

Islam dominated religion coverage in 2010

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(RNS) Islam was the most frequent topic of religion news coverage in 2010, as the media doubled the amount of time and space devoted to religion compared to 2009.

An analysis by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that more than 40 percent of religion coverage centered on three issues: plans to build an Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero, a Florida pastor's threat to burn the Quran, and commemorations of the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The news media devoted more time to elections (11.9 percent), foreign affairs (9.3 percent) and the economy (8.3 percent), but religion coverage reached 2 percent in 2010, doubling from about 1 percent in 2009.

The study, in conjunction with the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, marked the first time since 2007 that neither the Catholic Church nor religion and politics ranked as the No. 1 news story. The Catholic abuse scandal ranked as the No. 2 religion story in 2010, after the controversy over the Park51 Islamic center.

The analysis considered more than 50,000 stories from newspaper front pages, home pages of major news websites and the first half hour of television and radio news programs.

Researchers found that religion tended to get more coverage in the blogosphere than in traditional media; religion ranked among the top five stories covered on the Web for 12 of the 48 weeks studied.