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Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022

Annual report includes a five-year look at the relationship between religion-related government restrictions and social hostilities in each country

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How we did this

This is the 15th in a series of annual reports by Pew Research Center analyzing the extent to which governments and societies around the world impinge on religious beliefs and practices. This analysis was produced by Pew Research Center as part of the [Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project](#), which analyzes religious change and its impact on societies around the world. Funding for the Global Religious Futures project comes from The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation (grant 63095). This publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

To measure global restrictions on religion in 2022 – the most recent year for which data is available – the study rates 198 countries and territories by their levels of government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. The new study is based on the same 10-point indexes used in the previous studies.

- **The Government Restrictions Index (GRI)** measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. The GRI comprises 20 measures of restrictions, including efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversion, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups.
- **The Social Hostilities Index (SHI)** measures acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or groups in society. This includes religion-related armed conflict or terrorism, mob or sectarian violence, harassment over attire for religious reasons and other forms of religion-related intimidation or abuse. The SHI includes 13 measures of social hostilities.

To track these indicators of government restrictions and social hostilities, researchers combed through more than a dozen publicly available, widely cited sources of information, including the U.S. State Department’s annual “Reports on International Religious Freedom” and annual reports from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), as well as reports and databases from a variety of European and United Nations bodies and several independent, nongovernmental organizations. (Refer to the [Methodology](#) for more details on sources used in the study.)

To learn more about the analysis for understanding the relationship between GRI and SHI scores, read the [Methodology](#).

Table of contents

About Pew Research Center	1
How we did this	2
Table of contents	3
Overview	4
1. Number of countries with ‘very high’ government restrictions increases in 2022	19
2. Number of countries where religious groups were harassed reached new peak level in 2022	26
3. Median scores for government restrictions and social hostilities stay the same in 2022	34
4. Restrictions in the 25 most populous countries in 2022	41
Acknowledgments	45
Methodology	47

Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022

Annual report includes a five-year look at the relationship between religion-related government restrictions and social hostilities in each country

Since 2007, Pew Research Center has analyzed religious restrictions in nearly 200 countries and territories around the world with two measures that are related but that also are very different: the **Government Restrictions Index (GRI)** and the **Social Hostilities Index (SHI)**.

The GRI measures restrictions by governments that can target people for their religious beliefs, as well as incidents in which governments use religious justifications to harass, intimidate or restrict people. The SHI, on the other hand, looks at religion-related hostilities by *nongovernmental* actors (i.e., private individuals and social groups).

In 2022, the global median scores on both indexes stayed the same as they were in 2021, at 3.0 out of 10.0 on the Government Restrictions Index (its peak level) and at 1.6 out of 10.0 on the Social Hostilities Index.

This is the Center's 15th annual study of restrictions on religion. Before examining the 2022 findings in detail, we begin by examining the general relationship, in all countries, between levels of government restrictions and levels of social hostilities over the last five years of the study (2018 through 2022).

In simple terms, the question we are asking is: Do countries in which *government authorities* pressure religious groups also tend to be places in which *social groups and individuals* are hostile toward religious groups? Similarly, do countries with relatively few government restrictions on religion also tend to be places with relatively few social hostilities involving religion?

How the index scores are classified

	GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS INDEX	SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INDEX
Very High	6.6 to 10.0	7.2 to 10.0
High	4.5 to 6.5	3.6 to 7.1
Moderate	2.4 to 4.4	1.5 to 3.5
Low	0.0 to 2.3	0.0 to 1.4

Note: The analysis categorizes the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities in each country by percentiles. As the benchmark, it uses the results from the baseline year of the study (the year ending in mid-2007). Scores in the top 5% on each index in mid-2007 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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For the most part, the answer is yes: **Government restrictions and social hostilities tend to go hand in hand.** Over the five-year period, roughly three-quarters of all countries had either “high” or “very high” levels of *both kinds* of restrictions, or they had “low” or “moderate” levels of *both kinds* of restrictions. However, there are a sizable number of exceptions: About a quarter of all countries were in the high/very high range on one index and the low/moderate range on the other index.

Here is a breakdown:

- **62%** of the countries and territories analyzed (123 out of 198 studied) had low or moderate GRI scores *and* SHI scores, on average, from 2018 through 2022. For example, South Korea, Canada and the United States are among these countries.¹
- **12%** (or 24 countries) had high or very high GRI scores *and* SHI scores, on average, in the same five-year period. Egypt and India are among these countries.
- **16%** (or 32 countries) had high or very high GRI scores but had low or moderate SHI scores. China and Cuba are among these countries.
- **10%** (or 19 countries) had low or moderate GRI scores but were in the high or very high range of SHI scores. Brazil and the Philippines are among these countries.
- Most countries that had high or very high GRI scores nevertheless had low or moderate SHI scores (32 of 56 countries, or 57%).

Researchers looked at mean (i.e., average) GRI and SHI scores over the most recent five years of the study (2018-2022). This multiyear analysis reduces the impact of the year-to-year fluctuations that occur in the index scores of many individual countries, and thus offers a more stable set of scores.

¹ On the Government Restrictions Index (GRI), we categorize scores from 0.0 to 4.4 as low or moderate and scores from 4.5 to 10.0 as high or very high. On the Social Hostilities Index (SHI), we categorize scores from 0.0 to 3.5 as low or moderate and scores from 3.6 to 10.0 as high or very high.

Background on the study

Since 2007, Pew Research Center has been tracking restrictions on religion on two 10-point indexes:

- **The Government Restrictions Index (GRI):** Government restrictions on religion include laws, policies and actions that regulate or limit religious beliefs and practices. They also include policies that single out religious groups or ban particular beliefs or practices; the granting of benefits to some religious groups but not others; and bureaucratic rules that require religious groups to register to receive benefits.
- **The Social Hostilities Index (SHI):** Social hostilities include actions by private individuals or groups that target particular religious groups, often minorities. They can involve religion-related harassment, mob violence, terrorism and militant activity, as well as hostilities over religious conversions or the wearing of religious symbols and clothing.

Countries with low or moderate scores on both indexes

A majority of countries (123 out of 198 studied, or 62%) have scored in the “low” to “moderate” range on both the GRI *and* the SHI, on average, from 2018 through 2022. Nearly all countries in this group (121 out of the 123) have populations under 60 million, including South Korea, Canada and Ghana. In 34 of these countries, the population is under 1 million.

(Among the 34 countries with fewer than 1 million people, nine had mean SHI scores of 0.0 out of 10.0, meaning that from 2018 to 2022, no social hostilities were recorded for those countries. These countries include the small island states of Palau and Nauru. In addition, three countries with populations *over* 1 million – Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho – also had a mean SHI score of 0.0 during this period.)²

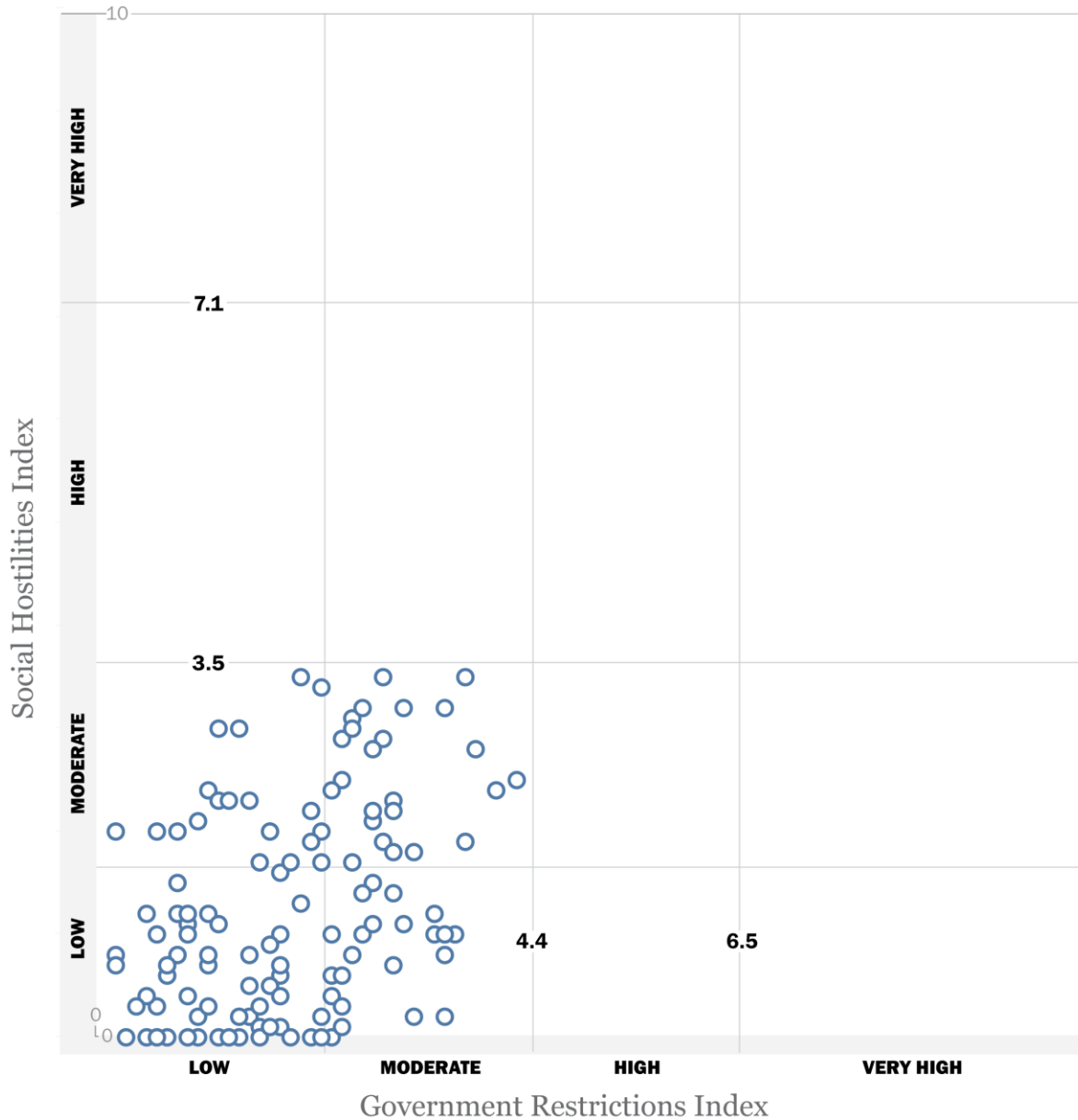
Looking regionally, 32 of 35 countries in the Americas had low or moderate scores on both scales in 2022, compared with 33 of 45 countries in Europe, 34 of 48 in sub-Saharan Africa, and 24 of 50 in the Asia-Pacific region. No countries in the Middle East-North Africa region had low or moderate scores on both the GRI and SHI.

In general, countries with low to moderate levels of government restrictions were somewhat more likely than other countries to also have low to moderate levels of social hostilities.

² There are an additional seven countries that have average scores between 0.0 and 0.05, out of 10.0. These countries had some social hostilities involving religion during this time period, but their scores round to zero and therefore they appear as zeros in the chart.

Countries with 'low' or 'moderate' GRI and SHI scores, 2018-2022

Average scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI) for countries in the "low" or "moderate" categories on both indexes, 2018-2022



Note: Based on 198 total countries and territories studied. GRI scores of 0.0 to 2.3 are considered "low"; scores of 2.4 to 4.4 considered "moderate." SHI scores of 0.0 to 1.4 are considered "low"; scores of 1.5 to 3.5 considered "moderate."

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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Countries with high or very high scores on both indexes

Two dozen countries fell into the high or very high GRI *and* SHI categories in terms of mean scores from 2018 through 2022.

Many of these countries experienced religion-related wars, militant activity or ongoing sectarian violence. For example, sectarian tensions and violence have been reported in multiple years during this period in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iraq, Israel, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand and Yemen.

In Thailand, for instance, a yearslong conflict continued in 2022 in the Deep South region, where [attacks by “suspected insurgents” fueled tensions between ethnic Malay Muslims and ethnic Thai Buddhists](#), according to a U.S. State Department report on human rights practices. Martial law has been in effect in the southern provinces since 2006, shielding state security forces from accountability, and there have been multiple reports of excessive force by the military when conducting raids or arresting people. One such case involved [an ethnic Malay Muslim rubber farmer who died in military custody in 2019](#) after being accused of taking part in the insurgency, according to Human Rights Watch.

Also in this category are a handful of countries in South Asia that, for many years, have had religion-related violence by nongovernmental actors while also having high or very high government restrictions. India and Pakistan, for example, have had high or very high GRI and SHI scores every year since the study began in 2007, while Bangladesh has had high or very high scores in *most* years. (For more details on 2022 events in India and Pakistan, read [Chapter 3](#).)

Nine out of the 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region also are in this category, including Iraq and Syria (for details on events in these two countries, jump to [Chapter 3](#)). By comparison, 10 of the 50 Asia-Pacific countries and four of the 45 European countries have been in the high or very high range on both indexes, on average, from 2018 through 2022. Just one of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa fell in these categories during that time span, and none of the 35 countries in the Americas did.

Countries with 'high' or 'very high' GRI and SHI scores, 2018-2022

Average scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI) for countries in the "high" or "very high" categories on both indexes, 2018-2022



Note: Based on 198 total countries and territories studied. GRI scores of 4.5 to 6.5 are considered "high"; scores of 6.6 to 10.0 considered "very high." SHI scores of 3.6 to 7.1 are considered "high"; scores of 7.2 to 10.0 considered "very high."
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.
"Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022"

Countries with high GRI scores and low or moderate SHI scores

Among the 198 countries and territories analyzed in the study, 32 had high or very high levels of government restrictions while also having low or moderate levels of social hostilities from 2018 to 2022.

Of the countries in this category, more than two-thirds (or 22 out of the 32) are classified as authoritarian on the 2022 Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).³ Most of these countries (20 of the 32) also have governments that give preferential treatment to certain favored or official religions. And nine of the 32 have governments that our analysis classifies as being hostile to religious institutions more generally.⁴

There were no countries in this subset that were classified by the EIU as “full democracies.”

The prevalence of authoritarianism among countries with high or very high government restrictions was explored in [a previous Pew Research Center analysis of GRI and SHI data from 2018](#). The pattern found in the present study is that countries displaying a combination of high or very high levels of government restrictions and low or moderate levels of social hostilities tend to have authoritarian governments, give preferential treatment to one or more religions, or have a general hostile relationship toward religious institutions. Such regimes may tightly control religion as part of broader restrictions on civil liberties.

Countries with high GRI scores and low or moderate SHI scores include post-Soviet states classified as authoritarian by the EIU, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. All have been classified in [a previous Pew Research Center analysis](#) as having a “hostile” relationship toward religion.

China, Cuba and Vietnam also are authoritarian regimes (according to the Economist’s classification) that have high or very high GRI scores but are in the low or moderate range of social

³ These scores are based on assessments by the Economist Intelligent Unit (EIU) of democratic rights and democratic institutions in 167 countries and territories. (The EIU does not make assessments for all 198 countries and territories analyzed in this Pew Research Center study). The EIU assessments review states based on 60 questions that broadly cover five themes: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. Each state is given a numeric score between 0 and 10 on the index and is classified into four regime types: full democracies (scores greater than 8), flawed democracies (scores greater than 6 and less than or equal to 8), hybrid regimes (scores greater than 4 and less than or equal to 6) and authoritarian regimes (scores less than or equal to 4). The EIU’s findings for 2022 can be accessed by downloading [the EIU’s 2023 report](#).

