

## Doug Bandow: Troubling News for Religious Liberty



posted by KENNETH SPENCE on THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2011



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The state of religious liberty around the world is poor, according to a [new study](#) by the Pew Forum on Religion. Doug Bandow breaks down the report over at The American Spectator—his piece is titled "[A World Spinning Backward.](#)"

Two years ago, Pew reported that 70 percent of humanity suffered from either government persecution of or social hostility to religion.

That trend is growing. According to Pew's new study, "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. About 1% live in countries where government restrictions or social hostilities are decreasing."

And in a finding that reminds one of Old Testament and Roman persecutions,

Pew noted that "restrictions on religion are particularly common in countries that prohibit blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion. While such laws are sometimes promoted as a way to protect religion, in practice they more often serve to punish religious minorities whose beliefs are deemed unorthodox or heretical."

Blasphemy prosecutions [have become notorious](#) in Pakistan. These laws began with the British, were strengthened by a military dictator seeking religious support, and now are disproportionately used against Christians, often to settle property or other disputes. Muslims who urge reform of the laws are at risk. Punjab governor Salman Taseer was vocal in his criticism of the blasphemy statute and was murdered in January.

So Bandow asks, "What is responsible for this alarming trend?"

One finding suggests an unusual form of global polarization. Authoritarian states are growing more repressive while liberal nations are growing freer.

But while the America remains the most religiously free region in the world, social oppression is breaking out even in Western democratic nations.... Pew found that "Europe had the largest proportion of countries in which social hostilities related to religion were on the rise from mid-2006 to mid-2009.

Bulgaria, Denmark, Russia (where religious-oriented terrorism is on the rise), Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Italy are all guilty of backsliding. Bandow's conclusion ought



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to be taken seriously:

Only one thing is certain: liberty is both rare and precious. Unfortunately, people in much of the world are free in neither their personal nor their political lives.... History obviously has more than its share of surprises left for us.

The First Amendment must never be taken for granted.

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