



THE PEW
FORUM
ON RELIGION
& PUBLIC LIFE



**Project for
Excellence in
Journalism**

FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 24, 2011

PEJ / Pew Forum Joint Release

Religion in the News: Islam Was No. 1 Topic in 2010

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
OR INTERVIEW REQUESTS:**

Contact the Communications Department
(202) 419-4562

Luis Lugo, Director,
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Tom Rosenstiel, Director,
Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism

Alan Cooperman, Associate Director,
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

Jesse Holcomb, Research Associate,
Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036

www.pewforum.org | www.journalism.org

Religion in the News: 2010

Events and controversies related to Islam dominated U.S. press coverage of religion in 2010, bumping the Catholic Church from the top spot, according to a new study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Much of the coverage focused on the plan to build a mosque and Islamic center near ground zero in New York City, a Florida pastor's threat to organize a public burning of the Koran and commemorations of the anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Stories related to these three events collectively accounted for more than 40% of all religion-related coverage studied in mainstream U.S. media (broadcast and cable television, newspapers, radio and major news websites).

Mainstream media devoted more attention to religion in 2010 than in any year since the Pew Research Center began measuring coverage of religion and other subjects in 2007. The amount of space or time media devoted to religion doubled between 2009 and 2010, going from about 1% of total coverage to 2%. And for the first time since tracking began in 2007, neither the Catholic Church nor religion's role in American politics were the No. 1 topic of religion coverage in major news outlets.

These are some of the findings of a new study that examined news stories from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2010.

Among other key findings:

- Although the volume of religion coverage in the mainstream media increased more than two-fold from a year earlier, it was still small compared with coverage of some other topics, especially elections and politics.
- The Tea Party replaced the religious right as the most-talked-about element of the Republican Party's grassroots support in coverage of the 2010 midterm elections. Religious individuals, groups or institutions were mentioned in only about 1% of all mainstream media coverage of the elections. By contrast, the Tea Party movement was mentioned in nearly one-in-six midterm election stories (14.1%).

- In 2010, religion appeared as a major topic more often in the blogosphere than it did in traditional media. Religion was among the most-discussed topics on blogs in 12 of the 48 weeks studied by PEJ and the Pew Forum. In three of those weeks, the plan to build a mosque and Islamic center near ground zero was among the top subjects.
- Analysis of social media, produced with technology from Crimson Hexagon, indicates that people who were active on social media sites were deeply divided about the proposed New York City mosque. About a quarter of the comments about the mosque and Islamic center posted on blogs, Twitter and online forums were neutral in character; the remaining comments were roughly evenly divided between those ardently for and those ardently against construction of the proposed mosque and Islamic center, now known as Park51, for its location at 51 Park Place in Lower Manhattan.

The study of traditional news sources analyzed 50,508 stories from newspaper front pages, home pages of major news websites, the first half hour of network and cable television news programs and the first half hour of radio news and talk shows. (For details, see the full [methodology](#).) The new media content was analyzed separately by aggregating and coding a sample of blogs, tweets and other sources monitored by Technorati and Icerocket, which track millions of blogs and social media entries. (For details, see the full New Media Index [methodology](#).) In addition, PEJ and the Pew Forum used software provided by Crimson Hexagon to analyze a broader range of social media conversations about the New York City mosque controversy during the period when the debate was most intense, Aug. 16-Sept. 13, 2010. That analysis monitored the tone of the conversations on blogs, Twitter and public forums. (For details, see Crimson Hexagon's [website](#).)

Religion Coverage Overall in 2010

There was more coverage of religion in the mainstream press in 2010 than in any year since PEJ and the Pew Forum began measuring coverage of religion and other subjects in 2007.