⁴ Countries that give preferential treatment or official status to a religious group can enshrine such benefits through the constitution or other laws and may provide benefits that favor that group over others. Countries that are hostile to religion tend to tightly control religious institutions by restricting legal status, funding or activities of the group’s leaders and members. [Our 2017 report](#) looked specifically at countries with preferred religions, countries with official religions, and countries with governments that are hostile toward religious institutions.

hostilities. All three governments also are generally hostile toward religious institutions, according to the previous Center study.

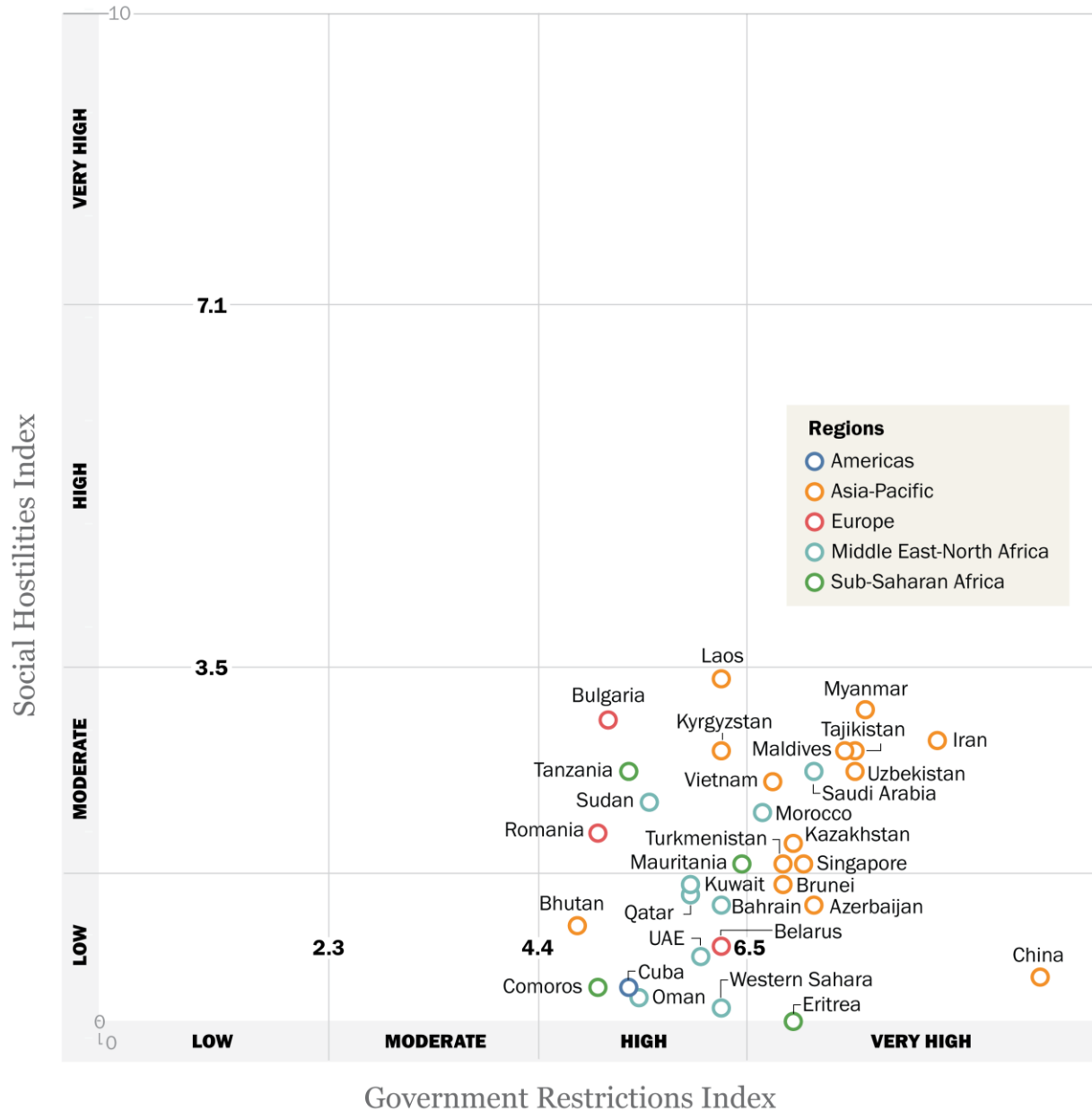
China, which bans religious and spiritual “cults” whose popular followings might pose a challenge to the ruling Chinese Communist Party, has had very high GRI scores every year since the inception of the study, along with low or moderate levels of social hostilities in most years. In Cuba, the government targets Christian leaders who oppose the ruling Cuban Communist Party. Cuba has had “high” government restrictions in *most* years of the study, but low social hostilities in almost all years.

Another country with this combination of high GRI and low or moderate SHI scores is Singapore, a small but religiously diverse country that is classified as a “flawed democracy” by the EIU. Singapore has had high or very high GRI scores, along with low or moderate SHI scores, in nearly all years of the study dating back to 2007. While Singaporean officials have repeatedly said that the country is committed to a multiracial and multireligious society marked by “religious harmony,” restrictive policies toward some religious groups – such as a ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses – have driven up Singapore’s GRI scores.

Most countries with high GRI scores and low or moderate SHI scores are located either in the Middle East-North Africa region (9 of the region’s 20 countries fall into this category) or the Asia-Pacific region (15 of 50 countries). Fewer countries in Europe (3 of 45), sub-Saharan Africa (4 of 48) or the Americas (1 of 35) are in this category.

Countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ GRI scores and ‘low’ or ‘moderate’ SHI scores, 2018-2022

Average scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) for countries in the “high” or “very high” categories, and average scores on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) for countries in the “low” or “moderate” categories, 2018-2022



Note: Based on 198 total countries and territories studied. GRI scores of 4.5 to 6.5 are considered “high”; scores of 6.6 to 10.0 considered “very high.” SHI scores of 0.0 to 1.4 are considered “low”; scores of 1.5 to 3.5 considered “moderate.” Myanmar is also called Burma.
 Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.
 “Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

Countries with high SHI scores and low GRI scores

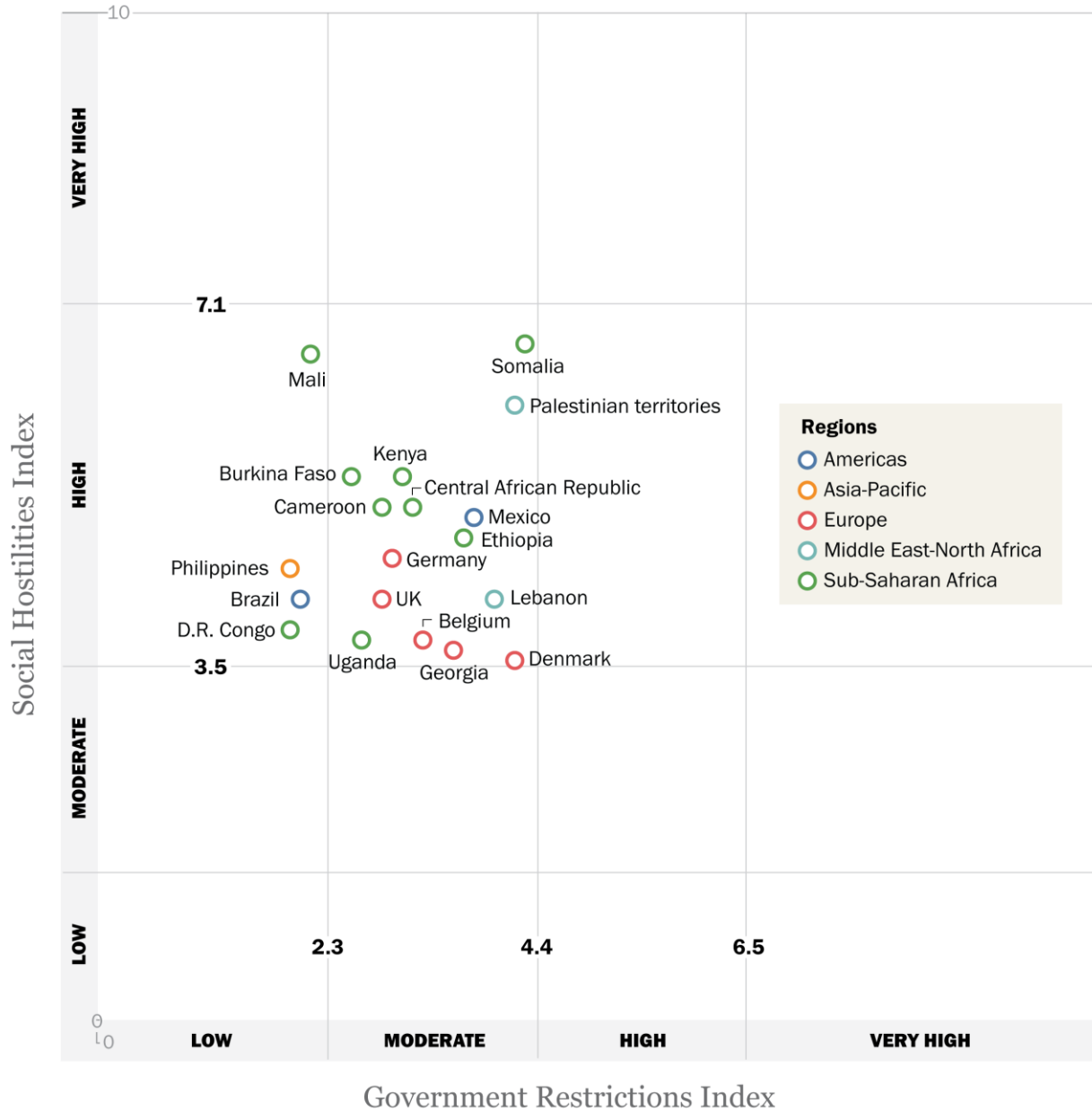
Of the 198 countries and territories studied, 19 had high or very high SHI scores while scoring in the low or moderate range of government restrictions on religion, on average, from 2018 through 2022. They include three countries classified by the EIU in 2022 as “full democracies” (Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom) and three classified as “flawed democracies” (Belgium, Brazil and the Philippines). Eight additional countries in this group were classified as authoritarian regimes and four as hybrid regimes.⁵

Nine of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa fall within these categories (countries with high SHI and low GRI scores) on our indexes, as do five of the 45 countries in Europe, two of the 35 countries in the Americas, one of the 50 Asia-Pacific countries, and two of the 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region.

⁵ The EIU did not have enough data to classify one of these 19 countries, Somalia.

Countries with ‘low’ or ‘moderate’ GRI scores and ‘high’ or ‘very high’ SHI scores, 2018-2022

Average scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) for countries in the “low” or “moderate” categories, and average scores on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) for countries in the “high” or “very high” categories, 2018-2022



Note: Based on 198 total countries and territories studied. GRI scores of 0.0 to 2.3 are considered “low”; scores of 2.4 to 4.4 considered “moderate.” SHI scores of 3.6 to 7.1 are considered “high”; scores of 7.2 to 10.0 considered “very high.”
 Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.
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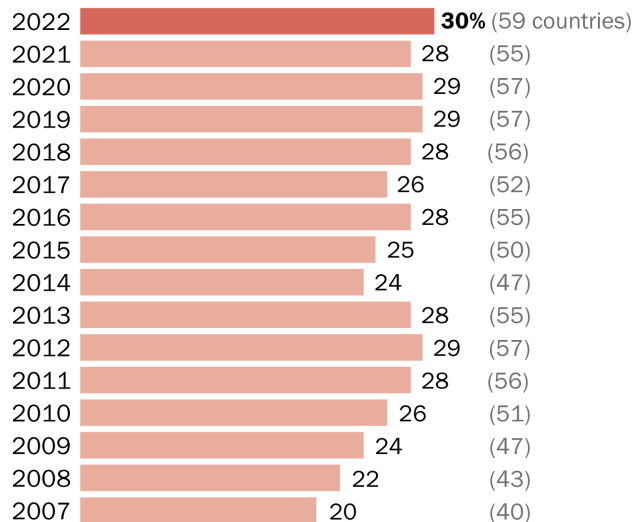
Restrictions on religion in 2022

Government restrictions

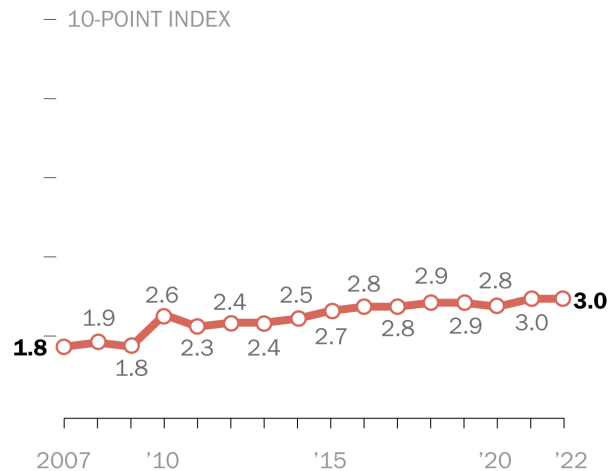
While the global median score on the Government Restrictions Index held steady in 2022 at 3.0 out of a possible 10.0, the number of countries with high or very high levels of government restrictions on religion rose to 59 (30% of all 198 countries and territories studied), up from 55 in 2021. This was the highest number since the study began in 2007. Still, most countries around the world (139, or 70%) had low or moderate levels of government restrictions on religion in 2022.

Number of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ government restrictions on religion peaked in 2022, as global median level of government restrictions stayed the same

% of 198 countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of government restrictions on religion (Scores of 4.5 and higher)



Government Restrictions Index global median score (Based on 20 indicators)



Note: The number of countries and territories studied increased in 2011, from 197 to 198, with the addition of South Sudan.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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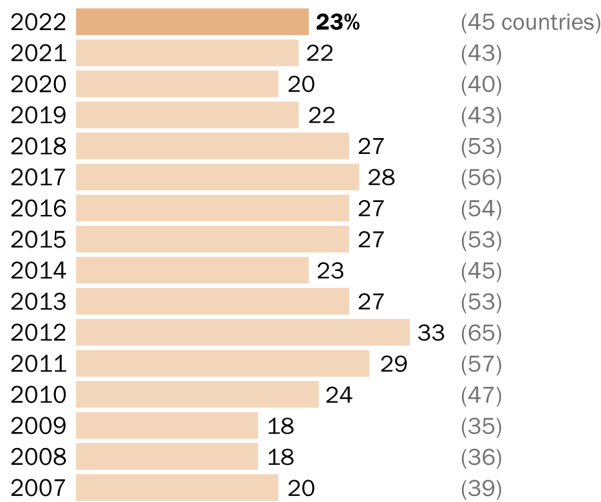
Government restrictions have gradually risen globally since 2007, when the median score on the GRI among all 197 countries and territories was 1.8. In 2021 and 2022, the median GRI score for all 198 countries and territories studied was 3.0.

