

Faith Digest: Restrictions on religious freedom increase

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Restrictions on religious freedom tighten. Religious believers throughout the world face a rising tide of restrictions, according to a study conducted by the [Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life](#). In the one-year period ending in mid-2010, 75 percent of the world's population lived in a nation with high or very high restrictions on religious beliefs or practices. Pew tracked religious freedoms denied by government and cultural authorities. A previous Pew study on the subject found 70 percent of the world lived under religious restrictions. The study covered 197 countries and relied on 19 sources of information, including the U.S. State Department's annual reports on religious freedom.

Scientology not a religion, most in U.S. believe. Most Americans do not believe Scientology is a real religion, according to a recent poll by *60 Minutes* and *Vanity Fair*. The survey, conducted by [CBS News](#), found 70 percent of Americans say Scientology is not a true religion; 13 percent believe it is; and 18 percent either don't know or don't care. Out of more than 1,000 people polled, Christian Americans were even more likely to question Scientology's status as a religion—79 percent of evangelicals, 74 percent of Protestants and 72 percent of Catholics surveyed responded they did not think Scientology is a religion. L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction author, established Scientology in 1952.

Poverty rate stagnant. According to newly released U.S. Census data, median household income declined in 2011, and the poverty rate remained mostly unchanged from 2010, at 15 percent. The federal government defines poverty as annual income of \$23,021 for a family of four. Jim Wallis, president and CEO of [Sojourners](#), a progressive Christian

group based in Washington, D.C., said the new data indicate the Circle of Protection around the poor he and other Christian leaders launched last year remains necessary. Advocates asked both presidential candidates to state on the record how they plan to tackle poverty.

Gameday godliness? No problem. Most Americans don't mind professional athletes expressing their faith on and off the field, according to a new study. A poll conducted by [Grey Matter Research and Consulting](#) shows 49 percent of Americans see athletes' public expressions of faith favorably, 32 percent don't care, and 19 percent take a more negative view. More than 1,000 American adults were polled about public displays of religion among professional athletes. Americans are most supportive of opposing teams praying together after games, with 55 percent of all Americans viewing it positively. But responses to statements such as "God really gave me strength out there" or "I kept believing, and God let me hit that home run," are viewed negatively by 26 percent of respondents. While regular churchgoers are more likely to support religious expression, between 30 percent and 41 percent of that same group had either negative or neutral feelings toward open religious expression on the field or on the court, depending on the action.

—Compiled from Religion News Service