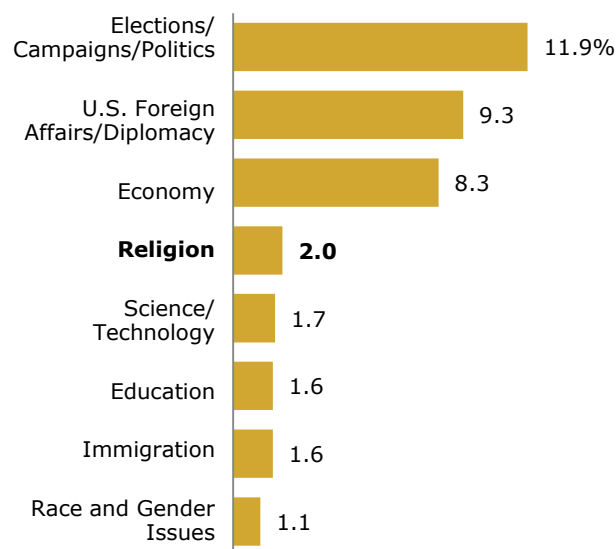
Of the news content analyzed in 2010, religion-related issues and events accounted for 2.0% of the newshole – the total amount of space or time available for news content in newspapers, on television or in other media. That is about double the amount of religion coverage generated in each previous year of tracking (0.8% in 2009, 1.0% in 2008 and 1.1% in 2007).¹

PEJ monitored 130 different topics and sub-topics in the news in 2010. As usual, politics and elections attracted more coverage than any other category of news, accounting for 11.9% of the overall newshole in 2010. U.S. foreign affairs (9.3%) and the economy (8.3%) also occupied a large share of the media's attention last year.

However, religion placed higher than a number of other important topics in the news. It slightly outpaced coverage of science and technology, which accounted for 1.7% of the overall newshole; education, which accounted for 1.6% of the newshole; and immigration, also at 1.6%. Several other topics, such as race and gender issues, trailed further behind. This was the first year since PEJ and the Pew Forum began measuring various categories of news coverage in 2007 that religion surpassed both education and science/technology in overall coverage.

Selected Topics in the U.S. Media, 2010

Percent of mainstream media coverage devoted to each subject



PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AND PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

¹ See PEJ's [The Year in the News 2010](#) report for more information on overall news coverage. In that study, topics are grouped somewhat differently and religion accounts for 1% of overall news coverage instead of 2%, as shown here. That is because coverage of foreign religion news and events was counted in a different category.

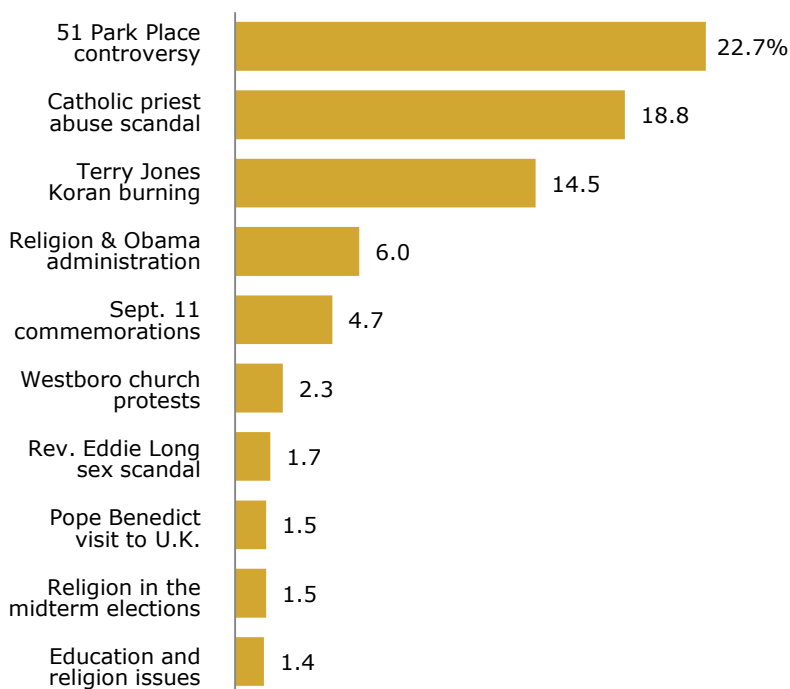
While the amount of attention devoted to religion increased, the geographic focus of the coverage, as in past years, was largely domestic. Of all the space and time allocated to religion last year in the mainstream U.S. media, 70.3% was devoted to stories that took place in the U.S. About a fifth of the religion coverage (18.9%) focused on international events. And 10.8% dealt with subjects that spanned domestic and foreign locales.