Social hostilities

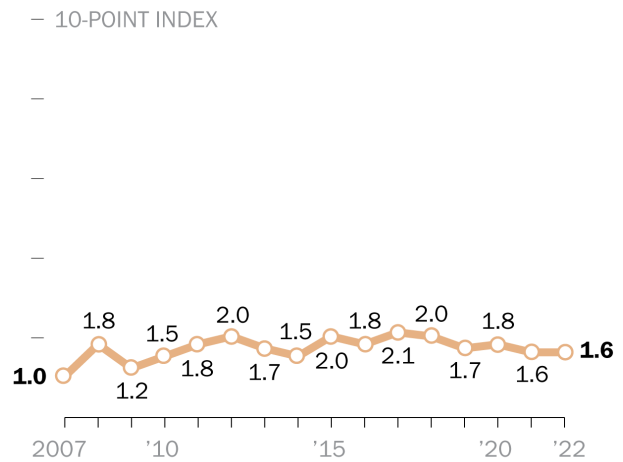
In 2022 the global median score on the Social Hostilities Index remained at 1.6 – the same as in 2021. At the same time, the number of countries with high or very high levels of social hostilities increased slightly to 45 (or 23% of all studied), up from 43 countries the previous year. Most countries (153, or 77%) had low or moderate levels of social hostilities involving religion in 2022.

Number of countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ social hostilities involving religion rose in 2022, while the global median level of social hostilities remained the same

% of 198 countries with ‘high’ or ‘very high’ levels of social hostilities involving religion
(Scores of 3.6 and higher)



Social Hostilities Index global median score
(Based on 13 indicators)



Note: The number of countries and territories studied increased in 2011, from 197 to 198, with the addition of South Sudan.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.
“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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Social hostilities include incidents that tend to vary more widely from year to year than laws and government policies do. The worldwide median score on the SHI started at 1.0 in 2007, reached a peak of 2.1 in 2017, and fell to 1.6 in 2021, where it remained in 2022.

Government harassment of religious groups and interference in worship in 2022

Harassment by governments – a broad measure that captures both verbal and physical pressure by authorities on religious groups – was one of the most prevalent types of restrictions we measured in 2022. It was reported in 186 of the 198 countries and territories in the study (94%).

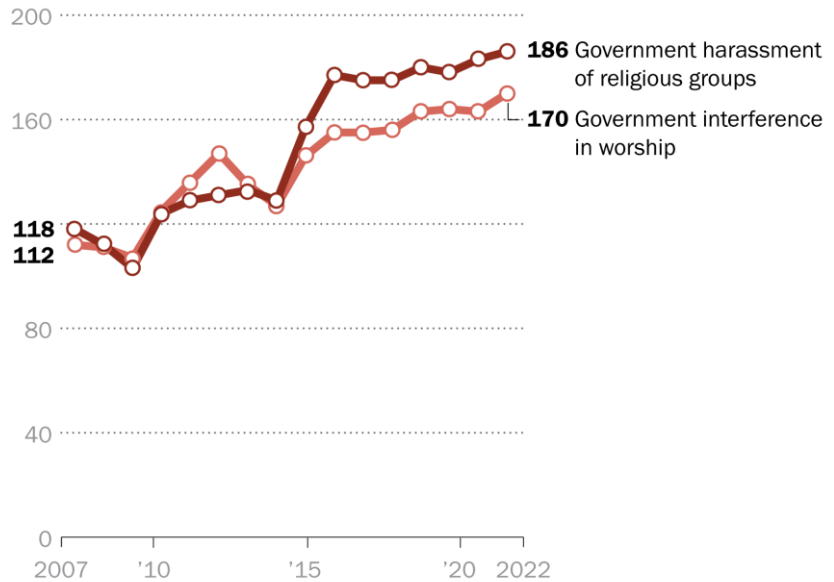
Government interference in worship also remained common around the world in 2022. It was reported by the sources used in this study in 170 countries and territories (86%). We define “government interference” to include policies and actions that disrupt religious activities, such as withholding permission to worship or denying access to places of worship. The term “interference” also covers restrictions on religious practices and rituals not specifically tied to worship, such as burial practices or conscientious objections to military service.

Figures on both government harassment and interference in worship were at peak levels for the study in 2022.

For more information on government harassment, go to [Chapter 2](#).

Since 2007, the number of countries where governments have harassed religious groups or interfered in worship has increased

Number of countries and territories where there was ___ in 2022



Note: The number of countries and territories studied increased in 2011, from 197 to 198, with the addition of South Sudan.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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1. Number of countries with ‘very high’ government restrictions increases in 2022

Government restrictions on religion

The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) gives a score from 0.0 to 10.0 to each country and territory analyzed in this study based on how much they limit or control religious activity such as public preaching or worship, and how much they harass or use force against religious groups. The first section below discusses countries with the highest GRI scores (i.e., those with the most extensive levels of government restrictions in 2022) and countries with large changes in their GRI scores from the previous year.

Among the 198 countries and territories analyzed in this study, 59 had either “high” or “very high” levels of government restrictions on religion in 2022. This figure was an increase from 55 countries in 2021 and a new peak level for the study.

Of these countries, 24 had “very high” scores on the GRI, an increase from 19 countries in 2021. And 35 countries had “high” GRI scores, down from 36 countries the previous year. (A score of 4.5 to 6.5 – out of 10.0 – is classified as a “high” score for a country, while a score of 6.6 to 10.0 is classified as “very high.” For more information on how the “high” and “very high” categories are defined for the GRI, refer to the [Methodology](#).

Countries with the most extensive government restrictions

Seven countries moved from the “high” GRI category to the “very high” category in 2022, including Iraq, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Turkey, Vietnam and Western Sahara. Most of these countries had small changes in their GRI scores (increases of 0.1 to 0.9 on the index) that pushed them from one category to the other. For example, Mauritania’s score on the GRI rose by 0.5 points (from 6.1 to 6.6), due in part to the April arrest of a man in the border town of Rosso after his son [brought Bibles and other Christian literature into Mauritania](#) across the country’s border with Senegal. (The man claimed ownership of the materials as a way to deflect blame from his son, and was released from detention by the end of the year, according to the U.S. State Department.)

Israel's GRI score increased by 1.0 point in 2022, from 5.7 to 6.7, partly due to new reports of violations of prisoners' religious freedom, which said that Israeli authorities prevented prisoners from praying; ate in front of detainees while they were fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan; and [removed the headscarves of women prisoners](#).

In 2022, both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan moved in the other direction on the GRI, from the "very high" category to "high." Kazakhstan's score fell by less than 1.0 point, from 7.0 to 6.3, while Turkmenistan's score fell by more than 2.0 points, from 7.1 to 4.8.

In Turkmenistan, unlike in the previous year, there were no reported arrests in 2022 of people for [holding religious gatherings or for being conscientious objectors to military service](#), according to the sources analyzed for the study. Although religious people in the country still faced harassment and many religious prisoners remained incarcerated in Turkmenistan, minority religious groups reported facing fewer barriers to practicing their faith freely. For example, there were improved relations with authorities and fewer hurdles to register as religious groups, according to the U.S. State Department.

For a full list of countries in each GRI category, refer to [Appendix A](#).

Countries and territories with 'very high' government restrictions on religion

Scores of 6.6 or higher on the 10-point Government Restrictions Index

2021	2022
Afghanistan	Afghanistan
Algeria	Algeria
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
China	China
Egypt	Egypt
Indonesia	Indonesia
Iran	Iran
Kazakhstan*	Iraq
Malaysia	Israel
Maldives	Malaysia
Myanmar	Maldives
Pakistan	Mauritania
Russia	Morocco
Saudi Arabia	Myanmar
Singapore	Pakistan
Syria	Russia
Tajikistan	Saudi Arabia
Turkmenistan*	Singapore
Uzbekistan	Syria
	Tajikistan
	Turkey
	Uzbekistan
	Vietnam
	Western Sahara

* Country had "very high" government restrictions in 2021 but not in 2022.

Note: **Bold** indicates a country that had "very high" government restrictions in 2022 but not in 2021. Myanmar is also called Burma. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

"Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022"

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Changes in scores on Government Restrictions Index

In 2022, a total of 97 countries had increases of 0.1 point or more on the GRI, while 63 countries had decreases of 0.1 point or more.

Looking at changes in classification, about two-thirds of the countries analyzed (134 out of 198) had *small* changes (0.1 to 0.9) in their GRI scores in 2022: 85 were small increases, and 49 were small decreases.

An additional 38 countries had no increase or decrease, while 25 had *modest* changes (1.0 to 1.9 points) in 2022, including 12 with modest increases and 13 with modest decreases.

Only Turkmenistan had a *large* decrease (2.0 points or more). No country had a large increase in its GRI in 2022.

Changes on the GRI in 2022

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) from 2021 to 2022

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	0	0%	49%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	12	6	
0.1 to 0.9 increase	85	43	
No change	38	19	19%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	49	25	32%
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	13	7	
2.0 or more decrease	1	1	
Total	198	100	

Note: Point changes are calculated by comparing GRI scores from year to year. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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Social hostilities related to religion

The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) gives a score to each country based on reports of incidents of religion-related hostilities carried out by nongovernment actors (such as private individuals and social groups). These acts can include verbal and physical harassment, mob violence, tensions between religious groups, or violence carried out in the name of religion. This section of the report discusses countries with the most extensive levels of social hostilities and large changes in SHI scores from 2021 to 2022.

In total, 45 countries had “high” or “very high” levels of social hostilities in 2022, compared with 43 countries in 2021. Among these countries, seven had “very high” SHI scores in 2022, the same number as in the previous year. A total of 38 countries had “high” levels of social hostilities, up from 36 in 2021. On the Social Hostilities Index, scores of 3.6 to 7.1 (out of 10.0) are categorized as “high,” while scores of 7.2 to 10.0 are considered “very high.” (Refer to the [Methodology](#) to learn about how these categories are defined.)

Countries with the most extensive social hostilities

Nigeria was one of the seven countries with “very high” levels of social hostilities in 2022. The U.S. State Department reported that “general insecurity was prevalent throughout the country” in 2022, with multiple reports of [religion-related mob violence, kidnappings and mass killings of Muslims and Christians by armed gangs](#). In addition, the militant groups Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa burned churches and mosques in the northeast part of the country.

Of the seven countries with “very high” SHI scores in 2022, only one (Iraq) moved *into* this category. An additional country (Israel) moved *out of* the category and instead into the “high” category.

In Iraq, part of the SHI increase was related to activities of sectarian armed groups such as the Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which detained religious minorities and kept them in secret prisons.⁶ (For more examples of social hostilities by the PMF in Iraq, refer to [Chapter 3](#).) According to Amnesty International, there also were more reports in the Iraqi Kurdistan region in 2022 than in previous years of [women and girls being killed by male family members](#) for reasons including conversions to another religion.

Israel’s SHI score went down in 2022, partly because there was [no recurrence of the civil unrest that erupted in several “mixed” Jewish and Arab areas in May 2021](#) during an escalation of hostilities in Jerusalem and Gaza, according to the U.S. State Department. (During the weeklong clashes between Jewish and Palestinian protesters, there had been violence and vandalism at synagogues, a mosque and Muslim gravesites.)

For a list of countries in each SHI category, refer to [Appendix B](#).

Changes in scores on Social Hostilities Index

In 2022, four countries had large changes (2.0 points or more) in their SHI scores. Three of them – Iran, Jordan and Sierra Leone – had large increases in their SHI scores, while Uganda had a large *decrease*. An additional 42 countries had modest changes (1.0 to 1.9 points) in their scores, including 18 modest increases and 24 decreases. A total of 103 countries had small changes (0.1 to 0.9 points), including 42 increases and 61 decreases. And 49 countries had no changes in their SHI scores.

Countries and territories with ‘very high’ social hostilities involving religion

Scores of 7.2 or higher on the 10-point Social Hostilities Index

2021	2022
Afghanistan	Afghanistan
Egypt	Egypt
India	India
Israel*	Iraq
Nigeria	Nigeria
Pakistan	Pakistan
Syria	Syria

* Country had “very high” social hostilities in 2021 but not in 2022. Note: **Bold** indicates a country that had “very high” social hostilities in 2022 but not in 2021.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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⁶ Although the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) were initially formally affiliated with the Iraqi government, there are reports they increasingly carried out attacks autonomously. Thus, they were coded in this analysis within the Social Hostilities Index. Refer to Nov. 29, 2022. [“To sleep the law: Violence against protesters and unaccountable perpetrators in Iraq.”](#) Human Rights Watch.

Of the four countries with large changes, two (Iran and Sierra Leone) moved into different SHI categories. Iran moved from “moderate” to the “high” category, while Sierra Leone moved from “low” to the “moderate” SHI category. Meanwhile, Jordan and Uganda stayed in the “high” category despite having large shifts in their SHI scores.

Iran’s increase on the SHI was partly driven by [an attack on a Shiite shrine in October](#) that killed at least 15 people and wounded at least 19 others, according to the U.S. State Department. The militant group [Islamic State \(which aligns with the Sunni branch of Islam\)](#) claimed it was behind the sectarian attack. In addition, [attacks against Shiite clerics increased during the year](#) due to their perceived association with the “clerical regime,” the U.S. State Department said.

Sierra Leone’s score went up due to [multiple reports of hostilities between groups](#). For example, foreign preachers from Pakistan who are part of the [Tablighi Jamaat](#), an Islamic missionary movement, attacked an Ahmadi Muslim missionary from Pakistan for “listening to a different version of the Quran on his cell phone,” the U.S. State Department reported. And [a Pentecostal church in Sierra Leone was attacked](#) by Muslims in the area during a graduation ceremony. The attackers damaged furniture, threw stones and complained that the ceremony was too noisy.

Uganda’s SHI score decreased in 2022 due to fewer reports of hostilities over conversions and proselytizing compared with the previous year.

Changes on the SHI in 2022

Changes on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from 2021 to 2022

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	3	2%	32%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	18	9	
0.1 to 0.9 increase	42	21	
No change	49	25	25%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	61	31	43%
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	24	12	
2.0 or more decrease	1	1	
Total	198	100	

Note: Point changes are calculated by comparing SHI scores from year to year. Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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Changes in overall restrictions on religion

When combining each country's GRI and SHI scores, we find that 88 countries had overall increases in scores from 2021, 85 had decreases, and 25 had no overall change.

Among the 88 increases, 67 were small ones (0.1 to 0.9 points) and 18 were modest (1.0 to 1.9 points). A total of three countries – Iran, Jordan and Sierra Leone – had large overall increases in their scores.

When looking at the 85 countries where overall scores fell in 2022, 60 had small decreases (0.1 to 0.9 points) and 24 had modest declines (1.0 to 1.9 points). Only Turkmenistan had a large overall decrease.

Overall changes in global restrictions on religion in 2022

Changes on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) or Social Hostilities Index (SHI) from 2021 to 2022

POINT CHANGE	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	% OF COUNTRIES	
2.0 or more increase	3	2%	44%
1.0 to 1.9 increase	18	9	
0.1 to 0.9 increase	67	34	
No change	25	13	13%
0.1 to 0.9 decrease	60	30	43%
1.0 to 1.9 decrease	24	12	
2.0 or more decrease	1	1	
Total	198	100	

Note: Categories of overall change in restrictions are calculated by comparing a country's unrounded scores on the GRI and SHI from year to year. When a country's score on both indexes changed in the same direction (both increased or both decreased), the greater amount of change determined the category. For instance, if the country's GRI score increased by 0.8 points and its SHI score increased by 1.5 points, the country was put into the "1.0 to 1.9 increase" category. When a country's score increased on one index but decreased on the other, the difference between the amounts of change determined the grouping. For example, if the country's GRI score increased by 2.0 points and its SHI score decreased by 1.5 points, the country went into the "0.1 to 0.9 increase" category. When a country's score on one index stayed the same, the amount of change on the other index was used to assign the category. Figures do not add to 100% because subtotals in the chart have been rounded.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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2. Number of countries where religious groups were harassed reached new peak level in 2022

In 2022, harassment of religious groups by governments or social actors occurred in 192 out of the world's 198 countries and territories, according to sources analyzed in our study. This was an increase by two countries from 2021 and a new peak level for the study.

