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Religious Persecution International

By **Doug Bandow** on 4.19.10 @ 6:08AM

The U.S. is a rarity among nations. Among its unique attributes is a commitment to religious liberty.

A new study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life explores religious persecution around the world. According to Pew: "64 nations -- about one-third of the countries in the world -- have high or very high restrictions on religion. 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, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities."

Include moderate restrictions, which most Americans also would consider to be intolerable, and more than half of the world's nations limit religious liberty. *Fully 86 percent of the globe's people face significant limits on their right to worship God.*

The Americas, including the U.S., happily have the least restrictions in both cases. The U.S. is joined by Brazil, Britain, Italy, Japan, South Africa, and the United Kingdom in the free category.

In contrast, explains Pew, "the Middle East-North Africa has the highest government and social restrictions on religion." Combine government limits with social attacks, and the worst nations include Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, and Pakistan. It is no accident that four of the five are Islamic. Although communist states tend to employ among the most restrictive policies, it is Islam where publics and governments alike are united in their commitment to persecute religious minorities.

Not all religious persecution is created equal. The Pew survey helpfully separates government regulation and social antagonism. Explains

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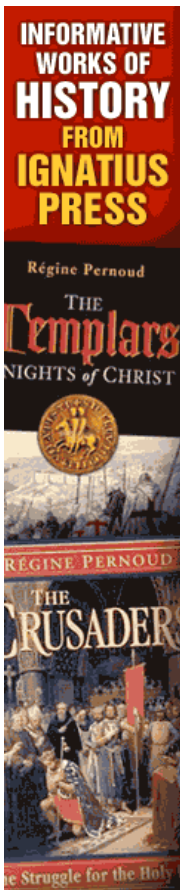
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separates government regulation and social antagonism. Explains Pew: "government policies and social hostilities do not always move in tandem. Vietnam and China, for instance, have high government restrictions on religion but are in the moderate or 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."

Still, in general countries that rank high on one measure are likely to be bad on the other. Both kinds of restrictions are shockingly common. Explains Pew: "In 75 countries (38%), for example, national or local governments limit efforts by religious groups or individuals to persuade others to join their faith. In 178 countries (90%), religious groups must register with the government for various purposes" -- which in the majority of instances results in discrimination against at least some faiths.

There were public tensions between religious groups in nearly nine of ten cases. Moreover, observes Pew, "In 126 countries (64%), these hostilities involved physical violence. In 49 countries (25%), private individuals or groups used force or the threat of force to compel adherence to religious norms."

Pew refuses to judge the appropriateness of particular restrictions. Countries that act against "cults" often attempt to justify their actions in terms of protecting personal freedom. Although one can argue for or against any particular policy, in practice virtually all government restrictions unfairly limit individual liberty. Social hostility usually is backed by intimidation if not violence. Thus, both public policies and private actions threaten fundamental religious liberties, especially of religious minorities.

It isn't possible to precisely measure state persecution. Pew asks 20 questions and creates four broad ranges of results.

Actual practice is more important. Explains Pew: "it is not sufficient simply to look at formal constitutional protections when gauging the level of government restrictions on religion. Most (76%) of the 198 countries and territories included in the study call for freedom of religion in their constitutions and basic laws, and an additional 20% protect some religious practices." However, barely a quarter of those governments actually enforce their constitutions and laws.

Similarly, many governments implement facially neutral legal provisions in a biased manner. Of those governments with registration requirements, 59% act to disable or discriminate against disfavored groups. Pew cites Singapore, which has effectively banned Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church in this way.

Public subsidies are used to much the same effect. Most governments (86%) subsidize religious groups. About three-quarter of countries do so in a discriminatory fashion. Many countries restrict or ban missionaries and proselytizing. Almost seven of ten governments harass disfavored religious groups; nearly half of states employ physical coercion.

Democracy is no guarantee against severe limits on religious liberty -- Pew points to Israel and Turkey. However, the toughest restrictions on the right to worship come from otherwise repressive governments which target religious minorities. Saudi Arabia and Iran rank numbers

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which target religious minorities. Saudi Arabia and Iran rank numbers one and two as the most restrictive states. (North Korea is off the charts, but the lack of available information made that nation impossible for Pew to rate.) Other bad actors are Uzbekistan, China, Egypt, Burma, Maldives, Eritrea, Malaysia, and Brunei.

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The Middle East and North Africa is the worst region. Asia is second, though there is great variability within. Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas follow. The median score of the Middle East and North Africa is five times that of the Americas.

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Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is the author of *Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics (Crossway)*.

COMMENTS

Pingback | 4.19.10 @ 6:17AM

[Doug Bandow](#) » [Blog Archive](#) » [Religious Persecution the World Over](#) links to this page. Here's an excerpt:

...Persecution The U.S. is in a global minority through its commitment to religious liberty. Unfortunately, persecution is the rule in most of the world. [I discuss a recent Pew Forum Survey which offers a detailed analysis of forms and magnitude of persecution.](#) Post a Comment Name (required) E-mail (will not be published) (required) Website Doug Bandow is Vice President of Policy for Citizen Outreach, a...

Bethel Hunk | 4.19.10 @ 6:22AM

Who are Jehovah's Witnesses?

No tolerance, the Jehovah's Witnesses are a cult because they try to cut you off from others who do not have the same beliefs, including family. The Watchtower is an oppressive cult if there ever was one!

It's amazing they are still around after 100 years of 100% failed prophecies. Truly amazing, that they can prompt their followers to actually go door to door with a 100% bogus message. Their Message is a Watchtower Gospel that, Jesus had his second coming in 1914 and they were the only ones who saw it and consequently the only hope for mankind.

The Watchtower is a wacky Orwellian world.

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north face jackets | 4.19.10 @ 7:11AM

who is so desperate to hold onto his life in that world. It's like pouring salt on an earthworm

I'll be contributing to the effort by my vote and agitation against the slimy one

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Roger That | 4.19.10 @ 9:36AM

REAP what they have SOWN

The Watchtower has been a source of hate Literature for over 100 years. Watchtower and other Jehovahs Witness publications have been full of slanderous, half-truth, deceiving, misleading hatefilled articles and lies.

The Jehovahs Witnesses on one hand fill their books and lectures with details about how evil and corrupt every other religion is, but then when theirs is exposed as corrupt they fall back on how it's *voluntary* to be a member, and how its not nice to say nasty things about them, and how they are being *persecuted*.

<http://www.jwfiles.com>

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Ryan | 4.19.10 @ 9:48AM

One of the more fascinating aspects about persecution is how it actually aids in spreading the Gospel. Particularly in China, where persecution is, at times, a requirement to do Church planting.

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Ryan | 4.19.10 @ 9:49AM

Articles like these are always interesting to see who they pull out of the woodwork - the rabidly anti-JW's in this instance.

(Not a JW here, btw - Reformed Baptist - ish).

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Ray | 4.19.10 @ 12:54PM

They are a perfect example of the social intolerance that the article, and survey, details. With comments like those, it is easy to understand why we rate so high in social intolerance.

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