious groups harassed or intimidated by any level of **government** or by individuals or groups in **society**?



Source: Pew Forum’s forthcoming updated report on Global Restrictions on Religion

While Christians faced governmental and societal harassment in a larger share of the world’s countries than did other religious groups individually, many other religious groups faced substantial persecution around the world as well. For instance, Muslims, who account for nearly one-in-four of the world’s population according to a recent [study](#)<sup>v</sup> by the Pew Forum, also experienced substantial harassment, though in slightly fewer countries worldwide. Overall, Muslims were harassed in 115 countries (58%), including harassment by government actors in 97 countries (49%) and by social actors in 90 countries (45%).

Although the global Jewish population makes up approximately 0.2 percent of the world’s population,<sup>vi</sup> governmental or societal harassment of Jews was reported in 75 countries (38%) during the three-year period under examination. In 72 countries (36%), Jews were harassed by social groups or individuals, and in 24 countries (12%), they were harassed by government actors.

In comparison, Buddhists and Hindus, who combined account for approximately one-fifth of the world’s population,<sup>vii</sup> experienced harassment in relatively fewer countries across the three-years studied, Buddhists in 14 (7%) and Hindus 16 (8%) countries. Members of smaller religions – including ancient groups such as Sikhs and Zoroastrians, newer faith groups such as Baha’is and Rastafarians, as well as more localized groups that practice Voodoo and tribal religions – experienced harassment in approximately 40 percent of countries, again far higher than their global share of the world’s population, which is estimated to be slightly less than 13 percent.<sup>viii</sup>

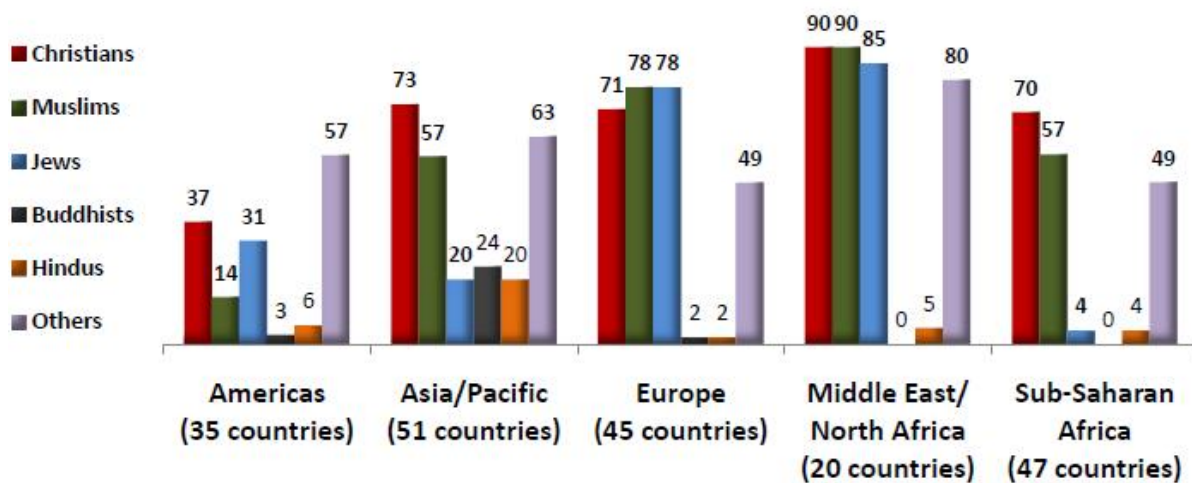
### Global Patterns in the Harassment of Christians

Considering the combined effects of government and social intimidation, Christians were harassed in a greater percent of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (90%) than in other regions.<sup>ix</sup> Notably, however, Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa also faced harassment in the same portion of countries (90%) as did Christians. Jews and members of smaller religious groups, such as Baha’is, also faced harassment in at least 80 percent of countries in the region during the study period.

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#### Percentage of Countries where Religious Groups were Harassed in World Regions

In what percent of countries are religious groups harassed by government or private actors?