Here are the key findings:

- **Governments** harassed people for their religious beliefs and practices in 186 countries in 2022, up from 183 in 2021.
- **Social groups or private individuals** harassed people due to their religion in 164 countries, the same number as in 2021.
- **Governments and/or social actors** harassed religious groups in 192 countries, including 158 countries where *both* governments *and* social groups or private individuals engaged in harassment.

In this study, harassment includes a range of actions, from disparaging verbal remarks to the physical use of force against religious groups or their property. The findings in this chapter reflect the number of countries where *at least one occurrence* of any type of religion-related harassment was reported in the sources analyzed. The figures, therefore, show how geographically widespread harassment of religious groups is and whether the number of countries where it occurs is increasing or decreasing. But they do not address which religious groups face the most persecution around the world, because a country is counted whether it had a single instance of harassment against a religious group or numerous ones.

To place a lens on the most serious cases, this chapter examines physical harassment faced by religious groups. It also looks at the number of countries where specific religious groups faced harassment more broadly (either physical or verbal). By **physical harassment** we mean cases in which physical force was used against religious groups and their property, including damage to property, detentions or arrests, assaults on people, displacements and killings. By **verbal harassment**, we mean insults and disparaging public remarks and statements or articles about religious groups in the media.

The figures also include countries where there was harassment of atheists, agnostics or others who do not affiliate with a religion, if the sources analyzed reported that they were harassed due to their beliefs or nonbeliefs. Humanists are included in a different category from the religiously unaffiliated.

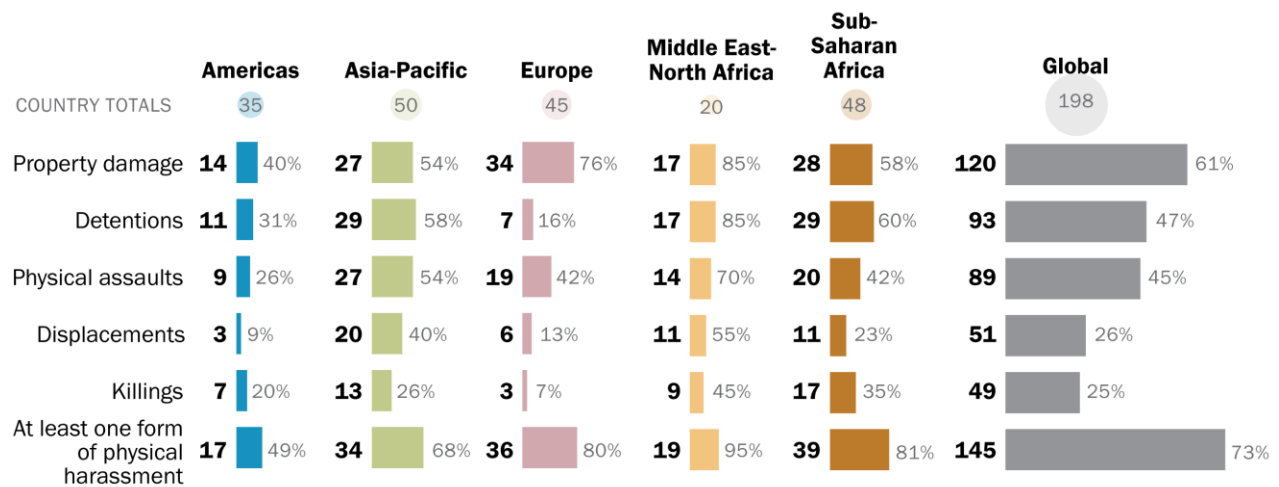
Physical harassment against religious groups

This section focuses on five types of physical harassment faced by religious groups: **property damage, assaults, detentions, displacements and killings.**

In 2022, at least one of the five types was reported in 145 out of 198 countries and territories (73% of all places analyzed), up from 137 countries in 2021. This included 111 countries where governments used physical force against religious groups (up from 100 in 2021) and 111 countries where social groups or private individuals carried out such incidents (up from 101 in 2021), according to our sources.

Religious groups faced at least 1 type of physical harassment in almost three-quarters of countries around the world in 2022

Number and share of countries and territories where religious groups encountered each type of physical harassment in 2022, by region



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details. "Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022"

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According to the sources analyzed, **damage to property** was the most common type of physical harassment against religious groups in 2022, occurring in 120 of 198 countries and territories (61%). **Detentions** were reported in 93 countries (47%) and **physical assaults** in 89 countries (45%). **Displacements** due to religious tensions or violence occurred in 51 countries (26%), while religion-related **killings** were reported in 49 countries (25%).⁷

Property damage

Religion-related property damage – including raids, evictions, closures, vandalism and unresolved restitution claims for properties confiscated in the past – occurred in **120 countries** in 2022, according to our sources. This includes 78 countries where governments targeted properties and 89 countries where social groups or private individuals were behind such incidents.

The Middle East-North Africa region had the highest share of countries with property damage targeting religious groups (85% of the 20 countries and territories in the region). Such incidents also were reported in 76% of Europe’s 45 countries, 58% of sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries, 54% of the 50 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and 40% of the 35 countries in the Americas.

For example, in Jordan, [authorities shut down 30 Quran teaching centers](#) for not complying with new conditions set by the ministry in charge of Islamic affairs, such as limits on how many hours the centers could be open and a requirement that the centers’ teachers pass an official exam. Activists protested the decision and claimed it was linked to a legislative attempt “to dispense with religious and traditional social norms.”

[In Iraq, which has a large Shiite Muslim population](#), Shiite militias and the Shiite Endowment (one of three national-level offices that distribute government funds to recognized religious groups) sought control over properties owned by the Sunni Endowment in the country, leading to sectarian tensions.⁸ For example, in Mosul, political parties tried to shift ownership and control of Sunni religious sites to the Shiite Endowment, according to Sunni members of parliament.

Also in Iraq, a Syriac Catholic Church leader in Bartella, a historically Christian town in Ninewa Province, said militias sought to “seize and occupy Christian properties” in an attempt to drive out Christians and alter the religious composition of the town.

⁷ In some cases, our analysis counts multiple types of physical harassment as occurring (in a single incident in a country). For example, in a raid of a house of worship that resulted in property damage, detentions and assaults, all three types of physical harassment would be tallied for that country.

⁸ The third religious endowment in the country is the Christian and Minorities Endowment.

Detentions

Detentions related to religion (including kidnappings or arrests that are reported as arbitrary or carried out without due process) occurred in **93 countries** in 2022. This included 88 countries where governments detained people and 22 countries where nongovernmental actors arrested or abducted people, according to our sources.

The Middle East-North Africa region again had the highest share of countries with religion-related detentions (85%), compared with 60% of countries in sub-Saharan Africa and 58% of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Lower shares of countries in the Americas (31%) and Europe (16%) had reports of detentions related to religion.

In Israel, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, [police on April 15 raided the Al-Aqsa mosque](#) in the compound known as Haram al-Sharif to Muslims and the Temple Mount to Jews. The raid, which occurred after early-morning prayers, reportedly resulted in more than 300 detentions and 150 injuries. Police said they entered the mosque compound to stop a crowd from throwing stones. Videos showed the police using tear gas and stun grenades. [A similar raid occurred in 2021](#) during the month of Ramadan.

In Eritrea, [20 Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in 2022 for their conscientious objection](#) to serving in the military and for other religious practices, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). And three Catholic leaders were detained after giving sermons that discussed human rights issues in the country. Also, [the patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church died in custody](#) in February 2022, after being under house arrest for 16 years. He had been imprisoned for opposing government restrictions and for resisting government interference in the church, according to USCIRF.

Physical assaults

Religion-related physical assaults occurred in **89 countries and territories out of the 198 studied** in 2022. Private individuals and groups were responsible for these assaults in more countries (72) than government authorities (43) were, according to the sources used in this study.

Assaults occurred against members of religious groups in 70% of Middle East-North African countries and 54% of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Lower shares of countries in Europe and sub-Saharan Africa (42% each) and the Americas (26%) had reports of these incidents.

For example, in Syria, armed opposition groups backed by Turkey [continued in 2022 to target Yazidis with physical abuse and sexual violence](#). Local media reported that the targeting of Yazidis

and other religious minorities was part of an effort to “engineer demographic change” that included forcing Yazidi children to become Muslims.

In Germany, there were reports of physical assaults on Jews and Muslims wearing religious garb. In March, a Syrian man attacked a British tourist wearing a kippah, threw it on the ground and “stomped on it repeatedly,” according to the U.S. State Department’s summary of the incident. In another incident, in August, a man on a bus attacked a pregnant woman wearing a headscarf.

In Brazil, a group of evangelical Christians attacked a priestess associated with Candomblé (an Afro-Brazilian religion), broke sacred items and vandalized a Candomblé temple in Bahia state, a local newspaper reported. According to the U.S. State Department, Afro-Brazilians make up just 2% of the population but are victims in a disproportionately high number of incidents of intolerance and discrimination. Within the country, there was also a reported rise in the activity of neo-Nazi groups and antisemitic incidents including graffiti depicting swastikas and “verbal and physical aggression” against Jews, according to the U.S. State Department.

Displacement

Displacements and deportations for reasons related to religion were reported in **51 countries**. Governments were behind these displacements in 40 countries in 2022, while private individuals or groups were the driving force in 18 countries, according to the sources used in the study.

People experienced displacement due to religion in 55% of Middle Eastern-North African countries, 40% of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, 23% of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, 13% of European countries and 9% of countries in the Americas.

In China, the government relocated about 26,000 people from nomadic Tibetan communities to areas that lacked Buddhist monasteries, according to the U.S. State Department, which also said Tibetans charged that this was an attempt to “dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.” And in 2022, “hundreds of thousands” of Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities were forced to leave their towns and take up jobs in state-owned factories under what a UN special rapporteur described as forced labor conditions, violence and surveillance.

In Myanmar (also called Burma), forces that seized control in a 2021 military coup attacked villages and houses of worship of religious minorities and the Buddhist majority throughout 2022. Since the coup, a conflict between government forces and multiple ethnic armed groups has internally displaced over 1 million people, including an estimated 121,000 from religious minority

groups and the Buddhist majority in Kachin and Shan states. According to USCIRF, although the military controlled only 17% of the country’s territory, “in that limited space it has significantly cracked down on all dissent and freedom.”

Killings

Killings due to religion occurred in **49 countries in 2022**, according to the study’s sources, which said social actors were behind killings in 37 countries and governments were responsible in 27 countries.

Reports of religion-related killings were made in 45% of countries in Middle East and North Africa and lower percentages of countries in sub-Saharan Africa (35%), the Asia-Pacific region (26%), the Americas (20%) and Europe (7%).

In Haiti, [a nun from Italy was killed](#) in June 2022 after an armed attack that media sources said was “probably [carried out] with the aim of robbery.” Amid a [rise in gang violence in the country](#), religious leaders said they were targets of kidnappings because they were viewed as wealthy and as having ties to foreign donors, according to the U.S. State Department.

Also in 2022, [the Saudi government conducted the largest mass execution](#) in its history, putting to death 81 people, including 41 Shiite Muslims on charges of terrorism. UN officials raised concerns about the “broad definition of terrorism” being applied and a lack of due process during the trials of the Shiite men.

And [in Mali, government forces extrajudicially killed hundreds of people](#) – most of them from the ethnic Fulani group, who are predominantly Muslim – in counterterrorism operations in 2022, according to Human Rights Watch. In one incident described as the “worst single atrocity” in the country’s decade of armed conflict, the government “summarily executed” around 300 civilians, including some “suspected Islamist fighters.”

Which religious groups were harassed?

[Christians and Muslims are the largest religious groups in the world](#) and were targets of harassment – either physical or verbal – in a greater number of countries in 2022 than any other groups analyzed in the study. This has been the case in all previous years of the study.

As previously noted, however, these measures do not reflect the *severity* of harassment or persecution and thus cannot determine which religious groups face the *most* persecution. In this study, a country is counted as having harassment against a religious group whether it had a single incident or many incidents in the year under review.

In 2022, Christians were harassed by governments or social actors in 166 countries, up from 160 the previous year. Muslims were harassed in 148 countries, up from 141 in 2021.

Jews were harassed in 90 countries in 2022, down from 91 in 2021. As in previous years, Jews in 2022 were the religious group that faced harassment in the third-highest number of countries even though they [comprise a comparatively small share \(0.2%\) of the world's population](#).

In 2022, most religious groups analyzed faced harassment in *more* countries than was the case in 2021. This includes Christians, Muslims, Hindus, practitioners of folk religions, followers of other religions (such as Baha'is, Scientologists, Sikhs, Rastafarians, Zoroastrians and others) and people who are religiously unaffiliated (such as atheists and agnostics).

Buddhists and Jews were harassed in slightly fewer countries in 2022 than they were in 2021.

And most religious groups – with the exception of Jews – faced harassment from *governments* in more countries in 2022 than from *private individuals or groups* in 2022. That year, Jews were harassed by governments in 68 countries and by social actors in 77 countries.

Religious groups were harassed by governments or social groups in 192 countries and territories in 2022

Number of countries and territories where religious groups were harassed, by year

	2007	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22
Christians	107	102	108	128	144	143	145	153	155	160	166
Muslims	96	99	100	125	142	140	139	147	145	141	148
Jews	51	77	81	74	87	87	88	89	94	91	90
Other religions	33	38	43	50	57	50	56	68	62	64	68
Folk religions**	24	34	21	32	41	38	37	32	33	40	49
Hindus	21	9	14	18	23	23	19	21	21	24	26
Buddhists	10	12	10	7	17	19	24	25	21	28	25
Religiously unaffiliated	–	5	4	14	14	23	18	22	27	27	32
Any of above	152	164	160	169	187	187	185	190	189	190	192

* Includes Sikhs, members of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, members of newer faiths such as Baha'i, and other religious groups.

** Includes, for example, followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian Aboriginal religions.

Note: This measure looks at the number of countries in which groups were harassed, either by the government or by individuals/social groups. It does not assess the severity of the harassment. Numbers do not add to totals shown because multiple religious groups can be harassed in a country.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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3. Median scores for government restrictions and social hostilities stay the same in 2022

In 2022, global median scores on both the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) were the same as they were in 2021. Some geographic regions scored higher on one or both indexes, but other regions had lower scores or showed no overall change. This chapter examines the year-over-year changes in the regional scores on both indexes.