Top Religion Stories of the Year

Four of the top five religion stories of 2010 involved controversies related to Islam. The plan to build an Islamic center and mosque near ground zero was the No. 1 religion story in the mainstream media in 2010, accounting for nearly a quarter of the religion coverage (22.7%). A Florida pastor's plan to host a Koran burning event on Sept. 11 was also a major newsmaker, the No. 3 religion story overall, filling 14.5% of the religion newshole. Many stories on the religious dimension of 9/11 commemorations also focused on Islam. In addition, much of the coverage of the administration of President Barack Obama and religion issues (the fourth biggest religion story) dealt with public perceptions of the president's faith and the belief among a large segment of the public that Obama is a Muslim.

Top Religion Stories in 2010

Percent of mainstream religion coverage devoted to each subject



PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
AND PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

The only one of the five biggest religion stories of the year that did not involve Islam, at least in part, was coverage of the Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal, including controversy over Pope

Benedict XVI's role. This ranked as the second biggest religion story of the year, filling nearly one-fifth of the religion newshole (18.8%). But among the top religion stories, Catholicism and related issues received less than half as much attention as the media paid to Islam in 2010. In 2009, by contrast, three of the five top religion stories involved Pope Benedict, accounting for 9.6% of all religion news that year, far more than any other single religious tradition or leader. And in 2008, Pope Benedict's visit to the U.S. was the No. 1 story of the year, accounting for more than a third of all mainstream religion coverage.

Islam in the News

The plan to build an Islamic center and mosque in Lower Manhattan, several blocks from the site of the World Trade Center attack, became the biggest single religion story of 2010, accounting for nearly a quarter of all religion-related coverage in the mainstream media (22.7%). Although early news reports about the plan had surfaced in December 2009, the controversy erupted in the summer of 2010, during what is typically a slow point in the news cycle.

The mosque's chief proponent, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, and other organizers presented their plans to an advisory board representing the Lower Manhattan neighborhood on May 5, 2010, setting off a flurry of news reports. Commentators and bloggers – many, but not all, political conservatives – criticized the plan to build the mosque because of its proximity to the former site of the World Trade Center. On Aug. 3, the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission approved construction of the mosque, an action that precipitated even more commentary and news reports.

On ideologically driven radio and television talk shows, the coverage was intense regardless of political orientation. Conservatives generally decried the proposal as an affront to the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, while many liberal commentators portrayed the reaction as xenophobic and contrary to American ideals of religious freedom.

Sean Hannity, a conservative host of a Fox News program, devoted most of his Aug. 16 program to the topic, which he referred to as the “August surprise.” Hannity played a clip of Obama telling a Ramadan gathering of Muslims at the White House on Aug. 13 that he supported the right of the developers to build the Islamic center. Hannity also showed a clip of the president backtracking a day later by saying he was not endorsing “the wisdom” of the project.

Hannity put the mosque project in a political context. “By commenting on this controversial topic,” Hannity said, “President Obama has, perhaps unintentionally, made this a pivotal midterm issue, and vulnerable Democrats up for re-election this November are doing their best to distance themselves from the White House.”

That same night, across the television dial and the political divide, liberal host Keith Olbermann also focused on the mosque controversy on MSNBC. He called the reaction to the proposed mosque “fake hysteria with the real danger of intolerance.” He noted that the architectural plans called for a YMCA-like center with a swimming pool, and he reminded viewers that the proposed building would be blocks away from ground zero.