Source: Pew Forum’s forthcoming updated report on Global Restrictions on Religion

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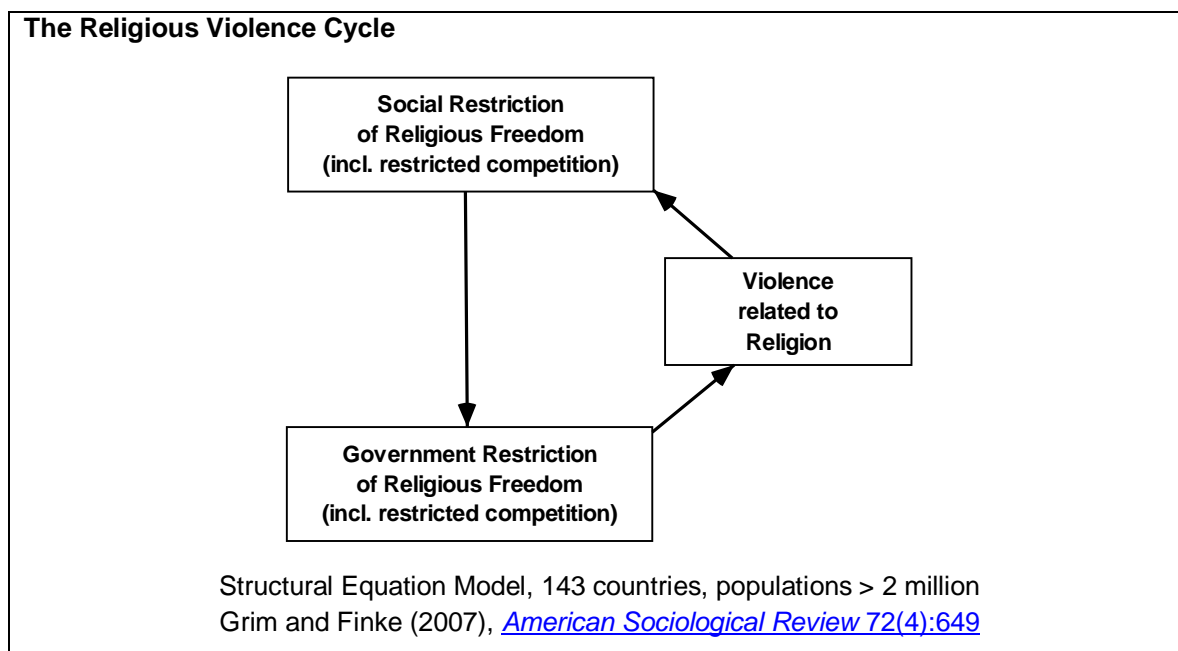
Two regions stand out where Christians were harassed in a larger percentage of countries than other religious groups. In Asia-Pacific, Christians faced harassment in 73 percent of countries, a greater portion than did members of religions that are more numerous in the region, including Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Christians are in the majority, Christians were harassed in 70 percent of countries.

In Europe, Muslims and Jews faced government and/or social harassment in a slightly larger share of countries (78%) than did Christians, though the portion of European countries where Christians were harassed was also high. Christians faced harassment in more than 70% of countries in Europe.

In the Americas, Christians faced harassment in 37 percent of countries, second to members of smaller religious groups such as Rastafarians and other newer or indigenous faiths. Jews were harassed in more countries in the Americas than were Muslims.

### SOME IMPLICATIONS

My colleague at Penn State University, Roger Finke, and I published an analysis of the relationship between restrictions on religion and religion-related violence in the *American Sociological Review*, which we develop further in our book, [\*The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century\*](#) (Cambridge, December 2010). Our statistical analysis finds that social and governmental restrictions on religion are associated with more violence and conflict, not less. Specifically, we found that social restrictions on religious freedom lead to government restrictions on religious freedom and the two act in tandem to increase the level of violence related to religion, which in turn cycles back and leads to even higher social and government restrictions on religion, creating the *religious violence cycle*.