Government restrictions on religion, by region

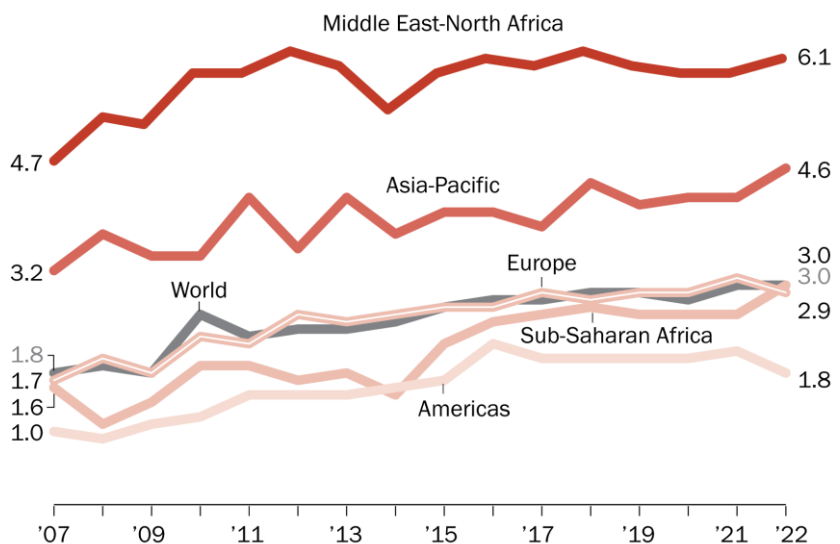
The global median score for the 198 countries and territories analyzed in this study remained 3.0 out of 10.0 on the Government Restrictions Index, tied for the highest median score registered since 2007, the first year of the study. Median GRI scores increased in three regions – Asia and the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa – while declining in two regions: the Americas and Europe.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the median GRI score rose from 4.2 to 4.6 in 2022, the highest score in this region since the beginning of the study. More than half of all

the countries in the world with “very high” levels of government restrictions in 2022 were in the Asia-Pacific region (14 out of 24).⁹ In this study, the Asia-Pacific region encompasses 50 countries and stretches across a vast area, from Australia to Turkey. It includes some of the most populous countries in the world, such as India, China and Indonesia.

In 2022, median levels of government restrictions on religion rose in the Asia-Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East-North Africa regions

Median scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI)



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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⁹ For a full list of countries with “very high” levels of government restrictions, refer to [Appendix A](#).

In 2022, more governments in Asia-Pacific countries interfered in worship, restricted public preaching and used violence against religious groups than in 2021. For example, [in Cambodia, a former Buddhist monk was sentenced to five years in prison](#) – and barred from becoming a monk again – for posting messages on social media that were critical of the prime minister. The monk was charged with “conspiracy to commit treason and incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest.”

In Afghanistan, the Taliban in 2022 were in power for the first full calendar year after having overthrown the previously elected government in August 2021. After their takeover in 2021, the group declared the country an Islamic emirate and ordered that all laws must be in accordance with [sharia, or Islamic law](#). According to the U.S. State Department, minority groups such as the Shiite ethnic Hazara said that the Taliban’s targeting of their community and failure to defend them from attacks by a militant group (ISIS-K) in 2022 “[deepened marginalization and the erasure of the Hazara from society](#).” Other minorities, such as Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and Ahmadi Muslims, sought to leave the country in growing numbers in 2022, fearing the Taliban’s enforcement of sharia.

In 2022, sub-Saharan Africa’s median GRI score increased from 2.6 to 3.0, also hitting its peak level on the index, with nearly all countries in the region (46 out of 48) reporting at least one case of harassment of religious groups. More of these countries interfered in worship, limited public preaching, and used physical violence against religious groups (by detaining religious leaders, for example) in 2022 than did so in 2021.

For example, [the government in Equatorial Guinea enforced new mandates](#) requiring religious groups to obtain a “theological certificate” in order to operate, leading some groups to be disbanded, according to the U.S. State Department. Also, an ordained Pentecostal leader in the country, who was a former ambassador and minister, was arrested for criticizing the government and calling it tyrannical. And [in Mauritius, 12 Rastafarians were arrested in 2022](#) for protesting restrictions on marijuana usage in religious ceremonies. Neither of these countries had reports of arrests related to religion in 2021.

The median GRI score in the Middle East-North Africa region climbed from 5.9 to 6.1 in 2022. As has been the case in every year of the study, this region had the highest levels of government restrictions in the study, largely driven by preferential status given to religious groups. Of the 20 countries in the region, all except Sudan recognized a favored or official religion; all except Lebanon required some type of religious education in public schools; and all except

Western Sahara had at least one type of physical harassment, according to the sources analyzed.¹⁰ And all 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region had reports of interference in worship and either physical or verbal harassment (or both types) toward religious groups.

In Oman, for example, authorities sentenced two people – Maryam al-Nuaimi and Abdullah Hassan – to prison for three years and five years, respectively, for online discussions about religious freedom that the government found to be “[denigrating Muslim values](#),” according to the U.S. State Department. And [in Morocco, a blogger was fined and sentenced to two years in prison](#) for satirical comments on social media about Quranic verses that authorities charged were “insulting to Islam.” The U.S. State Department reported that the blogger has been held in solitary confinement since her detention.

In 2022, the median GRI score for Europe fell from 3.1 to 2.9, while the score in the Americas fell from 2.1 to 1.8. Of all five major regions, the Americas had the lowest median score for government restrictions in 2022.

In Europe, Russia was the only country with “very high” levels of government restrictions in 2022. According to the U.S. State Department, [Russian authorities sentenced people from multiple religious groups](#) to prison on charges of extremism. Those sentenced included Jehovah’s Witnesses, followers of a Turkish Muslim theologian named Said Nursi, and members of Falun Gong (an illegal religious group), the Church of Scientology, evangelical Protestant groups, and a transnational Islamic political group called Hizb ut-Tahrir. Russian Orthodox priests and members of other religious groups also were fined and banned from their positions for criticizing the Russian government’s war in Ukraine.

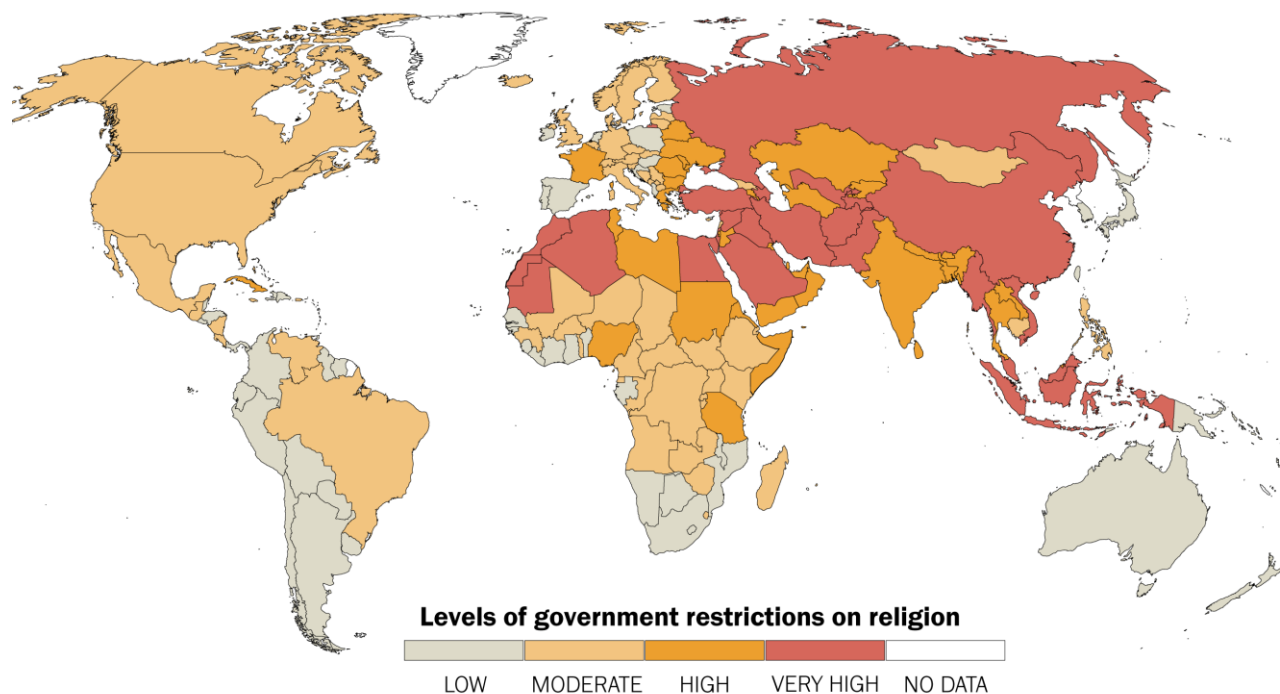
In the Americas, Cuba was the only country with “high” GRI levels in 2022, while all other countries in the region had “moderate” or “low” scores. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the [Cuban government restricted the freedom of religious groups](#) “through surveillance, harassment of religious leaders and laypeople, forced exile, fines and ill treatment of religious prisoners of conscience.” In February, the president of the Christian Reformed Church of Cuba was detained because his denomination had disaffiliated with a pro-government council of churches. He left the country for the United States later in the year.

¹⁰ [According to the U.S. State Department](#), while the interim constitution in Sudan does not rely on sharia as a source of law, “the clause restricting the death penalty permits its imposition as sharia-sanctioned ... punishment for certain crimes.” In contrast, Sudan’s former constitution “stated all national legislation should be based on sharia.”

And in the U.S., which had “moderate” levels of government restrictions in 2022, multiple cases remained open from previous years involving complaints of religious discrimination filed under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, a federal law. For example, the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi filed a lawsuit in November 2021 alleging that [city officials in Horn Lake, Mississippi, denied zoning permits for construction of a mosque](#) “due to anti-Muslim bias.”

Government restrictions on religion around the world in 2022

Levels of government restrictions on religion in each country and territory studied, as of 2022



Note: Based on the Government Restrictions Index's 10-point scale; scores of 0.0 to 2.3 are considered “low,” 2.4 to 4.4 are considered “moderate,” 4.5 to 6.5 are considered “high,” and 6.6 to 10.0 are considered “very high.” For details on how disputed territories are coded, read the Methodology.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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Social hostilities involving religion, by region

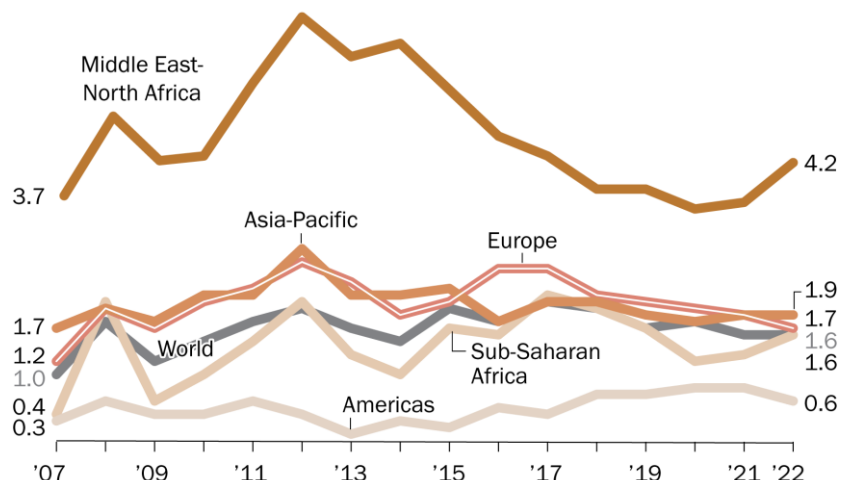
The global median score on the Social Hostilities Index was stable in 2022, remaining at 1.6 out of 10.0, the same as in 2021.

The Middle East-North Africa region and sub-Saharan Africa registered increases, while the Americas and Europe had declines in their median SHI scores. The Asia-Pacific region's median score stayed the same.

In the Middle East-North Africa region, the median SHI score rose from 3.6 to 4.2. Syria, Iraq and Egypt had the highest social hostilities scores in the region, with all three countries in the “very high” category.

Median levels of social hostilities toward religion rose in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East-North Africa regions in 2022

Median scores on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI)



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

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[Syria in 2022 continued to experience the aftereffects of broad conflicts](#) dating back to anti-government protests that broke out in the [Arab Spring of 2011](#). The U.S. State Department said the country was afflicted by sectarian violence “exacerbated by regime actions” and accused the Syrian government of using “sectarianism, including the politicization of religion” to its advantage in 2022.

[Iraq also experienced sectarian instability](#) rooted in a long series of events, including the U.S. invasion of the country in 2003; the subsequent rise of the Sunni militant group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2013-14; and the formation of predominantly Shiite armed groups known as Population Mobilization Forces (PMF) to fight ISIS. In 2022, media and human rights organizations said security conditions were improving in Iraq but also [reported that “sectarian armed groups” \(such as militias aligned with Iran\) carried out violence](#) and that people in non-Muslim minority religious groups faced kidnappings and pressure to follow Islam.

The median SHI score in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 1.3 to 1.6 in 2022, with Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mali recording the highest SHI scores in the region. Nigeria had “very high” levels of social hostilities, while Burkina Faso and Mali had “high” levels.

In 2022, [Burkina Faso faced a worsening security climate](#) due to multiple military coups and the expansion of armed insurgents and jihadist militant groups such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. These groups killed religious leaders and worshippers and attacked mosques, churches and places where animists worship, according to the U.S. State Department, which also reported that the expansion of extremist groups threatened the country’s “long tradition of religious pluralism.” For example, the Fulani ethnic group, which is mostly Muslim, faced violence from other ethnic groups because of a “perceived association with militant Islamist groups.”

[Mali also dealt with violent attacks in 2022](#), as militant groups targeted civilians, government forces and peacekeepers for not following their strict interpretation of Islam, according to the U.S. State Department. These groups – designated by authorities as extremists – shut down government schools they viewed as overly Western and directed that some of them become schools focused on teaching the Quran.

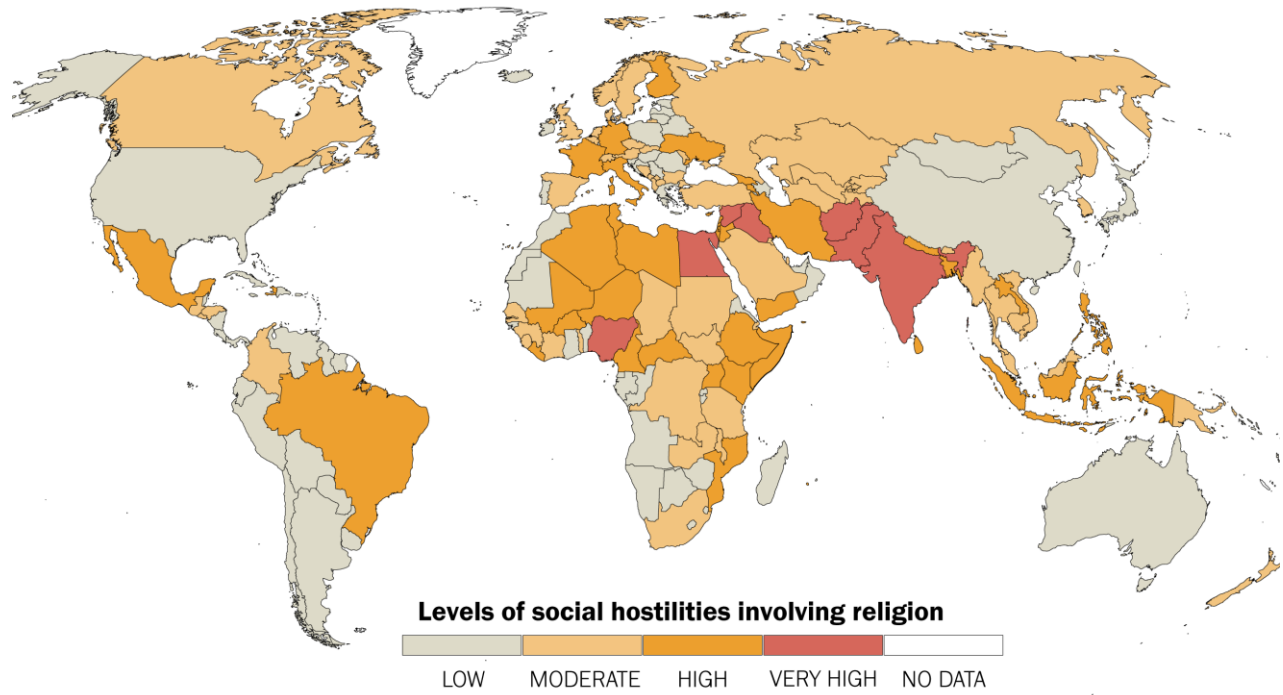
Meanwhile, the median SHI score across Asia and the Pacific remained stable at 1.9 in 2022. India, Pakistan and Afghanistan had the highest levels of social hostilities in this region; all registered SHI scores in the “very high” category.