Like Hannity, Olbermann played clips of political leaders speaking out against the center, but he added his own commentary on each. “The president’s shrillest political opponents, having gotten it wrong on principle and fact, now say he is out of touch,” Olbermann said.

As the public learned more about the project, it became a flashpoint in a national debate about tolerance of Muslims and Islam, and about freedom of religion more broadly. During the week of Aug. 16-22, the controversy was the No. 1 story in all of the mainstream media collectively, filling 15% of the total newshole. The coverage faded slightly the following week, but the mosque controversy was still among the top stories, at No. 4, filling 6% of the newshole. During the week of Aug. 30-Sept. 5, the mosque controversy briefly disappeared from the top news stories. But as the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks approached, the debate over the mosque and Islamic center returned to the headlines, reaching the No. 4 spot and filling 4% of the total newshole during the week of Sept. 6-12.

Even the terms used to discuss the controversy became fodder for media debate. Was it fair to call the center a mosque? Was it “close to ground zero,” “in Lower Manhattan” or “in New York City”? And what about the decision to change the name of the building from Cordoba House to Park51? The Associated Press drew fire from political conservatives for issuing guidelines to its reporters suggesting that they “continue to avoid the phrase ‘ground zero mosque’ or ‘mosque at ground zero’” and instead “say it’s ‘near’ ground zero, or ‘two blocks away.’”

The national attention focused on the New York mosque controversy may have helped generate interest in another story related to Islam – Florida pastor Terry Jones’ plan to burn a Koran to mark the anniversary of Sept. 11.

Jones, the leader of Dove World Outreach Center, a small church in Gainesville, Fla., tweeted a simple announcement on July 12: “9/11/2010 Int Burn a Koran Day.” In the weeks that

followed, Jones' announcement volleyed around the internet and was picked up by the national media. On July 29, Jones was interviewed on CNN, one of many interviews he gave to national television, radio and print news outlets. Anchor Rick Sanchez asked, "Why would you want to do this?" and Jones answered, "What we are doing, by the burning of the Koran on 9/11, is saying 'stop.' We're saying 'stop' to Islam, 'stop' to Islamic law, 'stop' to brutality."

Some commentators questioned whether it was wrong to provide the pastor with such a major platform for his pronouncements, which ignited protests around the world. But others saw a connective thread between the Koran story and the plan to build an Islamic center near ground zero. In a Sept. 12 *Washington Post* column that took the form of an open letter to the Muslim world, Kathleen Parker wrote, "Obviously, Muslims have the same right to worship when and where they please, just as any other group in America. The same rules of tolerance that allow a Florida pastor to preach his message also allow Muslims to preach theirs."

Jones' plans, along with the debate over the Park51 mosque and Islamic center, injected an element of tension into the annual round of stories remembering the Sept. 11 attacks. The religious dimension of the 9/11 attacks and the religious aspect of many of the commemorations was the fifth biggest religion story of the year, accounting for 4.7% of the religion newshole in the mainstream press in 2010.

A *New York Times* article published on Sept. 11, for example, opened with the following observation: "The ninth anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, was marked on Saturday by the memorials and prayer services of the past, but also by events hard to envision just a year ago – heated demonstrations blocks from ground zero, political and religious tensions and an unmistakable sense that a once-unifying day was now replete with division."

Catholic Church in the News

In recent years, the Catholic Church and Pope Benedict have been at the center of the mainstream media's coverage of religion. In 2010, the Catholic Church once again garnered a lot of press attention, even though it was supplanted in the No. 1 spot by Islam-related events and controversies.

The chief storyline concerning the Catholic Church – sexual abuse of minors by priests – re-emerged in early 2010 in the European press then gradually gained traction in the U.S. media despite a lot of competing news. The federal health care overhaul and the sputtering global

economy dominated headlines in the late winter and early spring. Still, the sexual abuse story became one of the 10 most-covered stories in the following weeks.

