


[PRINT](#)
[CLOSE](#)

Enlightenment a more distant goal

Doug Bandow says a report on rising persecution of worshippers around the world should worry us

Updated on Sep 19, 2011

History was supposed to have ended. Alas, rather than celebrating the triumph of democratic capitalism, the world appears to be dividing between generally liberal Western-oriented states and a gaggle of authoritarian systems united only in their disdain for individual freedom and dignity.

It is not just democratic politics and free markets that are under attack. A new study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found increasing restrictions on religious liberty between 2006 and 2009. The survey found that "more than 2.2 billion people - about a third of the world's population - live in countries where government restrictions or social hostilities involving religion are increasing".

In many cases, the limits are significant. The number of countries where governments used at least some measure of force against religious groups or individuals is on the rise, according to the survey. This violence was wide-ranging and included killings, abuse, imprisonment, detainment or being displaced from their homes. Moreover, reported Pew, mob violence related to religion is also on the increase.

These are astonishing findings in what is supposed to be an enlightened age. The situation improved in 12 countries, and got worse in 23. In population numbers, just 1 per cent of people enjoyed greater religious freedom while 32 per cent of them have less such freedom.

The most serious problem remains in countries with Islamic majorities, or in provinces with Islamic majorities. Those which suffered increases in government persecution or social attacks included Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria and Pakistan. The only other category witnessing obvious hostility towards religion is communist or former communist countries: persecution and/or hostility increased in China, Vietnam and Russia.

Overall, the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa became freer, and restrictions and social hostility remain lowest there