[In India, several deadly incidents of communal violence](#) took place in 2022, particularly between Hindus and Muslims over accusations that Muslims had slaughtered or sold cows, which Hindus view as holy. The U.S. State Department reported that a Muslim man was beaten to death and two others were injured by a mob in the state of Madhya Pradesh in August for “transporting cattle for slaughter,” which is illegal in the state. While police filed a complaint against the accused perpetrators of the attacks, they also charged the two injured Muslim survivors for “illegally transporting cattle.”

And [in Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country, religiously motivated attacks claimed the lives of Muslims as well as Hindus, Christians and Sikhs](#). For example, in February, a mob severely beat and killed a mentally disabled Muslim man and hung his body from a tree after he was accused of burning pages of a Quran. Police officers responding to the attack allegedly were assaulted by the mob as well. The police eventually arrested more than 30 people and held more than 100 for questioning.

Social hostilities involving religion around the world in 2022

Level of social hostilities involving religion in each country and territory studied, as of 2022



Note: Based on the Social Hostilities Index's 10-point scale; scores of 0.0 to 1.4 are considered "low," 1.5 to 3.5 are considered "moderate," 3.6 to 7.1 are considered "high," and 7.2 to 10.0 are considered "very high." For details on how disputed territories are coded, read the Methodology.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

"Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022"

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In 2022, Europe's median score for social hostilities fell from 1.9 to 1.7 in 2022. And in the Americas, the median SHI score also ticked downward, from 0.8 to 0.6. Still, religious groups faced harassment (verbal or physical) by social actors in 40 out of the 45 countries analyzed in Europe. And in 20 European countries, women were harassed for violating either secular or religious dress norms, according to the study's sources.

For example, in a survey conducted by the government, [Muslim women in the Netherlands who wore face coverings reported facing rising social harassment](#) after the country banned face coverings in 2019, which included religious attire such as niqabs and burqas. Another survey found that women who wear head coverings in job application photos have a lower chance of being called back by employers.

4. Restrictions in the 25 most populous countries in 2022

This chapter examines government restrictions and social hostilities in the world's 25 most populous countries.¹¹ Looking separately at these populous countries – which are home to about three-quarters of the world's population – allows us to see how government restrictions and social hostilities impact a large portion of the world's population.

While each country has a national score on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index (SHI), it is important to note that the restrictions measured on these indexes don't affect all inhabitants in a country equally. For example, restrictions can often target minority groups more than majority groups.

In 2022, among the 25 most populous countries, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Iran and Nigeria had the **highest overall levels of restrictions** (meaning, combined government restrictions and social hostilities scores for a country). Japan, South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the **lowest overall levels of restrictions** among these countries.

Government Restrictions Index (GRI)

China, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia and Russia had the highest levels of government restrictions among the most populous countries, with all five scoring in the “very high” GRI category. Japan, South Africa, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the UK had the lowest levels of government restrictions among this set of countries. Japan and South Africa were in the “low” category on the GRI, while the other three countries were in the “moderate” range.

Social Hostilities Index (SHI)

In 2022, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Bangladesh had the highest levels of social hostilities among the 25 most populous countries. All of these countries had “very high” SHI scores except for Bangladesh (which had a “high” score). Meanwhile, China, Japan, the U.S., South Africa and Vietnam had the lowest SHI scores. South Africa and Vietnam were in the “moderate” SHI category, while the other three countries were in the “low” range.

In seven of these 25 countries, the GRI and SHI scores fell into the same exact categories. For example, Egypt had “very high” scores on *both* the GRI and SHI; Bangladesh had

¹¹ The population figures used for this report are estimates for 2020 that were published in the 2022 revision of the UN Population Division's [“World Population Prospects.”](#)

“high” levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities; and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had “moderate” scores on both indexes.

At the same time, a few of the 25 most populous countries had “high” GRI scores but “moderate” or “low” SHI scores. China, for example, had “very high” levels of government restrictions but “low” levels of social hostilities in 2022, as it did the previous year. Vietnam and Turkey had “very high” levels of government restrictions in 2022 (both up from “high” GRI scores in 2021) and “moderate” levels of social hostilities. And Russia had a “very high” GRI score but “moderate” levels of social hostilities in 2022. For more information about how GRI and SHI scores correspond for other countries, refer to this report’s [Overview](#).

How GRI scores changed from 2021 to 2022

Most populous countries had a small change (i.e., of less than 1.0 point) in their GRI scores in 2022. Only the Democratic Republic of the Congo had a modest increase (i.e., of 1.0 to 1.9 points) in its GRI score, which shifted the country from the “low” category to the “moderate” range of the GRI. None of the world’s 25 most populous countries had a large change (i.e., of 2.0 points or more) on the index.

However, even small changes on the index pushed some countries into different categories. For example, the GRI score for the Philippines rose from 2.2 to 2.9, moving it from the “low” to the “moderate” level. The small increase was partly due to reports that [the Philippine government sought to arrest more religious people perceived to be threats](#). For example, in August 2022, authorities issued an arrest warrant for 16 members of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines for sending funds to the armed wing of the country’s Communist Party. It was unclear whether the charges were legitimate, according to the U.S. State Department, which reported that the government engaged in a practice – known as “red-tagging” – of publicly associating critics of the government with insurgent, terrorist or separatist groups in an effort to discredit them.

How SHI scores changed from 2021 to 2022

In 2022, a majority of the world’s 25 most populous countries had small changes in their SHI scores. Five countries had modest changes, and one country – Iran – had a large increase in social hostilities.

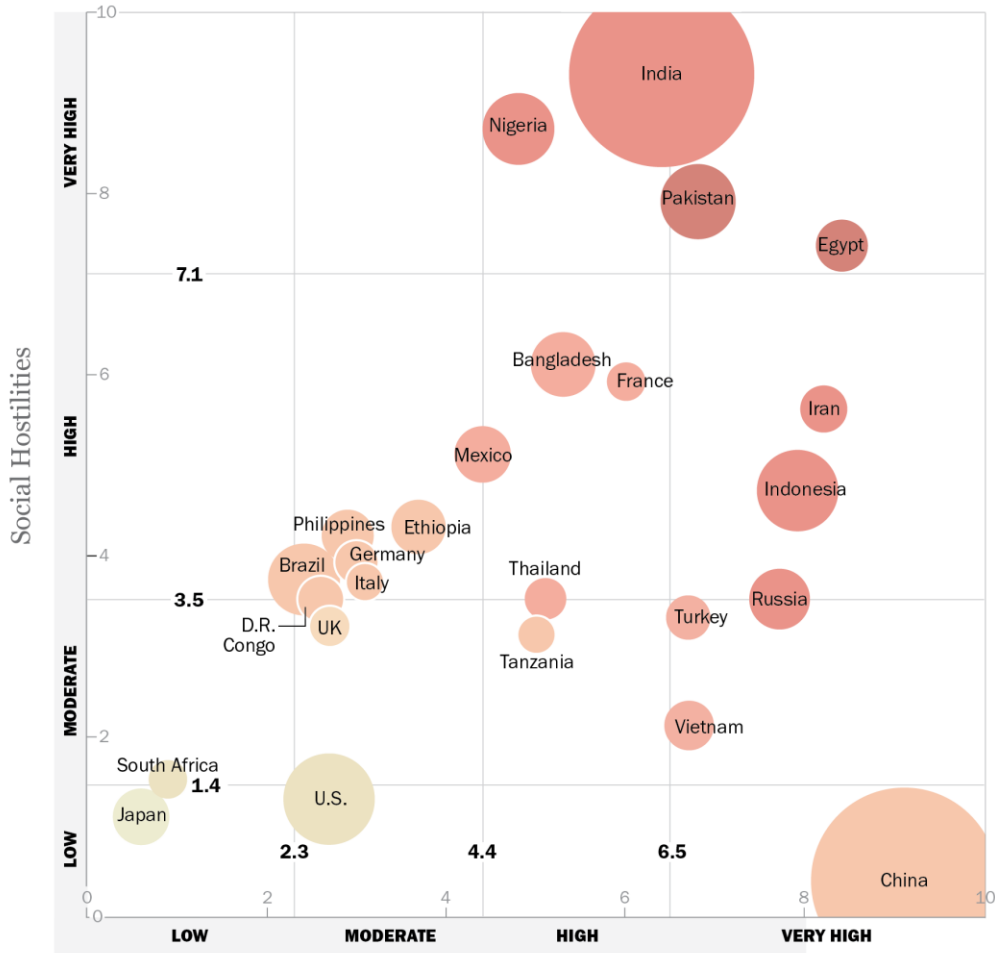
Italy had a small change in its SHI score, from 3.1 to 3.7, enough to shift it from the “moderate” to the “high” category. This was partly due to new reports of recruitment to religion-related terrorist groups within the country. In June, [a married couple in Italy was arrested for planning an attack “on behalf of” the militant group ISIS](#), according to the U.S. State Department. The couple was

reported to have been “radicalized to violence online” and was charged with “recruitment, association, and training for the purpose of terrorism.”

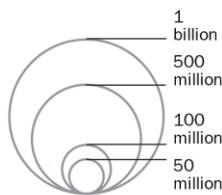
Iran’s SHI score went up from 2.8 to 5.6 in 2022, moving it from the “moderate” to the “high” SHI category. For more information on incidents that led to Iran’s SHI change and on other countries that had large changes (outside of the 25 most populous), go to [Chapter 1](#).

Restrictions on religion in the world's 25 most populous countries

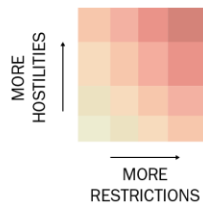
Among the world's 25 most populous countries, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Iran and Nigeria had the highest levels of overall restrictions on religion (when considering both government restrictions and social hostilities). Japan, South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the lowest levels. Scores on each 10-point index are for calendar year 2022.



Government Restrictions



Circles are sized proportionally to each country's population (2020).



Colors are based on each country's position on the chart.

Note: Countries in the upper right have the most restrictions and hostilities; those in the lower left have the least restrictions and hostilities. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details. Population figures are UN Population Division estimates for 2020.

"Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022"

Acknowledgments

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Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/religion.

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Methodology

This is the 15th time Pew Research Center has measured restrictions on religion around the globe.¹² This report, which includes data for the year ending Dec. 31, 2022, generally follows the same methodology as previous reports.

Pew Research Center uses two 10-point indexes – the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and the Social Hostilities Index (SHI) – to rate 198 countries and self-governing territories on their levels of restrictions.¹³ This report analyzes changes in restrictions on an annual basis, focusing on the 2022 calendar year.

The study categorizes the direction and degree of change in each country’s scores in two ways: numerically and by percentile. First, countries are grouped into categories depending on the size of the numeric change in their scores from year to year on the two indexes: changes of 2 points or more in either direction, changes of at least 1 point but less than 2 points, changes of less than 1 point, or no change at all (refer to the chart at right).

Changes in overall levels of restrictions are calculated for each country by comparing its scores on both indexes (the GRI and the SHI) from year to year. When a country’s scores on the GRI and the SHI changed in the same direction (both increased or both decreased), the greater amount of change determines the category. For instance, if the country’s GRI score increased by 0.8 and its SHI score increased by 1.5, the country was put into the overall “1.0-1.9 increase” category. When a country’s score increased on one index but decreased on the other, the difference between the amounts of change determines the grouping. For example, if the country’s GRI score increased by 2.0 and its SHI score decreased by 1.5, the country went into the overall “0.1-0.9 increase” category. When a country’s score on one index stayed the same, the amount of change on the other index was used to assign the category.

Index point change

Categories for assessing index score changes between years (points)

2.0 or more increase

1.0 to 1.9 increase

0.1 to 0.9 increase

No change

0.1 to 0.9 decrease

1.0 to 1.9 decrease

2.0 or more decrease

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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¹² Refer to the Methodology of Pew Research Center’s 2009 report [“Global Restrictions on Religion”](#) for a discussion of the conceptual basis for measuring restrictions on religion.

¹³ Some earlier reports provided scores for 197 countries and territories. This report includes South Sudan (which separated from Sudan in July 2011), bringing the total to 198 countries and territories.

Second, this report categorizes the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities in each country by percentiles. As the benchmark, it uses the results from the baseline year of the study (the year ending in mid-2007). Scores in the top 5% on each index in mid-2007 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.”

Refer to the table to the right for the index score thresholds as determined from the mid-2007 data. These thresholds are applied to all subsequent years of data.

Overview of procedures

The methodology used by the Center to assess and compare restrictions on religion was developed by Brian J. Grim, former Pew Research Center senior researcher and director of cross-national data, in consultation with other Center staff members, building on a methodology that Grim and Professor Roger Finke developed while at Penn State University’s Association of Religion Data Archives.¹⁴ The goal was to devise quantifiable, objective and transparent measures of the extent to which governments and societal groups impinge on the practice of religion. The findings were used to rate countries and self-governing territories on two indexes that are reproducible and can be periodically updated.

This research goes beyond previous efforts to assess restrictions on religion in several ways. First, the Center coded (categorized and counted) data from more than a dozen published cross-national sources, providing a high degree of confidence in the findings. Pew Research Center coders looked to the sources for only specific, well-documented facts, not opinions or commentary.

Level of restrictions on religion

	GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS INDEX	SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INDEX
Very High	6.6 to 10.0	7.2 to 10.0
High	4.5 to 6.5	3.6 to 7.1
Moderate	2.4 to 4.4	1.5 to 3.5
Low	0.0 to 2.3	0.0 to 1.4

Note: Based on distribution of index scores in the baseline year, ending mid-2007.

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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¹⁴ Refer to Grim, Brian J., and Roger Finke. 2006. “[International Religion Indexes: Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion.](#)” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*.

Second, Center staff used extensive data-verification checks that reflect generally accepted best practices for such studies, such as double-blind coding (coders do not see each other’s ratings), inter-rater reliability assessments (checking for consistency among coders) and carefully monitored protocols to reconcile discrepancies among coders.