In the six-week period from March 12 to April 27, the sex abuse scandal was the No. 8 story overall, filling 2.1% of the total newshole in the 52 mainstream media outlets analyzed.

On NBC's March 29 "Nightly News" program, anchor Brian Williams introduced a segment on the scandal: "It's another crisis over allegations of child abuse. This one comes during Holy Week...There is growing pressure on the pope to address this once and for all." Correspondent Anne Thompson described Pope John Paul's legacy and Pope Benedict's papacy as "clouded by claims priests sexually abused children in the European church under their watch."

The media's focus on Pope Benedict's role in addressing the scandal became the focal point of much of the coverage during this period, as documented in a [June 2010 study](#) by PEJ and the Pew Forum. Overall, the clergy abuse story accounted for nearly a fifth of all mainstream religion coverage (18.8%) last year.

In addition to the sex abuse scandal, the Catholic Church also made headlines with Pope Benedict's visit to the United Kingdom in September, which accounted for 1.5% of all religion coverage in the mainstream press in 2010 and ranked as the No. 8 religion story of the year. It was the first papal visit to Britain since 1982.

Religion and Politics in 2010

Coverage of the midterm elections and other political issues accounted for about 12% of the total mainstream media content in 2010, attracting more coverage than any other category of news. But few news outlets chose to focus heavily on the religious aspects of the congressional and gubernatorial races.

Of the 4,263 front-page stories about the Nov. 2 midterm elections that were studied, only 49 mentioned religion (1.1%). By contrast, 601 stories (14.1%) mentioned the Tea Party movement. In 2010 media coverage, the Tea Party replaced the religious right as the most-talked-about element of the Republican Party's grassroots support.

The little attention that religion did receive was largely about the personal beliefs of two Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Christine O'Donnell of Delaware. Both were Tea Party favorites, and both had to confront unusual allegations about

their pasts. Paul faced allegations that in his student days at Baylor University, a Baptist school, he belonged to an irreverent secret society. O'Donnell, an evangelical Christian endorsed by Sarah Palin, faced an old video clip of herself telling a TV interviewer that she had “dabbled into witchcraft.” When the clip was unearthed and broadcast repeatedly, O'Donnell responded with an ad beginning, “I’m not a witch.”

In addition, many mainstream media outlets paid attention to another story at the intersection of religion and politics: the public’s rising uncertainty about Obama’s faith and the persistence of rumors that he is a Muslim, despite his consistent public statements about being a Christian.

The subject of Obama’s religion took off after an [August poll](#) by the Pew Research Center found that nearly one-in-five U.S. adults (18%) said they thought the president is a Muslim, up from 11% the year before. The finding set off a debate among analysts and pundits about why only a third of Americans (34%) identified Obama as a Christian and why a plurality of Americans (43%) said they did not know what the president’s religion is. In all of 2010, the subject of Obama’s faith filled 3.6% of the religion newshole.

Some in the media were embarrassed by what they perceived as widespread xenophobia in the American public. *Time* magazine’s Mark Halperin, interviewed Aug. 19 on MSNBC’s “Hardball” program, said, “It’s, I think, so unfortunate for the United States and for our relationships around the world. Those numbers on the rise show a degree of ignorance that I think can only be based on the kind of prejudice we’re seeing in this country, seemingly also on the rise against Muslim Americans.”

But others, such as conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, used the poll as an opportunity to legitimize the questions about Obama’s personal faith. “The bottom line,” Limbaugh said on his Aug. 19 broadcast, “is the more people get to know about Obama, the more confused they are.”

Other Top Religion Stories

Several other stories rounded out the list of top religion stories in 2010.

Mainstream media devoted 2.3% of all religion coverage to a Supreme Court case addressing whether a small, independent Baptist group based in Kansas can picket at military funerals. Members of the Westboro Baptist Church have repeatedly demonstrated at soldiers' funerals, holding placards and shouting that U.S. deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan are God's punishment for America's tolerance of homosexuality. The Oct. 6 Supreme Court hearing on the case became the sixth biggest religion story of the year.