One unique aspect of these statistical findings is that *social* restriction of religious freedom (or social religious intolerance) tends to drive government restrictions more than vice versa. Examples include the social pressures in India for anti-conversion laws, calls for Shari'a law in northern Nigeria and parts of Indonesia, expulsions of evangelicals in Chiapas, Mexico, and numerous religious rebellions from China's long history including the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Rebellion. One of the clearest historical examples of the way social restrictions of religious freedom can feed into the religious violence cycle is the Holocaust. Research by Hannah Arendt and more recently by William Brustein has shown that the Nazi government's violence toward Jewish people reinforced pre-existing social prejudices, creating a cycle of violence that was banally carried out with the support of many in German society.

The irony is that while publics generally place a high value on religious freedom for themselves, this does not always translate into protecting the religious freedom of minorities in the same societies.

In closing, as the noted sociologist Peter Berger has stated, the 21st century is a "global age of explosive, pervasive religiosity." Accordingly, this study is part of a larger, ongoing effort – the Global Religious Futures Project, jointly funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation – that aims to increase knowledge and understanding of religion around the world. In the coming months the Pew Forum will release an update of the [Global Restrictions on Religion](#) report that was provided to you today, which will allow us to measure changes in religious restrictions and the treatment of religious groups over time. Please see our website ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)) for more information on this and other studies.



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<sup>i</sup> Although it is very likely that more restrictions exist than are reported by the 16 primary sources, taken together the sources are sufficiently comprehensive to provide a good estimate of the levels of restrictions in almost all countries. The one major exception is North Korea. The sources clearly indicate that North Korea's government is among the most repressive in the world with respect to religion as well as other civil and political liberties. (The U.S. State Department's 2008 Report on International Religious Freedom, for example, says that "Genuine freedom of religion does not exist" in North Korea.) But because North Korean society is effectively closed to outsiders and independent observers lack regular access to the country, the sources are unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that the Pew Forum categorized and counted ("coded," in social science parlance) for this quantitative study. Therefore, the report does not include scores for North Korea.

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<sup>ii</sup> While the Pew Forum's study does not have specific statistics on the extent to which people are harassed for having no faith at all, the study's 2009 report found that converting from one religion to another – including to no religion at all – resulted in social tensions in 57 countries (29%), which included physical violence in 32 countries (16%) for the period from July 2005 through June 2008. Additionally, the study found that private individuals or groups used force or the threat of force to compel adherence to religious norms in 49 countries (25%).

<sup>iii</sup> Government harassment was present in 91 percent of countries that enforce penalties for the defamation of religion compared with being present in 65 percent of countries where no such penalties existed. Similarly, social harassment occurred in nearly all countries where such government penalties existed compared with 74 percent when such penalties were absent.

<sup>iv</sup> The [World Religion Database](#) estimates the 2010 global Christian population to be nearly 2.3 billion, or 33 percent of the 2010 global population of 6.9 billion.

<sup>v</sup> [Mapping the Global Muslim Population](#), an October 2009 study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, estimates the 2009 global Christian population to be 1.57 billion, or approximately 23 percent of the 2009 global population of 6.8 billion.

<sup>vi</sup> The [World Religion Database](#) estimates the 2010 global Jewish population to be nearly 15 million, or 0.21 percent of the 2010 global population of 6.9 billion.

<sup>vii</sup> The [World Religion Database](#) estimates the 2010 global Hindu population to be slightly more than one billion and the Buddhist population more than a half billion, or 13.5 and 6.8 percent respectively of the 2010 global population of 6.9 billion.

<sup>viii</sup> The [World Religion Database](#) estimates the 2010 global population of these other groups to be nearly 900 million, or nearly 13 percent of the 2010 global population of 6.9 billion.

<sup>ix</sup> As reflected in the data on regions of the world, Christians – including Christians from minority traditions – were harassed in more 57% of countries where Christians are the majority population compared with Muslims being harassed in 48% of these same majority Christian countries. Christians, however, were also harassed in 88% of countries where Muslims are the majority population, a greater share than were Muslims, who faced harassment in 84% of those same countries. Notably, Muslims – including Muslims from minority traditions – were harassed in a greater percentage of majority Muslim countries than they were in majority Christian countries or in other countries with another or no majority religion.