Third, the coding took into account whether the perpetrators of religion-related violence were government or private actors. The coding also identified how widespread and intensive the restrictions were in each country.

Fourth, one of the most valuable contributions of the indexes and the questions used to construct them (read the [section on the coding instrument](#) later in the Methodology) is their ability to chart change over time.

Countries and territories

The 198 countries and territories covered by the study contain more than 99.5 of the world’s population. They include 192 of the 193 member states of the United Nations as of 2022, plus six territories – Kosovo, Hong Kong, Macao, the Palestinian territories, Taiwan and Western Sahara.¹⁵ Reporting on these territories does not imply any position on what their international political status should be, only recognition that the de facto situations in these territories require separate analysis.

Although the 198 countries and territories vary widely in size, population, wealth, ethnic diversity, religious makeup and form of government, the study does not attempt to adjust for such differences. Poor countries are not scored differently on the indexes than wealthy ones. Countries with diverse ethnic and religious populations are not “expected” to have more social hostilities than countries with more homogeneous populations. And democracies are not assessed more leniently or harshly than authoritarian regimes.

¹⁵ The one United Nations member state not included in the study 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 [“2015 Report on International Religious Freedom,”](#) for example, says that “religious freedom does not exist in North Korea despite the constitutional guarantee for the freedom of religion,” and there are no indications that this changed in 2022. But because North Korean society is effectively closed to outsiders and independent observers lack regular access to the country, the sources were unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that Pew Research Center categorized and counted (“coded,” in social science parlance) for this quantitative study. Therefore, the report does not include scores for North Korea.

Western Sahara coding

Western Sahara is considered a non-self-governing territory by the United Nations. Morocco administers part of the territory using the Moroccan Constitution and its laws, including laws affecting religious freedom.¹⁶ As a consequence, this report considers the policies and actions of the Moroccan government when assessing government restrictions on religion in Western Sahara. The government restrictions coding reflects Morocco's de facto control over parts of Western Sahara and is not intended as a Pew Research Center position on the status of the territory. When researchers evaluate social hostilities involving religion, Western Sahara and Morocco are coded separately.

Information sources

In the latest year of the study, Pew Research Center identified 19 widely available, frequently cited sources of information on government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion around the world. This study includes four sources that were not used in the baseline report on religious restrictions. (Read the section below for more details on the new information sources.)

The primary and secondary sources, which are listed below, include reports from U.S. government agencies, several independent, nongovernmental organizations, and a variety of European and UN bodies. Although most of these organizations are based in Western countries, many of them depend on local staff to collect information across the globe. As previously noted, the Center did not use the commentaries, opinions or normative judgments of the sources; the sources were combed only for factual information on specific policies and actions.

Primary and secondary sources for 2022

1. Country constitutions
2. U.S. State Department annual Reports on International Religious Freedom
3. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom annual reports
4. UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief reports

¹⁶ U.S. State Department. June 2020. "[Western Sahara](#)." International Religious Freedom Report for 2019. Refer also to United Nations. "[Non-Self-Governing Territories](#)." The United Nations and Decolonization.

5. Human Rights First reports in first and second years of coding; Freedom House reports in subsequent years of coding
6. Human Rights Watch topical reports
7. International Crisis Group country reports and database
8. United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office annual reports on human rights
9. Council of the European Union annual reports on human rights
10. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports
11. U.S. State Department annual Country Reports on Terrorism
12. Anti-Defamation League reports
13. U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices
14. Uppsala University's Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Armed Conflict Database
15. Human Rights Without Frontiers "Freedom of Religion or Belief" newsletters
16. Amnesty International Country Profiles
17. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Population Statistics Database
18. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's Global Internal Displacement Database
19. FBI Hate Crime Reports (for information on the situation in the United States)
20. American Civil Liberties Union (for information on the situation in the United States)

As noted, this study includes three sources that were not included in Pew Research Center's first report on global restrictions on religion: Freedom House reports, Uppsala University's Armed Conflict Database, and the "Freedom of Religion or Belief" newsletters from Human Rights Without Frontiers.

The Freedom House reports titled “Freedom in the World” have replaced Human Rights First reports, which have not been updated since mid-2008. Researchers also began using “Freedom on the Net” reports by Freedom House starting with 2019 data to code for restrictions on religious groups that occur through the internet. The Uppsala Armed Conflict Database provides information on the number of people affected by religion-related armed conflicts, supplementing other sources. The Human Rights Without Frontiers “Freedom of Religion or Belief” newsletters have replaced the Hudson Institute’s “Religious Freedom in the World” publication by Paul Marshall, which has not been updated since its release in 2008. Human Rights Without Frontiers is a nongovernmental organization based in Brussels that has affiliated offices throughout the world.

In 2021 and 2022, researchers consulted a comprehensive list of religious freedom cases in U.S. courts, which was compiled by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). However, the Center did not include the ACLU’s opinions or positions on these cases in the coding for the U.S.

A note on previous sources that were unavailable in 2022

Between 2013 and 2020, Pew Research Center used data from the Global Terrorism Database, maintained by the University of Maryland’s National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) to code and categorize information on religion-related terrorism. This data was not available at the time researchers collected information for the current report covering 2022 events. To analyze religion-related terrorism for the report on 2022 data, the Center used information from its usual annual sources, including the International Crisis Group’s CrisisWatch Database, the U.S. State Department’s annual “Country Reports on Terrorism,” along with its annual “International Religious Freedom” reports and “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.” Researchers also used annual reports from Freedom House, Amnesty International, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Human Rights Watch. (One source used in earlier reports, the U.S. government’s Worldwide Incident Tracking System, or WITS, is no longer available online.) Prior to 2013, the report relied only on the International Crisis Group reports, Uppsala University’s Armed Conflict Database and the U.S. State Department reports for information on religion-related terrorism.

In most years, Pew Research Center has included Amnesty International’s country profiles as one of the sources used for this study. These profiles were not updated for the year 2018, so they are absent as a source for the report covering 2018 events. Amnesty International reports were used for this report covering 2022 events, however.

The study also has used the U.S. Department of Justice’s “Religious Freedom in Focus” newsletters and reports to code information for the United States in most years. These reports were not available for 2021 and 2022. The U.S. State Department’s “Report on International Religious Freedom” was unavailable for Western Sahara in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

While some of the changes in religious restrictions noted in this study could reflect the use of more up-to-date and/or better informational sources, Pew Research Center staff monitor the impact of source information variability each year and have found no evidence of overall informational bias. (For additional discussion, read the “Potential biases” section in the 2014 report, “[Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High](#).”)

The coding instrument

As explained in more detail below, Pew Research Center staff developed a battery of questions similar to a survey questionnaire. Coders consulted the primary and secondary sources in order to answer the questions separately for each country. While the U.S. State Department’s annual “Reports on International Religious Freedom” generally contained the most comprehensive information, the other sources provided additional factual detail that was used to settle ambiguities, resolve contradictions and help in the proper scoring of each question.

The questionnaire, or coding instrument, generated a set of numerical measures on restrictions in each country. It also made it possible to see how government restrictions intersect with broader social tensions and incidents of violence or intimidation by private actors. The coding instrument with the list of questions used for this report is shown in the [summary of results](#).

The coding process required the coders to check all the sources for each country. Coders determined whether each source provided information critical to assigning a score; had supporting information but did not result in new facts; or had no available information on that particular country. Multiple sources of information were available for all countries and territories with populations greater than 1 million. Most of the countries and territories analyzed by the Center had multiple sources; only small (predominantly island) countries had a single source, namely the U.S. State Department reports.

Coding the U.S. presented a special problem since it is not included in the U.S. State Department’s annual “Reports on International Religious Freedom.” Accordingly, Pew Research Center coders also looked at reports from the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI on violations of religious freedom in the U.S., in addition to consulting all the primary and secondary sources, including

reports by the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, the International Crisis Group and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, many of which contain data on the U.S.

The coding process

Pew Research Center employed strict training and rigorous coding protocols to make its coding as objective and reproducible as possible. Coders worked directly under an experienced researcher's supervision, with additional direction and support provided by other Center researchers. The coders underwent an intensive training period that included a thorough overview of the research objectives, information sources and methodology.

Countries were double-blind coded by two coders (coders did not see each other's ratings), and the initial ratings were entered into an electronic document (coding instrument) including details on each incident. The coders began by filling out the coding instrument for each country using the information source that had the most comprehensive information. The protocol for each coder was to answer every question on which information was available in the initial source. Once a coder had completed that process, they then turned to the other sources. As new information was found, this was also coded and the source duly noted. Whenever ambiguities or contradictions arose, the source providing the most detailed, clearly documented evidence was used.

After two coders had separately completed the coding instrument for a particular country, their scores were compared by a research analyst. Areas of discrepancy were discussed at length with the coders and were reconciled in order to arrive at a single score on each question for each country. The data for each country was then combined into a master file, and the answers and substantiating evidence were entered into a database.

After data collection for all countries was completed, Pew Research Center coders and researchers compared the scores from calendar year 2022 with those from the previous year, ending Dec. 31, 2021. They identified scores that had changed and analyzed the substantiating evidence for each year to make sure the change was substantive and not the result of coder error. Throughout this process, the coding instrument itself was continually monitored for possible defects. The questions were designed to be precise, comprehensive and objective so that, based on the same data and definitions, the coding could be reliably reproduced by others with the same results. At the same time, the Center has attempted to minimize changes to the coding instrument as much as possible to ensure all changes between years are the result of actual changes in restrictions and hostilities, not changes in methodology.

Pew Research Center staff generally found few cases in which one source contradicted another. When contradictions did arise – such as when sources provided differing estimates of the number of people displaced due to religion-related violence – the source that cited the most specific documentation was used. The coders were instructed to disregard broad, unsubstantiated generalizations regarding abuses and to focus on reports that contained clear, precise documentation and factual details, such as names, dates and places where incidents occurred.

Pew Research Center staff compared coders' scores for all questions for each of the 198 countries and territories included in the study, computing the degree to which the scores matched. The inter-rater reliability score across all variables was 0.73. Scores near or above 0.7 are generally considered good.

The data verification procedures went beyond the inter-rater reliability statistics. They also involved comparing the answers on the main measures for each country with other closely related questions in the dataset. This provided a practical way to test the internal reliability of the data.

In previous years, Pew Research Center staff also checked the reliability of the coded data by comparing it with similar, though more limited, religious restrictions datasets. In particular, published government and social regulation of religion index scores are available from the Association of Religion Data Archives (for three years of data) and the Hudson Institute (for one year of data), which makes them ideal measures for cross-validation. The review process found very few significant discrepancies in the coded data; changes were made only if warranted by a further review of the primary and secondary sources.

Restriction of religion indexes

The Government Restrictions Index (GRI) is based on 20 indicators of ways that national and local governments restrict religion, including through coercion and force. The Social Hostilities Index (SHI) is based on 13 indicators of ways in which private individuals and social groups infringe upon religious beliefs and practices, including religiously biased crimes, mob violence and efforts to stop particular religious groups from growing or operating. The study also counted the number and types of documented incidents of religion-related violence, including terrorism and armed conflict.

Government Restrictions Index

Coding multiple indicators makes it possible to construct a Government Restrictions Index of sufficient gradation to allow for meaningful cross-national comparisons. An additional advantage

of using multiple indicators is that it helps mitigate the effects of measurement error in any one variable, providing greater confidence in the overall measure.

Pew Research Center coded 20 indicators of government restrictions on religion (refer to the [summary of results](#)). These 20 items were added together to create the GRI. In two cases, these items represent an aggregation of several closely related questions: Measures of five types of physical abuses are combined into a single variable (GRI Q.19), and seven questions measuring aspects of government favoritism are combined into an overall favoritism scale (GRI Q.20 is a summary variable showing whether a country received the maximum score on one or more of the seven questions).

The GRI is a fine-grained measure created by adding the 20 items on a scale of 0.0 to 10.0, with 0.0 indicating very low levels of government restrictions on religion and 10 indicating very high levels of restrictions. The 20 questions that form the GRI are coded in a standard scale from 0.0 to 1.0 point, while gradations among the answers allowed for partial points to be given for lesser degrees of the particular government restriction being measured. The overall value of the index was calculated and proportionally adjusted – so that it had a maximum value of 10.0 and a possible range of 0.0 to 10.0 – by dividing the sum of the variables by two.

A test of whether the 20 items were statistically reliable as a single index produced a scale reliability coefficient of 0.90 for calendar year 2022. Since coefficients of 0.7 or higher are generally considered acceptable, it was statistically appropriate to combine these 20 items into a single index.

Social Hostilities Index

In addition to government restrictions, violence and intimidation in societies also can limit religious beliefs and practices. Accordingly, Pew Research Center staff tracked more than a dozen indicators of social impediments on religion. Once again, coding multiple indicators made it possible to construct an index that shows gradations of severity or intensity and allows for comparisons among countries. The [summary of results](#) contains the 13 items used by Center staff to create the Social Hostilities Index.

The SHI was constructed by adding together the 13 indicators based on a scale of 0.0 to 10.0, with 0.0 indicating very low impediments to religious beliefs and practices, and 10.0 indicating very high impediments. The various questions that form the index are coded in a standard scale from 0.0 to 1.0 point, while gradations among the answers allow for partial points to be given for lesser

degrees of the particular hostilities being measured. The indicators were added together and set to have a possible range of 0.0 to 10.0 by dividing the sum of the variables by 1.3.

As with the Government Restrictions Index, various types of violence and intimidation were combined. A test of whether these 13 items were statistically reliable as a single index produced a scale reliability coefficient of 0.87. Since coefficients of 0.7 or higher are generally considered acceptable, it was statistically appropriate to combine these items into a single index.

How examples are coded

Examples of each type of government restriction or social hostility are generally counted in a single measure on the GRI or SHI. For instance, a restriction on proselytizing (sharing one's faith with the intent of persuading another to join the faith) is not also counted as a restriction on conversion (an individual changing their religion). In some situations, however, an individual restriction or hostility may be part of a broader set of restrictions or hostilities. For instance, a mob attack by members of one religious group on an individual of another religion may be an isolated event, counted only under question SHI Q.2: "Was there mob violence related to religion?" However, if such an attack triggers repeated attacks between religious groups, it also might be an indication of sectarian or communal violence, which by definition involves two or more religious groups facing off in repeated clashes. In such a case, the mob attack also would be counted under question SHI Q.3: "Were there acts of sectarian or communal violence between religious groups?" (Refer to the [summary of results](#).)

For a number of questions on the Social Hostilities Index (SHI. Q.6, Q.7, Q.8, Q.9, Q.10, Q.11, Q.12 and Q.13), coders look at incidents in the U.S. State Department's "International Religious Freedom" reports from the previous two calendar years to capture ongoing social hostilities in a country.

Social harassment and intimidation coding

Beginning with data for 2017, researchers updated the way social harassment and intimidation of religion is calculated. There are six components that encompass question SHI Q.1.a: "Were there crimes, malicious acts or violence motivated by religious hatred or bias?" The six components include harassment/intimidation, property damage, detentions/abductions, displacement from homes, physical assaults and deaths (refer to the [summary of results](#)). For the "harassment/intimidation" measure, researchers made an update to count "limited" harassment as 0.5 points and "widespread" harassment as 1.0 point for data covering 2017 onward. "Limited" means infrequent or isolated and indicates that the harassment seems unlikely to continue. "Widespread" does not necessarily mean the whole country, but it could be present in certain

regions, have potential of spreading to other regions, affect several groups, indicate a substantial uptick in the number of cases of abuse, or indicate a possible campaign against a certain religion(s) or practice(s).