The seventh biggest religion story of 2010 centered on a sex scandal involving Bishop Eddie Long, the spiritual leader of an Atlanta megachurch. In September, four young men said that Long, an outspoken critic of homosexuality, had made sexual advances toward them. After an initial media storm, the story all but disappeared from public view, as a long legal process began its course. The story filled 1.7% of the religion newshole for the year.

Religion and education also made the list of top religion stories in 2010. This category included news reports on the closure of parochial schools in New York City and other urban centers. It also included a variety of feature stories, ranging from coverage of the decision by Claremont School of Theology to begin clerical training for Jews and Muslims to articles on the increase in Muslim students enrolling at Catholic universities. These reports collectively accounted for 1.4% of religion content in the mainstream media in 2010.

Religion in Social Media

In 2010, new media focused heavily on religion. Indeed, religion appeared as a major topic more often in the blogosphere than it did in traditional media. Overall, religion was one of the top five subjects covered in the blogosphere for 12 of the 48 weeks studied. That is about the same as in 2009, when religion was a top subject on blogs for 11 of the 45 weeks examined.

As in the mainstream media, the most frequently occurring story was the plan to build an Islamic center and mosque near ground zero. The subject was either the No. 1 or No. 2 topic in the blogosphere for three weeks in 2010 – Aug. 9-13, Aug. 16-20 and Aug. 23-27.

Other Islam-related news stories also surfaced as major points of discussion in the blogs. During the week of April 19-23, for example, the second most popular story among bloggers, at 20% of the links, was a [speech](#) by an Iranian cleric named Hojjat ol-eslam Kazem Sediqi who claimed that earthquakes are caused by promiscuous women who wear revealing clothing. Some bloggers found the argument outrageous and offensive, while others dismissed it as laughable.

In July, a ban on traditional Islamic veils in France captured the attention of the blogosphere. And around the time that the mosque near ground zero became a popular subject, related topics gained traction. In the week of Aug. 16-20, stories about Obama’s faith were the No. 2 topic in the blogosphere. Two weeks later, the No. 5 story concerned Jones’ plan to burn a Koran on Sept. 11.

Top Religion Subjects on Blogs in 2010

Week	Topic	Percent of Blog Attention	Rank that Week
Jan. 18-22	Bible passage on guns	8%	5
March 8-12	Jewish tribe in Africa	6	4
April 19-23	Iranian cleric comment	20	2
April 26-30	LifeWay Christian Resources survey	11	5
July 12-16	Veil ban in France	11	4
Aug. 9-13	Park51 Islamic Center	18	2
Aug. 16-20	Park51 Islamic Center	14	1
Aug. 16-20	Obama’s religion	13	2
Aug. 23-27	Park51 Islamic Center	23	1
Sept. 6-10	Koran burning	10	5
Sept. 27-Oct. 1	Pew Forum religious knowledge survey	23	1
Oct. 11-15	Science vs. faith debate	22	2
Dec. 6-10	Pope and clean energy	12	3

PEW RESEARCH CENTER’S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
AND PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

Unlike controversies related to Islam, the Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal never appeared among the top subjects in the blogosphere in 2010, even though it was the No. 2 religion story for the year in traditional media. The pope's stance on renewable energy generated more discussion among bloggers: It was the No. 3 topic in the blogosphere during the week of Dec. 6-10.

Social Media and the Mosque Near Ground Zero: Tone of the Debate

To study blogs, Twitter, forums and message boards, this study used technology from Crimson Hexagon, which identifies statistical patterns in the words used to express opinions on different topics. Crimson Hexagon was used to analyze these platforms for a month's time, Aug. 16-Sept. 13, 2010, for themes relating to the Park51 mosque and Islamic center.

