

The following article, written by Ashley Fantz, appeared in CNN, WTVR- CBS 6 and Catholic News on September 20, 2012 at <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/20/spike-in-religious-restrictions-in-u-s-and-world-pew-center-finds/>

(CNN) - Restrictions on religion spiked throughout the world between mid-2009 and 2010, including in the United States, says a new study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. The U.S. was among 16 countries, including Switzerland, where hostilities jumped during that time period. Pew examined 197 countries, assigning a score between from zero to 10. Zero represents the least

restrictive and 10 the most. There are two categories - governmentally restrictive and socially restrictive. To answer the questions that make up the indexes, Pew Forum researchers combed through 19 widely cited, publicly available sources of information, including reports by the U.S. State Department, the

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Council of the European Union, the United Kingdom's Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, Freedom House and Amnesty International.

None of the countries in the study got a zero.

Of the 25 most populous countries examined, Brazil and Japan ranked the best in government restrictions.

The worst countries in both categories include Russia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan and India.

But it's the ranking of the United States that was particularly surprising to researcher Brian Grim.

“These were surprising findings because the U.S. (and Switzerland) are not countries

where we've typically seen these levels of hostilities," he said, referring to two previous studies Pew did on the topic - research that characterized the U.S. as more tolerant to different religious expressions.

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The U.S. had previously scored a two, according to Grim. The newest study gives it a 3.4.

Grim said it's important to keep in mind that the 2009-2010 time-frame doesn't account for recent events which he said could have given the U.S. an even worse score, such as the August killings at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin.

The study does however take into account a "number of reports involving people who were prevented from wearing religious attire, like beards, in the judicial settings and prison," he said.

There were also more reported restrictions on zoning permits to expand or build religious centers.

In 2009, Muslims living in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, saw construction of a new community center and mosque vandalized and then torched.

In Colorado in 2010, an appeals court upheld a lower court ruling that Boulder County commissioners discriminated against the Rocky Mountain Christian Church by denying it permits to expand its school and worship facilities, although commissioners had issued permits to a nearby secular school for a similar expansion, Pew found.

Pew culled from numerous sources, including various government reports and data from the Department of Justice.

Grim said a spike in religion-related terror attacks in the U.S. influenced the country's score. He pointed to the December 2009 attempt by a Nigerian Islamist to blow up an airliner arriving in Detroit, Michigan, and the Times Square attempted bombing in New York by a Pakistani-American who observed extremist Islam.

Pew also took into account the 2009 killings at Fort Hood. The alleged killer, an Army psychiatrist who had turned to radical Islam, was recently forced to shave his beard to appear in a military court.

Also in 2010, Oklahoma banned Islam's Sharia law in 2010. The change to Oklahoma's state law passed a statewide vote, but a federal appeals court struck down the amendment in January 2012, saying it violated the First Amendment.

Pew also wrote that "social hostilities" in the U.S. reflects an increase in reported religion-related workplace discrimination complaints.

Complaints filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rose from 3,386 in the fiscal year ending on September 30, 2009, to 3,790 in the year ending on September 30, 2010.

The number of cases that the EEOC determined had "reasonable cause" rose from 136 to 314 during that period.

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