The other five components of SHI.Q.1.a are coded as “Yes” (1.0 point) or “No” (0.0 points) based on whether incidents in each subcategory occurred. Compared with the previous method, this update to coding “limited” and “widespread” intimidation and harassment resulted in a change of no more than 0.1 points to the SHI score of 53 countries in 2017.

Effects of consolidating to a new database

For the first few years of this study, information on the number, types and locations of incidents of government force and social violence toward religious groups, as well as deference to religious authorities in matters of law, were coded at the province level. (Refer to the [example of data coding](#) on pages 45-48 of the December 2009 baseline report.) Each year, the province numbers were summed and put into separate country-level files. Following the publication of the August 2011 report, Pew Research Center staff created a database that integrated all province- and country-level data on religious restrictions. During this process, Center staff reviewed any discrepancies between province files and the sums that had been transferred to the country files and made appropriate corrections. The adjustments made were relatively minor and had small effects on index scores for countries, on average less than 0.005 on the 10-point indexes. Consolidating the data into a database also entailed a review of the data on harassment of religious groups. In particular, instances of harassment from the year ending in mid-2007 were stored as open-ended questions, and in a few cases, they were recoded to match the categories used in subsequent years.

Beginning with data covering 2012, Pew Research Center stopped collecting data at the province level; all data was coded at the country level.

Changing time period of analysis

This is the 12th time Pew Research Center has analyzed restrictions on religion in a calendar year. Previous reports analyzed 12-month periods from July 1 to June 30 (e.g., July 1, 2009-June 30, 2010). The shift to calendar years was made in part because most of the primary and secondary sources used in this study are based on calendar years.

Because of the shift in time frame, previous studies did not report directly on incidents that occurred during the period from July 1 to Dec. 31, 2010. While this misses some incidents that occurred during the second half of 2010, events that had an ongoing impact – such as a change to

a country's constitution or the outbreak of a religion-related war – were captured by the coding. Researchers for the study carefully reviewed the situation in each country and territory during this six-month period and ensured that restrictions with an ongoing impact were not overlooked.

Religion-related terrorism and armed conflict

Terrorism and war can have huge direct and indirect effects on religious groups, including destroying religious sites, displacing whole communities and inflaming sectarian passions. Accordingly, Pew Research Center tallied the number, location and consequences of religion-related terrorism and armed conflict around the world, as reported in the same primary and secondary sources used to document other forms of intimidation and violence. However, war and terrorism are sufficiently complex that it is not always possible to determine the degree to which they are religiously motivated or state sponsored. Out of an abundance of caution, this study does not include them in the Government Restrictions Index. They are factored instead into the Social Hostilities Index, which includes one question specifically about religion-related terrorism and one question specifically about religion-related war or armed conflict. In addition, other measures in both indexes are likely to pick up spillover effects of war and terrorism on the level of religious tensions in society. For example, hate crimes, mob violence and sectarian fighting that occur in the aftermath of a terrorist attack or in the context of a religion-related war would be counted in the Social Hostilities Index, and laws or policies that clearly discriminate against a particular religious group would be registered on the Government Restrictions Index.

For the purposes of this study, the term “religion-related terrorism” is defined as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatants by subnational groups or clandestine agents that have some identifiable religious ideology or religious motivation. It also includes acts carried out by groups that have a nonreligious identity but affect religious personnel, such as clergy. Readers should note that it is the political character and motivation of the groups, not the type of violence, that is at issue here. For instance, a bombing would not be classified as religion-related terrorism if there was no clearly discernible religious ideology or bias behind it, unless it was directed at religious personnel. For the 2013-2020 coding years, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) was used to find information on religion-related terrorism.

During the 2013-2020 period, researchers used the GTD's classification of terrorist incidents, which counted attacks on military targets as terrorism. For 2021 events, researchers made the decision *not* to count incidents involving police or military targets since they would not qualify as noncombatant targets.

“Religion-related war or armed conflict” is defined as armed conflict (a conflict that involves sustained casualties over time or more than 1,000 battle deaths) in which religious rhetoric is commonly used to justify the use of force, or in which one or more of the combatants primarily identifies itself or the opposing side by religion.

Changes to Somalia’s coding

Starting with data covering 2013, researchers changed the way they coded government restrictions in Somalia. In previous years of the study, researchers had coded actions by the al-Shabab rebel group as government restrictions, largely because the group effectively controlled large swathes of Somali territory. The extent of al-Shabab control over Somali territory decreased in calendar year 2013, so researchers did not code their actions as government restrictions but rather as social hostilities. Researchers continued to follow this policy when coding data for 2021.

Crimea and other disputed territories coding

Starting with data covering 2015, researchers coded incidents occurring in Crimea as part of Russia’s GRI and SHI scores. This is to reflect Russia’s de facto control over Crimea and is not intended as a Pew Research Center position on the de jure status of the territory, which the United Nations recognizes as part of Ukraine.¹⁷

For events in 2022, researchers included restrictions occurring in regions invaded by Russian forces during the year under Russia’s GRI score instead of Ukraine’s GRI score. When reviewing events that occurred in 2022, researchers counted restrictions in regions controlled by Russian armed forces during that year as contributing to Russia’s GRI score instead of Ukraine’s GRI score. The regions include Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, Mykolayiv and Zaporizhzhya Oblasts.¹⁸ This reflects Russia’s de facto control over these regions and is not intended as a Pew Research Center position on the de jure status of these regions, which the United Nations recognizes as part of Ukraine. Social hostilities in these regions were coded under Ukraine’s SHI for 2022.

Changes to Yemen’s coding

Starting with data covering 2016, researchers changed the way they coded social hostilities in Yemen. In previous years of the study, researchers had coded actions by Houthi rebels as social hostilities. In 2016, however, Houthis formed their own government and had control of territory that is home to more than half of Yemen’s population.¹⁹ For this reason, researchers coded actions

¹⁷ United Nations. March 2014. “[General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region.](#)”

¹⁸ U.S. State Department. May 2023. “[Ukraine: Russia-Occupied Territories of Ukraine.](#)” 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom.

¹⁹ Nov. 28, 2016. “[Yemen: Houthi rebels form new government.](#)” Al Jazeera.

by Houthis in 2016 as government restrictions rather than social hostilities and continued to do so in 2021.

Displacement coding

Starting with data covering 2016, researchers changed the way they coded displacement caused by religion-related conflict or terrorism. Previously, researchers would record displacement figures that were reported in any sources. During the coding period covering 2015, researchers continued to code displacement figures in this way but also recorded displacement figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in order to compare the results. Researchers found that the figures from the UNHCR and IDMC more closely matched UN estimates for new displacements in the calendar year than did the previous method of capturing displacements, which tended to overestimate the number of new displacements in a coding year because the figures often included the *total* number of displaced people from a country and not necessarily the *newly* displaced. Therefore, beginning with the data covering 2016, researchers exclusively used UNHCR and IDMC figures to more conservatively estimate the number of new displacements in the coding year. Displacement was only coded in countries with active religion-related conflict or terrorism in order to avoid including displacements from other types of conflicts or terrorism.

Country constitution audit

Researchers conducted an audit of country constitutions for coding covering the years 2007-2014. While the vast majority of country constitutions were correctly coded as to whether they included religious freedom provisions, there were a few countries where the coding was amended. These included Mexico, Costa Rica, Fiji, Iran, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Cameroon, Kenya and Mozambique. These amendments resulted in minimal changes in these countries' overall GRI scores and did not alter overall trends represented in previous reports. Two countries – Mexico and Costa Rica – had score changes that pushed them from one category to another in 2014. Mexico's 2014 GRI score decreased from "high" to "moderate," while Costa Rica's 2014 GRI score increased from "low" to "moderate."

Potential biases

As noted earlier, the primary and secondary sources indicate that the North Korean government is among the most repressive in the world, including toward religion. But because independent observers lack regular access to North Korea, the sources are unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that forms the basis of this report. Therefore, North Korea is not included on either index.

This raises two important issues concerning potential information bias in the sources. The first is whether other countries that limit outsiders' access and that may seek to obscure or distort their record on religious restrictions were adequately covered by the sources. Countries with relatively limited access have multiple primary and secondary sources of information that Pew Research Center used for its coding.

Each is also covered by other secondary quantitative datasets on religious restrictions that have used a similar coding scheme, including earlier years of coded U.S. State Department report data produced by Brian J. Grim at Penn State University's Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) project (four datasets); independent coding by experts at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Liberty using indexes also available from ARDA (one dataset); and content analysis of country constitutions conducted by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty (one dataset). Pew Research Center staff used these for cross-validation. Thus, contrary to what one might expect, even most countries that limit access to information tend to receive fairly extensive coverage by groups that monitor religious restrictions.

The second key question – the flipside of the first – is whether countries that provide freer access to information receive worse scores simply because more information is available on them. As described more fully in the [Methodology in the baseline report](#), Pew Research Center staff compared the length of U.S. State Department reports on freer-access countries with those of less-free-access countries. The comparison found that the median number of words was approximately three times as large for the limited-access countries as for the open-access countries. This suggests that problems in freer-access countries are generally not overreported in the U.S. State Department's reports.

Only when it comes to religion-related violence and intimidation in society do the sources report more problems in the freer-access countries than in the limited-access ones. However, the Social Hostilities Index includes several measures – such as SHI Q.8 (“Did religious groups themselves attempt to prevent other religious groups from being able to operate?”) and SHI Q.11 (“Were women harassed for violating religious dress codes?”) – that are less susceptible to such reporting bias because they capture general social trends or attitudes as well as specific incidents. With these limitations in mind, it appears that the coded information on social hostilities is a fair gauge of the situation in the vast majority of countries and a valuable complement to the information on government restrictions.

Data on social impediments to religious practice can more confidently be used to make comparisons among countries with sufficient openness, which includes more than nine-in-ten countries covered in the coding.

An analysis by Grim and Richard Wike, Pew Research Center’s director of global attitudes research, tested the reliability of the U.S. State Department’s reports on social impediments to religious practice by comparing public opinion data with data coded from the reports in previous years by Grim and experts at Penn State University. They concluded that “the understanding of social religious intolerance embodied in the U.S. State Department’s reports is comparable with the results of population surveys and individual expert opinion.”²⁰

Coding harassment of specific religious groups

As in previous reports, this study provides a summary of the number of countries where specific religious groups faced government or social harassment. This is essentially a cross-tabulation of GRI.Q.11 (“Was there harassment or intimidation of religious groups by any level of government?”) and the first type of religious hatred or bias measured in SHI.Q.1.a (“Did individuals face harassment or intimidation motivated by religious hatred or bias?”). For the purposes of this study, the definition of harassment includes any mention in the primary and secondary sources of an offense against an individual or group based on religious identity. Such offenses may range from physical attacks and direct coercion to more subtle forms of discrimination. But prejudicial opinions or attitudes, in and of themselves, do not constitute harassment unless they are acted upon in a palpable way.

As noted above, this study provides data on the number of countries in which different religious groups are harassed or intimidated. But the study does *not* assess either the severity or the frequency of the harassment in each country. Therefore, the results should not be interpreted as gauging which religious group faces the most harassment or persecution around the world.

New analysis on the relationship between GRI and SHI, 2018-2022

For the latest report, researchers analyzed how GRI scores compare with SHI scores, and vice versa – essentially, whether a country’s scores on one index are a good predictor of its scores on the other index.

As a starting point, we used average scores on the GRI and SHI for the five most recent years of data (from 2018 through 2022) and graphed all 198 countries’ average scores on a scatterplot chart, as shown in the accompanying graph. The reason we chose to analyze five-year averages of the index scores was that we wanted a more stable set of scores than an analysis of any single

²⁰ Refer to Grim, Brian J., and Richard Wike. 2010. “[Cross-Validating Measures of Global Religious Intolerance: Comparing Coded State Department Reports with Survey Data and Expert Opinion.](#)” Politics and Religion.

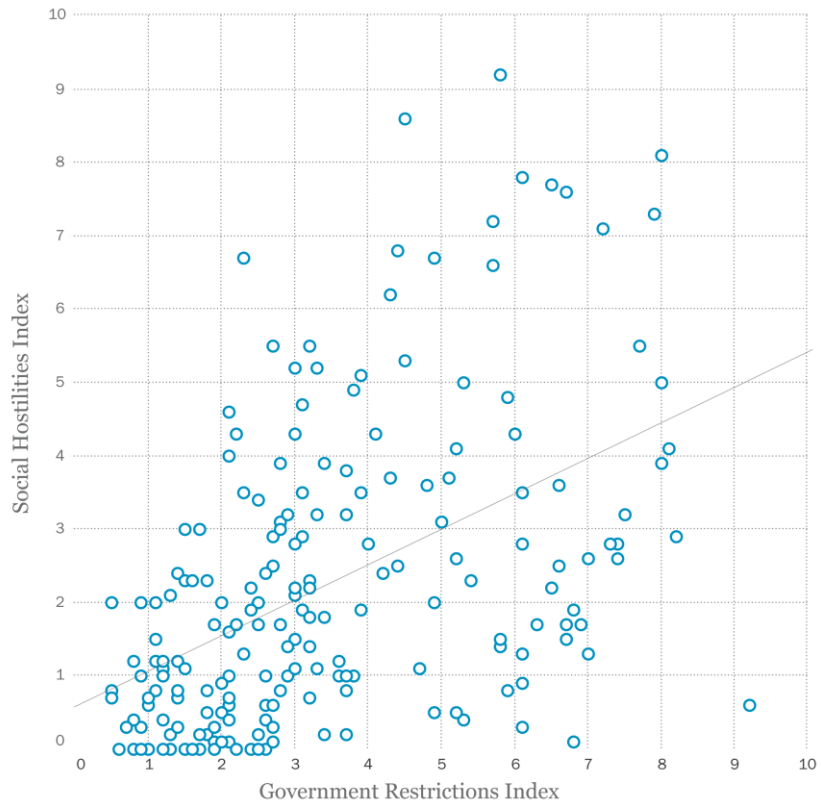
year would allow, because multiyear analyses reduce the impact of year-to-year fluctuations that often occur in the index scores of individual countries.

We then looked to see if the averaged national GRI scores from these years effectively served as a predictor of averaged national SHI scores, and vice versa. This involved conducting a regression analysis and plotting the results – an upward sloped straight line – on the accompanying scatterplot chart. The upward slope of the line shows that lower scores on one index are, in fact, generally associated with lower scores on the other index, and that higher scores on one index are generally associated with higher scores on the other.

For example, most countries appear to be clustered in or around the lower left corner, showing that they are low or moderate on both indexes. But as you move away from this corner, the remaining countries appearing elsewhere are fairly dispersed. In our analysis, we discuss the countries clustered in the lower left corner (having relatively low scores on both indexes), the countries that are in the upper right corner (having relatively high scores on both indexes), and the countries in the other two quadrants (high on one index and low on the other).

GRI and SHI mean scores for 198 countries and territories, 2018-2022

Average scores on the Government Restrictions Index (GRI) and Social Hostilities Index for 198 countries and territories, 2018-2022



Note: The p-value of this regression analysis was <0.0001.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. Refer to the Methodology for details.

“Government Restrictions on Religion Stayed at Peak Levels Globally in 2022”

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