The period marks the time when the subject of the mosque was most widely covered in the media. Attention to the matter shot up after Obama addressed the issue on Aug. 13. Attention dissipated markedly around the Labor Day holiday and then rose again as the anniversary of Sept. 11 approached. Attention began to drop off again after Sept. 11, when memorial ceremonies had ended and Jones' Koran-burning event was cancelled.

The analysis of blogs and social media reveals a roughly even division of sentiment for and against the proposed mosque. Among bloggers, Twitter users and online forum participants, 35% favored Park51, while 39% opposed it. Only slightly more than a quarter of the social media conversation (28%) was neutral.²

Of the opinions expressed in favor of the mosque, a portion focused on criticizing conservatives who opposed the mosque rather than on making a case in favor of the proposed project. Those accounted for 11% of all opinions, either positive or negative. For example, a Sept. 8 post titled "tolerance" on digbysblog.blogspot.com said, "It's not even noon yet and my brain is already fried trying to untwist GOP logic."

Of all postings, both for and against the mosque, 13% explicitly defended the proposal, arguing either that its planners have a constitutional right to freely exercise their faith or that they would be doing the country a service by promoting peaceful, interfaith dialogue.

² Numbers do not sum to 100 due to rounding

One Twitter user used the 140 allotted characters to make the point succinctly: “RT @tavissmiley Do Muslims have the right to build a mosque near New York’s ground zero? ‘Yes, of course.’ Shortest talk show ever.”

The remaining positive opinions contained a mixture of critiques of the opposition as well as arguments in favor of the project.

On the other side of the issue, among all those who used social media platforms to express opposition to the mosque, a portion of the postings focused on criticizing those who supported Park51. This accounted for 12% of all

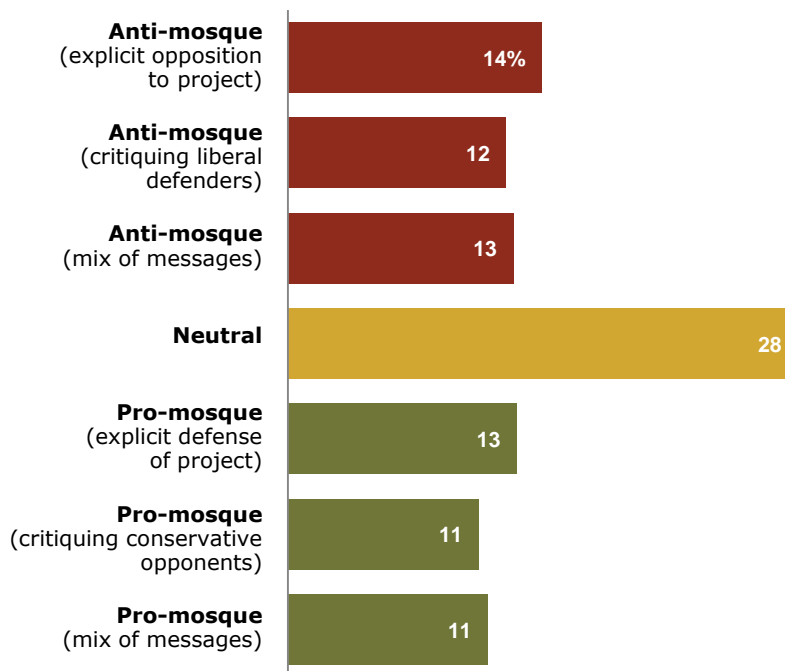
opinions about the matter. On Aug. 17, for example, the author of www.moonbattery.com wrote that, “By now we’ve figured out that the Ground Zero Victory Mosque is moving forward because our liberal rulers want it there. It seems incomprehensible, but once we’ve gotten our heads around Barack Hussein Obama’s election – and the hard shove from the liberal elite that made it happen – we can understand this too.”

But a slightly higher portion of those who used social media to comment on the mosque (14% in all) tried to make the case that the mosque should not be built. “The Mosque in New York on ground (sic) zero is a slap in the face of Americans,” tweeted Lakedude1k on the same day.

Most of the opinions on the topic (about 75%) came from blogs. The rest came from Twitter (16%) and social forums, such as message boards that allow users to contribute opinions

Social Media Conversation about the Park51 Mosque and Islamic Center

Percent of the conversation devoted to each of the themes between Aug. 16 and Sept. 13, 2010



Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Crimson Hexagon; data analyzed by PEJ and the Pew Forum

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AND PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

around a chosen topic (9%). The volume of opinions peaked early during the period studied, but decreased by a total of 82% over the course of the month studied.

Religion Coverage by Sector

Mainstream coverage of religion varied somewhat among the different sectors that were studied, including newspapers, the Web, network and cable TV, and radio.

In contrast to 2009, when each sector of the media devoted about the same amount of coverage to religion, cable TV devoted more time than the other sectors to religion in 2010, with 2.5% of its air time devoted to the topic. That was followed by three sectors that devoted about equal measures of their allotted time or space to religion: network TV (2.0%); online news websites (1.9%); and radio, including talk programming (1.9%). Newspapers, whose front pages were studied for this analysis, gave the least amount of space to religion-related topics in 2010, at 1.6% of their total newshole.

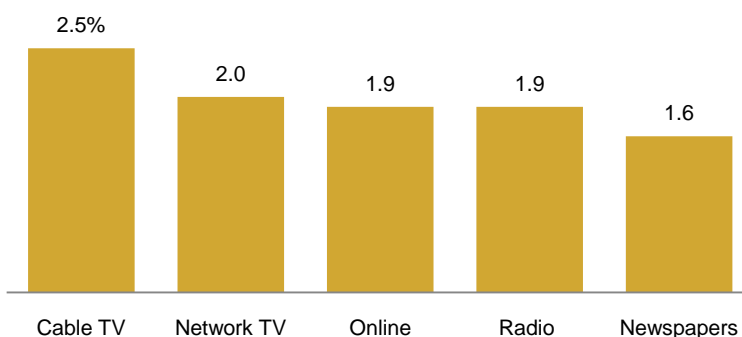
The debate over plans to build the Park51 Islamic center and mosque received the most attention on cable TV (38.2% of its religion coverage) and radio (36.1%) – two sectors that often fill their hours with talk and argument over highly charged and political topics.

In newspapers, however, the Islamic mosque controversy accounted for only 7.0% of all front-page space devoted to religion coverage. The

Catholic priest sexual abuse scandal was the No. 1 religion story in newspapers, accounting for 24.9% of the coverage in this sector. The resurgence of the abuse scandal story was driven largely by newspaper reporting, including a number of front-page investigative pieces in major national newspapers about the subject. One of these stories, appearing in *The New York Times*

Religion Coverage by Medium in 2010

Percent of each sector's news coverage devoted to religion



PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
AND PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

on March 24, said that top Vatican officials, among them Pope Benedict XVI, failed to take action against an abusive American priest despite warnings by other U.S. bishops.

Still, the attention devoted to Islam-related storylines was significant in all media sectors, spanning traditional and new media. The overtly religious aspects of several Islam-related events and controversies were emphasized by the gatekeepers at major national media outlets in the U.S., as well as by the throngs of individuals who contributed to a digital discourse on the subject.

About this Study

The Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life made use of three primary data sources for this study. Analysis of mainstream media coverage of religion was conducted using data from PEJ's News Coverage Index content analysis (the methodology can be found [here](#)). Analysis of new media treatment of religion was conducted using data from PEJ's New Media Index content analysis (the methodology can be found [here](#)). Finally, analysis of the tone of the new media conversation about religion was conducted using software provided by Crimson Hexagon, a company that uses algorithmic methods to identify statistical patterns in blog posts, forum messages, tweets and other social media platforms. Information on the software can be found on Crimson Hexagon's [website](#); an in-depth discussion of Crimson Hexagon's methodology can be found [here](#).